

MURDEROUS ATTACK ON SAIF ALI KHAN

PN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan sustained six stab injuries, including one to his spine, in a knife attack by an unidentified intruder. The attack is suspected to have been part of a burglary attempt at his 12th-floor residence in a posh building in Bandra (West), north-west Mumbai, in the early hours of Thursday. Shortly after the attack, a bleeding Saif was rushed to the nearby Lilavati Hospital, where he underwent surgery to remove the knife and address the leaking spinal fluid. "The actor was brought to our hospital with six injuries, two of which were deep. We performed surgery near his spine and removed a 2.5-inch piece of the knife from the spine," said Dr. Niraj Uttamani, the Chief Operating Officer of Lilavati Hospital. Dr. Nitin Dange, a colleague at the same hospital, elaborated: "The actor sustained a major injury to his thoracic spinal cord due to the knife piercing his spine. We performed surgery to remove the knife and plug the leaking spinal fluid. We also treated two other deep wounds—one on his left hand and another on his neck. He is completely stable now and recovering well. He is out of danger." Known for his roles in films like Dil Chahta Hai, Kal Ho



Bollywood actor Kareena Kapoor at the Lilavati Hospital where actor Saif Ali Khan was admitted after he was injured in an attack by an intruder with a knife, in Mumbai

Naa Ho, Omkara, Parineeta, and Hum Tum, the 54-year-old Saif is the son of legendary cricketer Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, popularly known as Tiger Pataudi, and actress Sharmila Tagore. He is also the 10th Nawab of Pataudi. "Saif Ali Khan has come out of surgery and is out of danger. He is currently in recovery, and doctors are monitoring his progress. All family members are safe, and the police are investigating the incident. We would like to thank Dr. Niraj Uttamani, Dr. Nitin Dange, Dr. Leena Jain, and the team at Lilavati Hospital. We also thank all

his fans and well-wishers for their prayers and support during this time," Saif's family said in a statement issued to the media. The incident took place around 2 a.m. at the 12th-floor flat of Saif's "Satguru Sharan" building, located at the junction of 29th and 24th Roads in Bandra (W). Saif and his family occupy the top four floors of the 12-storey building. A housemaid, identified as Eliyama Phillipas alias Lima, was the first to spot the intruder and raised an alarm, prompting Saif to rush out of his bedroom. Upon seeing the actor, the knife-wielding

intruder, who is suspected to have broken into the house for a burglary, pounced on him. The actor attempted to resist, resulting in a scuffle. The intruder stabbed Saif multiple times before fleeing the scene. Taking the attack seriously, the Mumbai police formed seven teams to investigate the incident and arrest the assailant. Former encounter specialist Daya Nayak is one of the key investigators. Investigators are reviewing CCTV footage from the "Satguru Sharan" building and its vicinity to determine how the intruder gained access to Saif's flat.

Hindenberg winds up political turmoil

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA/PTI ■ NEW DELHI/ WASHINGTON

Hindenberg Research, the US investment research firm known for short-selling, which primarily targeted Indian billionaire Gautam Adani and created a flutter in the Indian political system by holding hostage the functioning of the Parliament for multiple sessions in last three years, has shut down its operations. Announcement of the closure by Hindenberg Research founder Nate Anderson, who started in 2017, came just days before Donald Trump's inauguration as the new President of the United States. Adani Group CFO Jugeshinder Robbie Singh in a cryptic social media post: "Kitne Ghazi Aaye, Kitne Ghazi Gaye". Adani group always denied the allegations. The announcement of disband of Hindenberg once again ignited political duel between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Congress said its closure does not mean a clean chit for "Modani" and asserted that without a Joint Parliamentary Committee, the "already-compromised" institutions of the Indian state will continue to act only to protect the powerful. The BJP alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is in the "complete grip" of the thinking process of "urban naxals", and asked if he has now got the "contract" for the Hindenberg Research's closed "shop". Former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said US-based short-selling firm Hindenberg Research "shut its shop" the day the Congress inaugurated its new headquarters building. The sudden and surprising announcement by Anderson comes within days of a Republican Congressman, a member of the House Judiciary Committee, asking the Department of Justice to preserve all the documents and communications related to the investigations of Adani and his companies. "As I've shared with family, friends and our team since late last year, I have made the decision to disband Hindenberg Research. The plan has been to wind up after we finished the pipeline of ideas we were working on. And as of the last Ponzis cases we just completed and are sharing with regulators, that day is today," Anderson announced according to the PTI from Washington. 40 years old Anderson said he looks forward to taking up hobbies, travelling and spending time with his fiancée and their child, adding



that he has earned enough money to provide for them in the future. BJP said it seems the "shop" of US-based billionaire investor George Soros is also going to close down with new administration under President-elect Donald Trump set to take over. Soros, he said, funds Hindenberg. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the closure of Hindenberg Research does not, in any way, mean a clean chit for Modani." The Hindenberg report of January 2023 proved serious enough to compel the Supreme Court of India to set up an Expert Committee to probe the allegation made in it against the Adani Group "whose prime patron is none other than the present Prime Minister of India", he said in a statement. "However the Hindenberg Report covered only one part of securities laws violations - of the hydra-headed Modani MegaScam. Out of the 100 questions on the Adani Mega Scam that the Congress party had asked of the PM in the Hum Adani ke Hain Kaun (HAHK) series during January-March 2023, only 21 questions related to revelations made in the Hindenberg report," Ramesh said. "The matter goes far deeper. It involves the abuse of Indian foreign policy to enrich the PM's close friends at the expense of the national interest. It involves the misuse of investigative agencies to force Indian businesspersons to divest critical infrastructure assets and help Adani build monopolies in airports, ports, defence and cement," Ramesh alleged. The Swiss Public Prosecutors Office has frozen several Adani-linked bank accounts operated by Chang Chung-Ling and Nasser Ali Shaban Ahli that are "suspected of engaging in illicit activities, including money laundering and embezzlement", Ramesh claimed, citing a Swiss Federal Criminal Court order.

Government to constitute 8th Pay Commission

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday approved setting up the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries of nearly 50 lakh central government employees and allowances of 65 lakh pensioners. The chairman and two members of the Commission will be appointed soon, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told reporters here. "Prime Minister has approved 8th Central Pay Commission for central government employees," the minister said. The term of the 7th Pay Commission will end in 2026. Since 1947, seven Pay Commissions have been constituted, with the last one implemented in 2016. As the 7th Pay Commission's term concludes in 2026, initiating the process in 2025 ensures sufficient time to receive and review recommendations before its completion, the Minister added. He said the setting up of the Pay Commission in 2025 will ensure that its recommendations are received before the completion of the term of the seventh pay panel.



Ceasefire deal hangs in balance in Gaza

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that a "last-minute crisis" with Hamas was holding up Israeli approval of a long-awaited ceasefire that would pause the fighting in the Gaza Strip and release dozens of hostages. Israeli airstrikes, meanwhile, killed at least 72 people in the war-ravaged territory. Netanyahu began signalling there were issues with the deal just hours after US President Joe Biden and key mediator Qatar announced it was complete. The objection created a dual reality: War-weary Palestinians in Gaza, the relatives of hostages held there and world leaders all welcomed an agreement, expected to begin Sunday, even as Netanyahu said it was not yet finalised. It was not yet clear if Netanyahu's statements merely reflected jockeying to keep his fractious coalition together or whether the deal was at risk. Netanyahu's office said his Cabinet won't meet to approve the deal until Hamas backs down, accusing it of renegeing on parts of the agreement in an attempt to gain further concessions, without elaborating.



