

# TRUMP IS BACK



President-elect Donald Trump, right, and Melania Trump clap during a fireworks show at Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Va., ahead of the 60th Presidential Inauguration. PTI

**PTI ■ WASHINGTON**

President-elect Donald Trump is spending the eve of his inauguration in a series of Washington events that celebrate his return to power and his "Make America Great Again" movement as he prepares to move back into the White House at a time of deep national political divisions. Washington has prepared in unprecedented ways to keep the unfolding events safe and secure. But unlike when Trump helped spark a mob of his supporters to attack the Capitol and tried to retain power in 2021 after his loss to Democrat Joe Biden, officials are not expecting massive protests, unrest and violence this time. Instead, the city is braced for crowds celebrating Trump's second term and MAGA's total control of the Republican Party. It is a remarkable turnaround after Trump left the nation's

capital four years in disgrace and skipped the inauguration of his successor. Trump blasted his way through the 2024 GOP presidential primary and won November's election by an Electoral College margin unseen since Democrat Barack Obama was reelected in 2012. Yet even with that comfortable victory and his party in full, albeit narrow, control of Congress, the incoming president remains one of the most polarising figures in US history, with nearly as many fierce detractors as ardent supporters. That means it could be difficult to fulfil postelection pledges about promoting bipartisanship while healing political differences. He told NBC News on Saturday that unity would be a theme of his inauguration speech Monday at the Capitol, along with strength and fairness. "January 20th cannot come fast enough!" he posted on his

social media site. "Everybody, even