Izzat al-Rishq, a senior Hamas official, said the militant group "is committed to the ceasefire agreement, which was announced by the mediators." The deal announced Wednesday would see a scores of hostages held in Gaza released and a pause in fighting with a view to eventually wind down a 15-month war that has destabilised the Middle East and sparked worldwide protests. Hamas triggered the war with its October 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. Israel responded with a fierce offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

Delhi residents suffer fluctuating GRAP restrictions

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Residents of the National Capital have no respite either from the hazardous air pollution or from the sudden revocation and imposition of different stages of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the recent past, leaving common people to suffer due to the restrictions imposed. Narrating their ordeal, many question the government's action plan, stating that only ordinary people are harassed by this flip-flopping. The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality on Thursday revoked curbs under stage 4 of the GRAP amid dip in pollution levels following its invocation on Wednesday as the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi crossed 400. However, stage 3 of GRAP is still in force which prohibits BS-III and BS-IV vehicle from plying on the roads. Moreover, the invocation happens with immediate effect, leaving many office-goers and regular citizens to face fines repeatedly. People say that the constant removal and imposition of GRAP stages causes significant problems in their daily lives. In several instances, people who book a cab in Delhi before boarding a flight from a different city are left in the



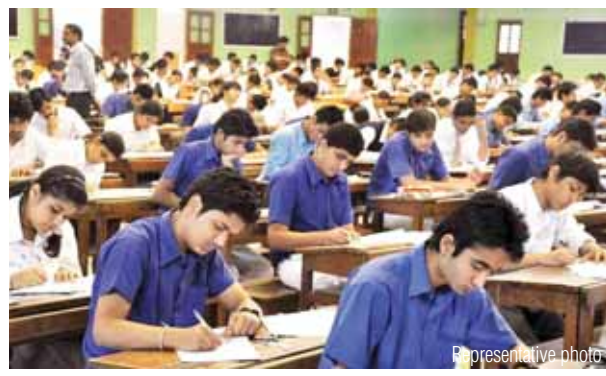
Photo: Ranjan Dimri

lurch after receiving a message that the taxi service they hired a few hours ago has been canceled due to GRAP in the city. "I booked a day-long cab service for an official visit to Delhi and boarded my flight early in the morning. The moment I switched on my mobile network, I received a message from the travel service regretting the cancellation of the service due to GRAP implementation overnight," said Ankit Guleria, a media professional who came to the Capital from Chennai. "I drove to my office in my private car in the morning. In the evening, when I was leaving, I heard that GRAP Stage-IV had been implemented. In such a

WEATHER

AQI 302
MAX 10.3°C(+2.7)
MIN 19.6°C(0)

was enforced after 22 days. It was last enforced on December 16 last year and withdrawn on December 24. The most recent enforcement of Stage-III was on January 9, and it was withdrawn on January 12. People add that they remain unaware of these implementations, questioning the poor dissemination of such news by the CAQM. "How do we expect us to know or keep track minute by minute of these developments? Do you think ordinary people have so much time to keep reading the news to know if this stage of GRAP has been invoked or that stage has been revoked?" said a 35-year-old office-goer, advising the authorities to focus on effectively spreading these updates so people can be aware and plan accordingly. The city has been seeing Stage-I and Stage-II measures since October 14 and October 21, 2024, respectively. The measures under Stage-I and Stage-II include augmenting public transport to reduce the use of private vehicles, impounding or imposing heavy penalties on vehicles with visible emissions, and enhancing vehicle parking fees to discourage private transport, among other restrictions.



Centre keeps NEET-UG in pen-paper format

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has decided against conducting the medical entrance exam NEET-UG in online mode for now, and announced on Thursday it will continue to be conducted in pen and paper mode. The decision comes after detailed deliberations between education and health ministries on whether to conduct the NEET-UG in pen and paper mode or online mode. "As decided by the National Medical Commission(NMC), the NEET-UG shall be conducted in Pen and paper mode (OMR based) in a single day and shift," a senior National Testing Agency (NTA) official said on

Thursday. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is the largest entrance exam in the country in terms of number of candidates appearing for the test. In 2024, a record more than 24 lakh candidates took the exam. The NTA conducts the NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for MBBS course. Of the seats available for the MBBS course, approximately 56,000 are in government hospitals and about 52,000 in private colleges. Admissions to undergraduate courses in Dentistry, Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha also utilise the results of the NEET for admission.

India joins US, Russia, China with satellite docking success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

In a major boost to India's ambitious space missions, ISRO on Thursday successfully performed the docking of satellites as part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) and announced that post docking, control of two satellites as a single object was also achieved. "India docked its name in space history! Good Morning India ISRO's SpaDeX mission accomplishes historic docking success. Proud to witness this moment!", ISRO said in a social media post. With the successful docking of satellites — Chaser and Target — India has become the fourth country after the US, Russia and China to accomplish the technological feat. In space, docking technology is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives.



The docking experiment is crucial for the smooth conduct of the country's ambitious future missions, including Chandrayaan-4, Gaganyaan, setting up a space station and landing an astronaut on the moon. Last October, the government announced that India will have its own Space Station by 2035, known as the "Bharatiya Antriksh Station".

Indic languages are driving India's internet growth

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The internet user base in India is set to surpass 900 million by 2025, driven by the growing use of Indic languages for digital content. The 'Internet in India Report 2024', jointly prepared by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and KANTAR, reveals that the number of active internet users in India reached 886 million in 2024, marking a robust 8% year-on-year growth. The report underscores the increasing role of Indic languages in shaping internet consumption patterns. It shows that rural India is leading the way when it comes to internet consumption. Not only that, but news consumption is also

highest among the rural Indian population. The report further highlights the increasing importance of Indic languages in shaping internet consumption patterns. Nearly all internet users (98%) accessed content in Indic languages, with Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam emerging as the most popular due to their extensive availability. Over half (57%) of urban internet users prefer consuming content in regional languages, underscoring the growing demand for local-language content across platforms. The report highlights that the digital gender gap in India is steadily narrowing, with 47% of all internet users in the country being women—so far the highest. Female internet users now form a significant



portion of shared device users in rural India: 58%. This marks substantial progress in making digital access more inclusive and equitable over the years. While internet penetration continues to grow, the pace has moderated, especially in urban areas, compared to the exponential growth seen in previous years. Rural India, however, continues to witness double the growth rate of urban regions, reflecting the untapped potential in these areas. Urban India leads in the adoption of non-traditional devices such as smart TVs and smart speakers, which have grown by 54% between 2023 and

2024. Concurrently, mobile devices remain the primary means of accessing the internet across both urban and rural demographics. Rural India dominates online engagement for top activities, including OTT video and music streaming, online communication, and social media usage, outpacing urban users in these categories. Conversely, activities like e-commerce, digital payments, and online education are still more prevalent among urban populations. According to the report, rural India, with 488 million users, leads this growth and now accounts for 55% of the total internet population. The report states that Indians spend an average of 90 minutes online daily.

Farmers Gear Up for Renewed Delhi March as Dallewal's Hunger Strike Enters 52nd Day

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab's farmers are escalating their protests against the Central Government with a renewed determination to march to Delhi. A group of 101 farmers will set off from the Shambhu border on January 21, pressing demands that include a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) on crops. The announcement comes as the farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike at the Khanauri border entered its 52nd day. Dallewal's health continues to deteriorate, with doctors warning of severe complications, yet his resolve remains unshaken.

The protest, fueled by growing frustration with the Central Government's inaction, has garnered nationwide attention. Farmer unions, under the banners of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have vowed to intensify their agitation. The announcement came a day after the fast-unto-death was initiated by 111 farmers in solidarity with Dallewal, further amplifying the urgency of their demands. Security forces remain on high alert, but the protesters are determined to make their voices heard.

The upcoming Delhi march will mark the fourth attempt by farmers to breach the Punjab-Haryana border since December. Previous attempts to send the marjeevda jatha (volunteer group) on December 6, 8, and 14 were thwarted by heavy security, with paramilitary forces and Haryana Police blocking their paths. These attempts resulted in injuries to over 50 farmers, and during the December 14 march, one protester tragically consumed poison in despair.

KMM coordinators and

senior farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher criticized the BJP-led Central Government for ignoring their plight. "We have tried everything, but the government refuses to listen. This march is our collective decision to escalate the agitation," he declared. The 101-member 'jatha' will face increased security measures, with Section 144 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita imposed in the area to prohibit gatherings.

At the heart of the protest lies the Khanauri border, where Dallewal has been on a hunger strike since November 26. Despite worsening health — marked by fluctuating blood pressure, difficulty in speaking, and the risk of multiple organ failure, Dallewal has refused medical treatment. In solidarity, the 111 farmers who joined the fast have pledged not to relent until their demands are met.

Braving the bone-chilling cold of 9.2°C, 111 farm activists spent the night under a modest tent at the Punjab-Haryana border in Khanauri. Despite the harsh conditions, the activists showed remarkable resilience, layering themselves with blankets and quilts as they slept on the ground where their protest continues. Their commitment underscored the growing solidarity within the movement, as they prepare to endure many more nights under the open sky until their demands are met.

While Dallewal fasts in isolation inside a trolley, his location has been fortified by farm activists who welded together a barricade of trolleys to prevent police intervention. Meanwhile, the 111 farm activists are staging their fast under a simple shamiana near the Haryana Police barricades at the Khanauri border. Their tent provided limited protec-

tion from the elements, leaving them exposed to potential rain and harsh weather. Despite these challenges, the resolve of the protesters remained unshaken as they continued their hunger strike, amplifying the call for justice and pressing for their demands to be addressed.

The situation has become a humanitarian crisis, drawing the attention of the Supreme Court. On Wednesday, the apex court had directed the Punjab Government to submit Dallewal's medical reports and sought expert opinions from AIIMS. The temporary medical facility established at the protest site, staffed by 50 doctors, continues to monitor Dallewal's condition.

Meanwhile, a contingent of Haryana Police remained stationed at the protest site, maintaining a constant vigil. The officers, like the protesters, are braving the biting winter cold as temperatures continue to dip.

As the standoff continues, the Central Government faces mounting pressure to address the farmers' demands. The prolonged agitation has already disrupted border regions, with farmers camping at Shambhu and Khanauri since February last year.

The farmers are not only advocating for an MSP law but also seeking justice for a range of grievances — including withdrawing cases against 25 farmers related to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alleged security breach in Ferozepur in 2022. Farmer leaders like Pandher have criticized the Government for reviving these cases, which include charges as severe as attempted murder, three years after the incident. Pandher recounted the events of January 5, 2022, when Modi's convoy was briefly halted due to a road blockade by protest-

ing farmers. "No harm was intended, and not even a flower was thrown at the PM," Pandher said, decrying the Government's actions as politically motivated.

Farmers Challenge Punjab Govt's Health Claims on Dallewal

A day after the Punjab Government had informed the Supreme Court that farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's health was improving, farmer representatives and functionaries of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) on Thursday contradicted the claim, raising alarms over his deteriorating condition.

On Thursday, SKM leader and Dallewal's aide Abhimanyu Kohar revealed that Dallewal's weight had plummeted from 86.95 kg on November 26, 2024 — when he began his fast-unto-death — to a precarious 66.4 kg. "He is not even consuming adequate water due to persistent vomiting. Doctors have warned that reduced water intake is causing his hemoglobin levels to rise, further jeopardizing his health," he said.

The leaders demanded from the Punjab Government to make public the medical reports on Dallewal's health, compiled by a team of government-appointed doctors. Transparency in sharing these findings would ensure accountability and reassure the farmers supporting the agitation, he added.

Hry CM reviews Govt's works in 100 days; Asks officers to implement 'Citizen Charter' diligently

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday reviewed the achievements of the current government over the past 100 days and directed the officers concerned to implement 'citizen charter' diligently.

Presiding over a meeting of Administrative Secretaries, the Chief Minister said that during the first 100 days of the current government, several significant steps have been taken for the development of all sectors, including agriculture, education, and health. He also engaged in detailed discussions with officers to ensure the effective implementation of the government's public welfare agenda, both for the first 100 days and for the next five years. Director General of Information, Public Relations, Languages and Culture Department KM Pandurang delivered a presentation highlighting the achievements of the past 100 days on this occasion.

Saini, while directing the officers, emphasized the importance of diligently implementing the 'Citizen Charter' in their respective departments. He urged all officers to ensure the continuous updating of the CM Announcement Portal. In addition, he stressed that demand for works or applications received through Jan Samvad should be treated with utmost importance, and timely solutions must be provided.

He instructed all Administrative Secretaries to



conduct surprise inspections within their respective departments to ensure that there are no delays in work related to public interest. He further said that all pending cases requiring personal hearings should be resolved at the earliest. Apart from this, he directed the officers to prepare a detailed action plan, outlining short, medium, and long-term goals for their departments, with clear timelines spanning the next five years.

Arhatiya commission hiked from Rs 46 to Rs 55 per quintal

It was informed during the meeting that the state government had increased the commission of arhatiyas from Rs 46 per quintal to Rs 55 per quintal. As a result, over Rs 309

Women sarpanches to be brand ambassadors of their respective villages

In a separate meeting of the Women and Child Development Department, Saini announced that all women sarpanches in the state will be appointed as brand ambassadors of their respective villages under the Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao campaign. He said that 10,000 Anganwadi Centres in the State will be developed as Saksham Anganwadi Centres in the next five years and a grant of Rs 563 lakh has been received from Government of India for upgrading 563 Anganwadi Centres to the Saksham Anganwadi. The Department has also submitted another proposal for the upgradation of 2307 Anganwadi Centres to the Government of India.

He emphasized that, in addition to raising awareness among the public, the provisions of the PNDT Act 1994 should be strictly enforced and directed organizing Nukkad Natak and other programs in villages to encourage people to save the girl child. To curb female foeticide and ensure compliance with the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, Haryana has adopted strict enforcement measures. A total of 1,220 FIRs have been registered under the Act from 2015 to 2024. Additionally, 386 FIRs have been registered through inter-state raids, and 4,000 arrests have been made targeting illegal practices by doctors, quacks, and touts.

Punjab Govt Orders 5% Salary Hike for PUNBUS Workers

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

In a major announcement that has brought much-needed relief to the PUNBUS contractual employees, the Punjab Government has approved a five percent salary hike for drivers, conductors, and workshop staff. The revision, effective immediately, comes as a result of sustained protests and demands from workers who have been battling stagnant wages and mounting financial pressures. However, the hike will only be applicable to those who have completed one year of service by November 1, 2024 — according to the state government's directive issued on January 15, 2025.

The decision is being hailed as a victory for the PUNBUS contract workers, who have repeatedly highlighted the growing challenges of managing household expenses amidst inflation. For years, they had been urging the government for a salary increase, staging multiple strikes and demonstrations to

voice their grievances. Their perseverance has now paid off, with the management finally presenting the proposal to the Board of Directors. The proposal was unanimously approved, and the order has been circulated to seven departments to ensure swift implementation.

"This increase is a small but significant step toward addressing the financial struggles faced by employees. While it does not resolve all issues, it shows the government is willing to listen and act," said a senior union leader.

Beyond the salary hike, a major breakthrough was achieved in the ongoing dialogue between the Punjab Government and the Punjab Roadways, PUNBUS, and PRTC Contract Workers' Union. During a meeting chaired by Transport Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar, it was agreed to formulate a policy for the regularization of contract employees under service regulations.

The file for this policy is set to be forwarded to the Punjab Advocate-General for legal

scrutiny. A high-level meeting involving the Transport Minister and senior officials is scheduled for January 25, to discuss the policy framework in detail. Following this, another round of talks with the workers' union will be held on February 3, where the policy is expected to be finalized.

Union representatives have expressed cautious optimism about this development. "The salary hike is a welcome move, but regularization of jobs remains our primary demand. We are hopeful that the upcoming meetings will result in a fair and legally sound policy," said a union spokesperson.

The workers' fight for better wages and job security has been a long and arduous one. Many employees have raised concerns about the precarious nature of contract employment and the difficulties it poses in maintaining financial stability. The Government's acknowledgment of these issues and its willingness to address them through concrete measures has been widely appreciated.

SGPC Demands Ban on Kangana Ranaut's 'Emergency' in Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Ahead of the release of Bollywood actress and BJP MP from Mandi (in Himachal Pradesh) Kangana Ranaut's controversial movie 'Emergency', the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) on Thursday strongly urged Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann to block its screening in the state. SGPC president Harjinder Singh Dhama, in a letter sent to the Chief Minister, expressed grave concerns over the film, which he claimed distorts historical facts and is an affront to Sikh sentiments.

The movie, which is set to release nationwide on January 17, has already sparked considerable controversy. Dhama has accused 'Emergency' of presenting a skewed version of the 1984 Operation Blue Star, during which the Indian Army stormed the Golden Temple in Amritsar, leading to the death of prominent Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. SGPC's objections are based on what they believe to be a deliberate attempt to misrepresent history, specifically the portrayal of Bhindranwale and the events surrounding the Sikh genocide that followed the military operation.

Dhama, in his letter, stressed that releasing the movie in Punjab would lead to widespread outrage within the Sikh community. He warned that the SGPC, along with other Sikh bodies, would oppose the film's release at the state level, urging the government to take swift action and prevent potential unrest. The SGPC had raised similar concerns in November 2024, but Dhama noted that despite their efforts, the Punjab Government had not responded adequately.


Ranaut, in an interview shared on social media, had revealed that the film had made significant changes, including the removal of Bhindranwale's name from the script. According to Ranaut, the film's producers were instructed to omit references to the Sikh leader and certain pre-Operation Blue Star scenes. These alterations, however, did little to quell the concerns of Sikh organizations, who see them as part of a larger pattern of historical distortion.

The SGPC's objections are not new. Back in August 2024, the committee had issued a legal notice to the filmmakers, demanding the removal of scenes deemed offensive to the Sikh community. They also called for an apology from Ranaut and the production

team for what they considered a "misrepresentation" of Sikh history. The committee took further action by sending letters to the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting and the Central Board of Film Certification, urging them to reconsider the film's content before it was approved for release.

The growing tensions surrounding 'Emergency' highlight the volatile intersection of politics, history, and cinema in India. As a political figure and an actress known for her controversial statements, Ranaut's involvement in the film has only intensified the backlash. Sikh bodies argued that the film not only misrepresents history but also undermines the dignity of the community, particularly through the alleged character assassination of Bhindranwale, a figure seen as a martyr by many Sikhs.

In response to the mounting opposition, SGPC officials have begun submitting memoranda to district authorities across Punjab, reiterating their demand for a ban. The next few days are expected to see further protests and demonstrations as Sikh groups continue to voice their anger over what they perceive as an attempt to tarnish the image of the Sikh community and distort key historical events.




Punjab Government
led by
Chief Minister
BHAGWANT SINGH MANN
pays homage to

66 SIKH KUKA MARTYRS
who raised a banner of revolt against British imperialism in 1872, thus displaying unique valour and indomitable spirit

on
NAMDHARI KUKA MARTYRDOM DAY


Under the aegis of
SRI SATGURU UDAY SINGH JI

STATE LEVEL FUNCTION
January 17, 2025 at 9:00 AM
Namdhari Shaheedi Samarak,
Malerkotla



Bhagwant Singh Mann
Chief Minister, Punjab

Join Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann's official WhatsApp channel



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Hope and dread

The Gaza truce between Hamas and Israel may be fragile but it is still welcome as it offers some relief to beleaguered people

The recent announcement of a potential truce between Israel and Hamas has brought a mix of cautious hope and lingering fear to those on both sides of the conflict. After months of violence and suffering following the devastating events of October 2023, which saw Hamas's deadly incursion into Israel and the subsequent retaliatory offensive, the prospect of a ceasefire offers a moment of relief. However, the road ahead remains fraught with uncertainty. The conflict has left deep scars on both Israeli and Palestinian communities. For Israelis, the abduction of hostages—including women, children, and elderly civilians—has been a source of immense anguish. The release of 33 hostages as part of the initial phase of the ceasefire would bring some relief, but many fear the fragile agreement could collapse, leaving their loved ones in limbo. In Gaza, the humanitarian crisis is dire. The death toll exceeds 46,000, with women and children accounting for over half of the fatalities. Massive displacement has left 90 per cent of the population—approximately 2.3 million people—homeless. Entire neighbourhoods lie in ruins, and the lack of basic necessities has pushed residents to the brink of famine.



The proposed truce, brokered by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, outlines a three-phased agreement. The first phase involves the exchange of hostages and Palestinian detainees, with the release of women, children, and the elderly prioritised. Subsequent phases would address the release of soldiers and other male captives, along with broader discussions to halt hostilities. A crucial component of the ceasefire includes a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza. This would enable displaced Palestinians to return to their homes and help rebuild critical infrastructure. Yet, the long-term success of this agreement hinges on both sides' willingness to engage in meaningful negotiations during the second phase. The fragile nature of previous ceasefires—such as the one in November 2023 that lasted only a week—underscores the difficulty of achieving lasting peace. Key obstacles include Hamas's insistence on maintaining its military capabilities and Israel's objective to dismantle Hamas's governing structures. Both sides are under immense domestic and international pressure, but deeply entrenched mistrust makes compromise elusive. For hostages' families, uncertainty looms large. Many remain haunted by the possibility that their loved ones may not survive captivity if the truce fails. Meanwhile, Palestinians fear that a breakdown in talks could trigger renewed violence, exacerbating an already catastrophic situation. If the ceasefire holds, it could mark the beginning of a much-needed reprieve for Gaza's beleaguered population. Immediate priorities include addressing food insecurity, medical shortages, and the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure. International aid would play a critical role in alleviating the humanitarian crisis, but long-term recovery would require substantial investment, political stability and lasting peace.

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PICTALK



People try to tame a bull as they participate in the 'Jallikattu' event as part of 'Pongal' celebrations, in Tiruchirappalli

India's projector demand soars with eco-friendly innovations

These next-generation projectors not only offer enhanced energy efficiency and sustainability but also excellent output redefining the visual experience

India is rapidly becoming one of the fastest-growing projector markets globally, with an anticipated annual growth rate of 8.10 per cent over the next five years. This surge is driven by the increasing demand for projectors in both commercial and personal spaces. Technological advancements are playing a key role in this trend, as new, more eco-friendly projector alternatives are replacing traditional lamp-based models. These older models, while effective, had significant drawbacks such as high power consumption, reliance on hazardous materials, and limited recyclability. In contrast, modern projectors are designed with sustainability in mind, making them an attractive option for a wide range of applications. The rise in digitization across businesses and households further accelerates the need for effective display solutions. Eco-friendly projectors not only address this need but also offer a greener, more sustainable alternative to conventional options. With advanced production standards grounded in sus-



tainable development, these projectors are perfectly positioned to meet India's growing demand for high-tech, energy-efficient devices. Eco-friendly projectors are designed to tackle many of the issues associated with traditional models. They operate with much higher energy efficiency, significantly reducing power consumption. The manufacturing process also minimizes carbon footprints, with materials sourced responsibly. Innovations such as LED and laser light sources have significantly improved these devices' energy efficiency and lifespan, making them superior to traditional lamp-based projectors. These advancements appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and businesses alike, offering a more sustainable solution to their

display and entertainment needs. Compared to earlier generations, eco-friendly projectors offer several clear advantages. Their energy efficiency makes them much more cost-effective in the long term, as they consume far less power and do not require frequent replacements of parts like traditional bulbs. Additionally, the longevity of these projectors reduces waste, further decreasing their environmental impact. Importantly, many eco-friendly projectors do not contain harmful substances like mercury, which is found in conventional models, thus contributing to safer disposal practices. Furthermore, these projectors are built to last longer and require less maintenance, thanks to technologies like LED and laser, which do not degrade as quickly as traditional bulbs. As a result, maintenance costs are significantly lower, and users benefit from reduced downtime and increased durability. This is an appealing factor for both businesses and consumers, as it translates to lower total ownership costs

over the life of the device. Looking ahead, there are several trends that will further shape the future of eco-friendly display technologies. One of the most promising is the development of even more efficient light sources, such as OLEDs and advanced lasers, which will provide higher brightness while consuming even less power. Another exciting possibility is the use of solar-powered projectors, especially in rural or off-grid areas, which would reduce reliance on conventional power sources and minimize carbon footprints. Additionally, there is growing interest in integrating biodegradable materials into the production of projectors, which would reduce the environmental impact when the product reaches the end of its lifecycle. The future will also likely see the introduction of more smart projectors that can integrate seamlessly with smart home and office ecosystems, featuring energy-saving modes based on usage patterns. (The writer is MD Optoma Technology; views are personal)



VIJAY SHARMA

Diplomacy: The pillar of India's global aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

To fulfill its aspirations as a global leader, India must urgently bolster its diplomatic infrastructure by expanding and modernising the Ministry of External Affairs

India, the world's most populous nation and the largest democracy is emerging as a pivotal force in global affairs. As a leader of the Global South, its growing economic might, strategic autonomy, and commitment to peace have positioned it at the centre of international diplomacy. However, despite these achievements, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)—the critical institution shaping and executing its foreign policy—remains under-resourced. With only about 850 diplomats, the MEA is inadequately equipped to handle the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape. For India to realize its potential as a global leader, it must significantly expand its diplomatic infrastructure, scaling the MEA to at least 5,000 personnel. Such an expansion would align with India's ambitions and its stature as a major international power. India's diplomatic requirements have grown substantially alongside its global ambitions.

As the world's largest democracy and one of its fastest-growing economies, India's foreign policy must address a wide range of global issues. From trade negotiations and climate change to digital diplomacy and global security, the MEA serves as the nerve center of India's international engagements. India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by strategic autonomy and a commitment to peace, rooted in the Nehruvian tradition of non-alignment. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and VK Krishna Menon laid the foundation of an independent foreign policy that prioritized non-violence while asserting India's sovereignty. This legacy of non-alignment, which positioned India as a bridge between competing superpowers, remains a cornerstone of its diplomatic approach. However, the global order is shifting, and India must adapt its foreign policy apparatus to meet modern challenges. Strengthening the MEA is vital not only for safeguarding India's interests but also for crafting a vision capable of influencing global politics. With a population



exceeding 1.4 billion and leadership roles in key international forums, India's current diplomatic infrastructure is insufficient for the demands it faces. Countries like the United States, China and Russia deploy thousands of diplomats and foreign policy experts to maintain their global influence. In contrast, India's diplomatic corps, though skilled, is a fraction of the size required. This gap underscores the urgent need for a larger, more specialised MEA capable of shaping global discussions and providing strategic depth across multiple domains. Expanding the MEA to 5,000 personnel would ensure that India's foreign policy is both proactive and comprehensive. Such an expansion is not merely about increasing numbers; it is about cultivating strategic expertise across diverse fields. India's diplomacy must address trade, defense, environmental sustainability, cybersecurity, humanitarian aid, and more. To achieve this, the MEA must recruit specialists who can navigate these complex issues. During the Cold War, figures like US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger demonstrated the transformative power of strategic brilliance in diplomacy. Similarly, India needs diplomats capable of long-term thinking and crafting policies that reflect its evolving global role. India's for-



THE NEED FOR A DIPLOMATIC CORPS THAT CAN SHAPE GLOBAL DISCUSSIONS AND PROVIDE THE INTELLECTUAL AND STRATEGIC DEPTH REQUIRED IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE URGENT

ign policy must anticipate global trends rather than merely react to events. To compete with global powers like the US, Russia, and China, India requires a diplomatic team adept at building alliances, leveraging emerging opportunities, and addressing global challenges. This necessitates investments in strategic thinking and specialised knowledge. The MEA must develop expertise in fields such as space diplomacy, climate change negotiations, global trade, and defense strategy. Moreover, diplomats must engage with governments, businesses, think tanks, and civil society to shape decisions in India's favour. A well-staffed MEA would enable India to better engage with key global issues and deepen its relationships with major powers. Just as the US relied on figures like Robert McNamara and John Foster Dulles to shape its diplomacy, India must nurture a generation of visionary diplomats. These individuals should possess deep understanding of global security, international law, multilateral organisations, and global trade—qualities exemplified by VK Krishna Menon, who championed India's interests on the international stage during the 1950s. Expanding the MEA is not just about addressing immediate challenges but about aligning India's diplomatic capabilities

with its evolving priorities. Experts in climate change, energy security, trade relations, and technology diplomacy are essential to ensuring a forward-thinking foreign policy. The expanded MEA must also prioritise collaboration with think tanks, academic institutions, and media professionals. These partnerships can provide the intellectual foundation for strategic decisions and help India anticipate emerging global trends. Think tanks and universities—both domestic and international—can offer critical insights into shifting geopolitical dynamics, new economic policies, and other global developments. Engaging with these institutions will ensure that India's foreign policy remains agile and informed. Public diplomacy is another critical component of modern foreign policy. Beyond government-to-government negotiations, India must focus on shaping global perceptions and building relationships with international audiences. The MEA should work closely with media professionals to effectively communicate India's vision and policies to the world. Leveraging India's soft power—its rich culture, democratic ideals, and values—can amplify its global influence and ensure its voice is heard. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RUPEE LOSING SHEEN

Madam — There is an ongoing concern over the rupee sharply losing value against the dollar. But then a nation's currency intrinsically represents two notions of value: one for the purchaser and seller in the domestic market and the other for the external one. China, in its monetary parlance, has the yuan and the renminbi. In layman's terms, the domestic standing of the rupee is broadly propped up by an incremental rise in GDP and per capita income, with the purchasing power sustained by low inflation. Compared to most economies, we are far better placed. Our current concern would be more reining in inflation and fiscal deficit to retain the value of the rupee. The exchange value of the rupee with other currencies is a matter of the difference between the inflow and outflow of foreign currency for our external buying or selling, be it products, commodities, or services. The crux lies in developing our niche in any one of them to reverse the trade deficit. China found it in manufacturing and commodities and dares to keep its currency highly depreciated. The US despite its huge debt has the privilege of printing the dollar, the global currency. We must find it in diligence, research, and human potential.

R Narayanan | Navi Mumbai

NGO SUSPECTED FOR BOMB THREAT

Madam—Apropos of the headlines 'Police find NGO, political ties in Delhi bomb threats', it is imperative to dig deeply into the conspiracy of scaring 400 Delhi schools with bombing. The 16-year-old boy is only a juvenile shield to escape punishment. This is a heinous crime closely connected with the terrorist act perpetrated by the sympathisers of terrorist Afzal Guru, who had been hanged during Congress's tenure. Delhi CM Atishi is also a potential source of investigation because of her family's sympathy with the terrorist Afzal Guru. All those associated with the NGO should be slapped with NSA under the zero-tolerance policy of the Union Government. The

Meta offers apologies on election remark



Mark Zuckerberg's controversial statement has sparked a new debate across India and the world. His remarks about the functioning of Joe Biden's administration and the 2024 Indian elections have angered the Indian Parliament. Now, Meta has publicly apologised following backlash over its CEO Mark Zuckerberg's comments on India's 2024 general elections. This issue raises critical questions about the responsibility of tech companies and the impact of their statements

on a global scale. Zuckerberg's comments on Joe Rogan's podcast regarding economic challenges and democracy in India are being seen as damaging to India's image. Particularly, the questions raised about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's economic management and COVID-19 strategies are considered serious. India's IT Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, has responded strongly, stating that foreign companies must respect India's constitutional dignity. This incident not only scrutinises the social impact of social media giants but also questions their political interference. India's stance highlights that major tech giants are now being held accountable for their actions. This development sends an important message that strict action against misinformation is essential to upholding the dignity of democracy.

R K Jain | Barwani

Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist who carried out the Parliament attack in 2001 earned sympathy for those vying for Delhi rule. It is the most unfortunate for the country and the ugliest face of our political ecosystem. Hitherto, a part of the INDIA bloc, AAP must clarify the role of its Delhi CM. The Khalistani links of the Aam Aadmi Party and Arvind Kejriwal are already in public awareness. There seems to be no end to the revengeful acts of sympathisers of the terrorists, so the strongest punishment should be ensured against the culprits. We are aware that a team of leading advocates will protect the NGO behind the Delhi school bomb threats. Such an ecosystem should be exposed. Delhi has been targeted by the extremist forces; it is very obvious and evident.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

B'DESH AG'S ANTI-SECULARISM PITCH

Madam — Bangladesh's Attorney General Mohammad Asaduzzaman has demanded the removal of the word secularism from the Constitution. He has said that 90 per-

cent of Bangladesh's population is Muslim, so it should be a Muslim country by removing the word secular. The Attorney General has said that words like socialism and secularism do not present the correct picture of Bangladesh. He has suggested making major changes in the constitution and removing 'secularism.' He will make these changes before the next elections. Because Yunus is an educationist later and is first a fundamentalist Muslim. Earlier, in the year 2010, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh had ruled that the removal of secularism in 1977 was illegal. The court had reinstated secularism in the constitution. Just as Bangladesh is attacking temples in its country, similarly in India too, deities are being searched for in mosques. The destination of both the neighbours is the same. Bangladesh wants to become an Islamic nation while preparations are on in India to make it a 'Hindu Rashtree'

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

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FIRST COLUMN

US EXPORT CONTROLS:
IMPACT ON INDIA'S AIUS export controls pose new challenges
for India's AI and tech ambitions

KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Biden administration's Interim Final Rule (IFR), effective January 2025, introduces strict regulations on the export, reexport and in-country transfer of advanced computing integrated circuits (ICs) and artificial intelligence (AI) model weights. These measures aim to limit the proliferation of advanced technologies with potential military and intelligence applications, particularly in AI-driven systems. While this move marks a significant policy step from the outgoing administration, its future under the next presidency remains uncertain, as the new administration could pause the implementation for review. India, a nation rapidly advancing its AI infrastructure, faces significant challenges under the IFR. Here are the key implications:

The IFR enforces licensing requirements for exporting advanced computing ICs and AI model weights, particularly those integral to high-performance AI models. For India, which is heavily investing in AI research and infrastructure, these restrictions may hinder access to state-of-the-art U.S. technologies. A "presumption of denial" applies to licenses for advanced ICs used in training AI models, limiting India's ability to obtain cutting-edge hardware essential for its AI development.

The regulations impose stringent controls on advanced closed-weight AI models, while open-weight models are exempt. Since closed-weight models often drive groundbreaking AI research, this limitation could slow India's progress in leveraging advanced US AI models. Restricted access to these critical technologies could delay breakthroughs in AI-driven applications.



Although the IFR provides exceptions for low-risk destinations, India is not included in the list of preferred nations. As a result, Indian entities face capped allocations on advanced computing capacity based on total processing performance (TPP). Over the next three years, these limitations could restrict the computational resources available for Indian researchers and developers, potentially stalling AI initiatives.

Indian companies seeking US technology will face heightened scrutiny under the IFR, including stringent checks on supply chain security, personnel vetting, and cybersecurity compliance. These requirements will increase the complexity of partnerships with US firms and may delay India's efforts to scale its AI ecosystem.

India's plans to establish advanced data centers and high-performance computing clusters will be directly affected by the new regulations. The IFR mandates compliance with US security standards, such as NIST guidelines, adding operational costs and potential delays.

India's ambition to lead global AI collaborations, as demonstrated by its participation in initiatives like the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), faces friction under these controls. With international partnerships playing a crucial role in India's technological growth, the restrictions on high-performance computing components and AI models could disrupt progress.

To mitigate these challenges, India must consider alternative strategies, including strengthening domestic research and development, partnering with non-US technology providers, and leveraging diplomatic channels to negotiate favorable terms with the US. The path forward will require Indian companies to adapt rapidly, focusing on self-sufficiency and fostering collaborations beyond traditional partnerships. While the IFR offers limited flexibility through license exceptions and potential adjustments, India's advanced computing and AI ambitions will require resilience and innovation to overcome the regulatory hurdles imposed by these new export controls.

*(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)*The war they waged,
the price we paidWith Trump's return, the stage is set for continuation of the bloodstained
legacy, with devastating consequences for the world's most vulnerableNILANTHA
LANGAMUWA

The Vietnam War should have been the United States' breaking point—a humiliating defeat that exposed the futility of projecting brute force in a world that had long learned to resist imperialism. But instead of becoming a sobering moment of reflection, it ignited a chain reaction of conflicts, interventions, and proxy wars that would devastate nations and leave millions dead. From Ronald Reagan to Joe Biden, the American war machine has not only endured but expanded, thriving on chaos and suffering. With Donald Trump poised to return, his new administration promises to perpetuate this bloodstained legacy, consolidating power at home while unleashing destruction abroad. Reagan's tenure marked a revival of the Cold War mindset, framed by a simplistic, almost cartoonish view of global politics.

His administration orchestrated covert operations and military interventions with reckless abandon, leaving a trail of devastation across continents. In Grenada, a minuscule island nation, the U.S. flexed its muscle in a laughable display of overkill. Yet, the price for the people of Grenada was far from humorous—hundreds of civilians died in an operation sold as a "rescue mission." In Lebanon, Reagan's deployment of U.S. Marines ended in catastrophe, with 241 servicemen killed in a suicide bombing. The retaliatory shelling of Lebanese villages left countless civilians dead, their stories erased from the official narrative. George H. W. Bush brought the carnage to Panama and Iraq. Operation Just Cause in Panama left at least 3,000 civilians dead, according to independent estimates—numbers far higher than the official U.S. tally. The Gulf War of 1991 killed tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians, with entire neighbourhoods flattened by American airpower. The sanctions that followed—a form of economic warfare—led to the deaths of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children, as reported by UNICEF. But these deaths were dismissed by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as a price worth paying.

Bill Clinton's presidency, often remembered for its charm and centrism, was any-



THE GULF WAR OF 1991 KILLED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF IRAQI SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS, WITH ENTIRE NEIGHBOURHOODS FLATTENED BY AMERICAN AIRPOWER. THE SANCTIONS THAT FOLLOWED—A FORM OF ECONOMIC WARFARE—LED TO THE DEATHS OF AN ESTIMATED 500,000 IRAQI CHILDREN

thing but peaceful. Under his watch, NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo killed an estimated 500 civilians, while strikes on critical infrastructure plunged the region into chaos. In Somalia, Clinton inherited and expanded a disastrous intervention that culminated in the infamous Black Hawk Down incident. The fallout was not limited to American soldiers—it cost the lives of an estimated 10,000 Somali civilians caught in the crossfire. The Bush-Cheney years saw the bloodbath reach industrial levels. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, based on falsified intelligence, unleashed a catastrophe of staggering proportions. By conservative estimates, 200,000 Iraqi civilians died in the war, though many argue the real number exceeds half a million. Afghanistan, initially framed as a righteous response to 9/11, turned into a graveyard for American credibility. The war cost over 70,000 Afghan civilian lives, with many more lost to starvation and disease caused by the destruction of infrastructure.

These numbers, while horrifying, barely scratch the surface. Barack Obama, heralded as a harbinger of change, instead became the drone king. Under his administration, drone strikes killed an estimated 3,800 people in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. These numbers include as many as 800 civilians, though independent investigations suggest the real toll is much higher. Libya, once a stable if repressive state, was reduced to a failed state after NATO's intervention, with Obama admitting it was his greatest foreign policy mistake. Yet his admission did nothing to rebuild Libya, now a haven for human traffickers and militia warlords. Donald Trump's first term shattered even the pretence of restraint. Civilian casualties from U.S. airstrikes in Syria and Iraq

soared, with independent monitors estimating at least 4,500 civilians killed in 2017 alone.

In Somalia, Trump's loosening of drone strike protocols led to a surge in civilian deaths, including women and children obliterated in remote villages. Yemen's civil war, fueled by U.S.-supplied bombs and logistical support to Saudi Arabia, created what the U.N. calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. By some estimates, over 377,000 Yemenis have died—many of them from famine and disease exacerbated by the relentless bombing campaigns. Joe Biden's administration, while promising a pivot to diplomacy, has only perpetuated the violence.

The withdrawal from Afghanistan, while ending America's longest war, was executed with callous disregard for human life. At least 170 civilians were killed in a single ISIS-K bombing during the chaotic evacuation. Biden's continued drone strikes and military presence in Syria ensure that civilians remain collateral in America's unending "war on terror." In Ukraine, US military aid fuels a war that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives on both sides, with no end in sight. Across these decades, the pattern is unmistakable: the United States does not fight wars for freedom or democracy.

It fights for hegemony, resources, and geopolitical advantage, with human lives as expendable currency. The statistics are staggering but fail to capture the depth of the tragedy. From Vietnam to Yemen, from Iraq to Libya, the human cost is always paid by those least equipped to bear it: the poor, the displaced, and the voiceless. In just days, Donald Trump will return to the White House, his second administration poised to escalate the already relentless machinery of American war. This time, the

gloves are off—his power more consolidated, his team of loyalists more ruthless, and his ambitions unrestrained. The team surrounding him will be battle-hardened ideologues with little patience for opposition.

Trump has openly embraced authoritarian impulses, and his foreign policy will likely mirror his domestic ambitions—unapologetic, ruthless, and geared toward consolidating dominance. For the impoverished, this is a death sentence. The costs will not be borne by those who plan wars from air-conditioned offices or justify them in press briefings but by the powerless: Yemeni mothers sifting through the rubble for scraps, Syrian children cowering as drones circle above, and Gazan families freezing to death amid the ruins of their bombed-out homes. These are not accidents of war; they are deliberate outcomes of a global system that treats human life as expendable in the pursuit of dominance over dignity.

The bombs will continue to fall, the starving will continue to die, and the architects of this destruction will dine in opulence, their hands stained with the blood of the voiceless.

We collectively absorb these atrocities—not with shock or outrage, but with numbed detachment, anaesthetised by the relentless churn of media cycles and the droning rationalisations of pundits. It is not that we do not care—it is that we have been conditioned not to. Once our souls have been amputated by decades of warmongering, by a system that normalises suffering as the cost of 'security', we survive in resignation, compelled by the machinery of indifference to keep moving forward.

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

Uttarakhand's initiatives to strengthen climate resilience in the Himalayas

The State's efforts, encapsulated in the Dehradun Declaration, highlight the importance of collaboration and community empowerment

The Uttarakhand Council of Science and Technology (UCOST) recently organised a significant workshop in Delhi, focusing on climate resilience and disaster management, with a particular emphasis on Himalayan states. This workshop attracted eminent scientists, disaster management experts, and advocates of climate resilience, underscoring the pressing need to address environmental challenges in the region. This initiative follows Uttarakhand's landmark 2023 International Conference in Dehradun, which drew participants from approximately 50 countries.

The conference culminated in the adoption of the "Dehradun Declaration," a comprehensive action plan

aimed at fostering collaboration, innovation and effective strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change and natural disasters in Himalayan states. Uttarakhand's proactive approach to uniting stakeholders on these critical issues is both commendable and necessary.

Rationale Behind Uttarakhand's Initiatives

Uttarakhand's unique geographical and cultural significance drives its commitment to addressing climate resilience. With the second-largest Himalayan boundary after Arunachal Pradesh, the state plays a pivotal role in supporting Northern India's vast hinterland. The region's popularity as a hub for tourism, religious pilgrimages such as the Char



DINESH KUMAR TYAGI

Dham Yatra, and adventure activities exerts considerable pressure on its fragile ecosystem.

The state faces recurring natural calamities, including forest fires, landslides, cloud-bursts, and glacier shrinkage. These disasters significantly impact local communities, strain state resources, and demand robust measures to minimise their devastating

effects. By organising international workshops and fostering collaborations, Uttarakhand aims to raise awareness, share best practices and leverage technology, such as data analytics and artificial intelligence, to design both preventive and responsive strategies.

Highlights of the Dehradun Declaration

The Dehradun Declaration lays out a comprehensive framework for building climate resilience and disaster preparedness in Himalayan states. Its key features include: **Strengthening Preparedness** Integrating disaster resilience into educational curricula. Framing regulations to protect vulnerable populations. Developing financial tools and frameworks to advance the "science of survival."



Protecting the Himalayan Ecosystem

Merging indigenous knowledge with traditional community practices. Promoting nature-based solutions and active community engagement. Enhancing institutional collaboration for project monitoring and execution. **Empowering Communities** Establishing community-

based early warning systems. Educating and equipping communities to take local measures.

Strengthening livelihoods and building local networks of like-minded individuals.

Policy Integration

Establishing an Institute of Disaster Management and a global center for climate resilience.

Formulating policies based on national and international best practices.

Coordinating among state, central, and international organisations.

Promoting Innovation

Supporting startups and entrepreneurs in developing tools and technologies for climate resilience.

The Delhi Workshop and Global Consensus

The Delhi workshop served as a follow-up to the Dehradun Declaration and brought together disaster management scholars, international organisations, and corporate representatives engaged in CSR activities. Participants praised Uttarakhand's efforts to convene diverse stakeholders, emphasising that protecting the Himalayan ecosystem is a shared responsibility.

The Himalayas, often referred to as the "Soul of India" and the "Third Pole," are crucial for maintaining ecological balance. Workshop attendees agreed on the need for collective action to address challenges such as unchecked tourism and resource exploitation. Recommendations included regulating plastic use, promoting organic farming,

imposing green taxes on vehicles, and training locals to mitigate post-disaster damage.

National Perspectives on Climate Resilience

The recently concluded COP 29 in Baku included an agenda to establish a global fund for addressing climate change. Developed nations were urged to allocate higher budgets to support developing and poorer countries in reducing carbon emissions.

Training volunteers at the village level and connecting them through a centralised platform can foster trust and confidence in disaster preparedness efforts.

(The writer is a retired IAS officer and president of Society of Digital Entrepreneurs; views are personal)

NEW LAUNCH



Honouring Legal Luminaries

Through its pages, the book recounts the lasting legacy of lawyers who championed justice and equality, says **ABHI SINGHAL**

The Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF) commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Republic of India with a memorable event that highlighted the significant contributions of lawyers to the nation's democratic journey. The occasion witnessed the launch of an extraordinary book titled *Lawyers of India in Freedom Struggle & in Independent India (1872-2022): 150 Years and Continued Glorious Contribution Toward the Centennial - 2047*. The launch brought together luminaries of the legal fraternity. The highlight of the evening was the book's formal launch by K.K. Venugopal, former Attorney General of India, who presented the first copy to his successor, R. Venkataramani, the current Attorney General of India. Addressing the distinguished gathering, K.K. Venugopal praised the legal profession's crucial role in shaping India's democratic ethos. "The contributions of lawyers have always transcended the courtroom. They have been instrumental in guiding India towards its democratic ideals, especially during times of struggle," he said. The comprehensively



researched book chronicles 150 years of the legal profession's impact on India's socio-political landscape, from the colonial era to the present day. It pays homage to legendary figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, whose advocacy during the independence movement laid the foundation for India's freedom. Equally, it sheds light on post-independence lawyers and educators who have fortified the country's legal framework. Dr. Lalit Bhasin, President of SILF, emphasised the book's significance in preserving the history of Indian legal professionals. "This book is an homage to the lawyers who



ABOUT THE BOOK
Compiled, Edited and Authored by Dr. Lalit Bhasin (President) Society of Indian Law Firms

have played a vital role in the independence movement and, more importantly, in the development of a legal system that is the backbone of India's democracy," he said. The book highlights Lala Lajpat Rai's leading advocacy for social reform and the rights of Indians and explores how post-independence legal professionals have upheld the principles of democracy, justice, and fairness in the evolving Indian Republic. As India approaches its centennial of independence in 2047, the book serves as both a historical record and a call to action. It underscores the continuing role of lawyers in addressing modern challenges and ensuring the rule of law prevails.

A Literary Prelude

Curtain-Raiser for Jaipur Literature Festival 2025



By **SAKSHI PRIYA**

The curtain-raiser for the Jaipur Literature Festival 2025 at The Leela Palace New Delhi offered an engaging preview of what promises to be another remarkable edition of the world's most celebrated literary gathering. Hosted at one of Delhi's most prestigious venues, the event celebrated the enduring power of literature and its ability to spark meaningful conversations. This year marks the fourth consecutive partnership between the Jaipur Literature Festival and Teamwork Arts with The Leela Palace New Delhi. The event brought together distinguished authors, poets and intellectuals, creating an atmosphere filled with creativity and inspiration.

The evening featured insightful speeches by key figures associated with the festival, who reflected on the significance of literature in contemporary society. Their words highlighted the festival's mission to preserve cultural heritage and encourage dialogue through storytelling and ideas. The venue provided a fitting backdrop for discussions about the role of literature as a bridge between the past and the present. The event underscored the Jaipur Literature Festival's role as a global platform for literary excellence and its dedication to the written word. As a preview of the main event, the curtain-raiser successfully built excitement among attendees. It highlighted the festival's significance for readers and writers alike, continuing to inspire and promote intellectual exchange.



(Left to right): William Dalrymple, celebrated historian, author and co-founder & co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival; Anupam Dasgupta Area Vice President (North India) and General Manager at The Leela Palace, New Delhi; and Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts. In its fourth year of partnership with Teamwork Arts, The Leela Palace New Delhi hosted the curtain-raiser dinner for the Jaipur Literature Festival 2025, scheduled from January 30 to February 3. The collaboration culminates with the prestigious Writer's Ball at The Leela Palace Jaipur, showcasing The Leela's dedication to celebrating India's rich cultural heritage and traditions.

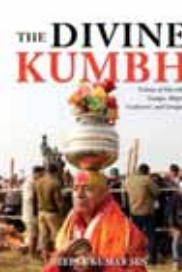
JANUARY READS



Book: Ananda: An Exploration of Cannabis in India
Author: Karan Madhok
Publisher: Alpha book company
Price: ₹999



Book: Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change
Author: Thich Nhat Hanh
Publisher: Alpha book company
Price: ₹399



Book: The Divine Kumbh Echoes of Eternity: Ganga, Shipra, Godavari, and Sangam
Author: Deepak Kumar Sen
Publisher: Niyogi books
Price: ₹695



Book: The Gown and the Gavel: Life Journey of a Former Chief Justice of India
Author: G.B. PATNAIK
Publisher: Niyogi books
Price: ₹695



Book: Urban Leopards of Jhalana
Author: Soham Chakraborty
Publisher: Niyogi Books
Price: ₹650

In *Contemplating Gandhi: Essays on Mahatma's Life and Thought*, Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari, a notable jurist and Gandhian thinker, presents a deeply reflective and insightful account of the Mahatma's life, philosophy, and enduring significance. The essays, thoughtfully compiled and expertly translated by Ramchandra Pradhan, present an intimate and vivid portrayal of Gandhi, seamlessly mixing historical insights with poignant personal reminiscences. This volume transcends the bounds of academic discourse, becoming a heartfelt and reverent tribute to a legacy that continues to inspire and guide generations, both past and present. Ramchandra Pradhan's preface is a heartfelt and expansive memoir detailing his serendipitous and deep association

with Justice Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari and the Institute of Gandhian Studies in Wardha. Through his reflective and eloquent writing, Pradhan reveals a deep and abiding respect for Dharmadhikari's unwavering dedication to Gandhian values and principles. Pradhan's preface is not merely an introductory passage; rather, it chronicles his decade-long journey of engaging with Gandhian thought, a journey characterised by mutual affection, intellectual camaraderie, and a shared reverence for the Mahatma's enduring legacy. Pradhan affectionately recounts Dharmadhikari's poignant anecdotes, including the inspiring words spoken by Dharmadhikari's mother to his father, Dada Dharmadhikari, during the pivotal Non-cooperation Movement. Such compelling narratives serve to enrich the book's historical context, offering readers a valuable glimpse into the familial and philosophical underpinnings that have so profoundly shaped Dharmadhikari's own work and perspective. Moreover, Pradhan's translation, which Dharmadhikari himself has described as enhancing the original text, underscores Pradhan's vital role in preserving the nuances and essence of Gandhian philosophy for a contemporary audience. The essays in this collection, written on various occasions, range from reflections on Gandhi's principles to portraits of significant figures in the Gandhian movement, including Jinnah's wife, Jankidevi. They explore themes like the Non-cooperation Movement, the challenges of India's independence, and Gandhi's response to partition. While Dharmadhikari's writings exhibit repetition, as acknowledged by the translator, this reiteration reinforces the profundity and timelessness of Gandhian ideas. Dharmadhikari emphasises the dynamic

nature of Gandhian philosophy. Drawing on his father's wisdom, he argues that ideas must evolve with the times to remain relevant. This approach challenges readers to engage critically with Gandhi's teachings, urging them to reinterpret his principles in contemporary contexts. The book's philosophical core lies in Dharmadhikari's insightful and nuanced reflections on the profound concepts of Anasakti Yoga and Karma Yoga, which Gandhi himself so eloquently embodied and exemplified throughout his life. These essays also powerfully highlight Gandhi's unwavering humanism, his inspiring ability to transcend personal sorrow during times of immense national crisis, and his steadfast commitment to living amidst and in service of the people. Dharmadhikari's deeply personal

The Relevance of Principles

Contemplating Gandhi uncovers the depth of Gandhian philosophy, inspiring future generations, says **SHALEEN KUMAR SINGH**



recollections and experiences with the Mahatma himself, such as the cherished moments of walking alongside Gandhi and the profound anguish of mourning his tragic assassination, add an indelible emotional dimension to the essays. These poignant accounts elevate the book from a mere academic endeavour, transforming it into a living, breathing bridge that connects the revered past with the present day, allowing readers to forge a genuine, visceral connection to Gandhi's enduring legacy. Hence, the book titled *Contemplating Gandhi* is not merely a collection of essays; rather, it is a profound philosophical exploration and a heartfelt, reverent homage to the life and enduring legacy of the Mahatma. Through the insightful writings of Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari, enriched by the meticulous and evocative translation of Ramchandra Pradhan, this volume inspires readers to view Gandhi's teachings not as relics of the past, but as a living, dynamic philosophy that continues to guide and shape the present-day world. This book is a necessary read for scholars, students, and anyone deeply interested in Gandhian thought and principles. It challenges readers to think critically, to embrace the fluid and evolving interpretations of Gandhi's ideas, and to strive to embody his timeless values and principles in their own lives. Through this reflective work, Dharmadhikari and Pradhan remind us that the true relevance of Gandhi's legacy lies not in the provision of ready-made solutions, but in the offering of a transformative framework for ethical, purposeful and meaningful living in an ever-changing, dynamic global landscape. A book that deserves serious reading. — Shaleen Kumar Singh (shaleensingh.in) teaches English at Swami Shukdevanad College, Shahjahanpur, India, edits creativesaplings in an online journal

Contemplating Gandhi
Essays on Mahatma's life and thought
Chandrashekar Dharmadhikari

ABOUT THE BOOK
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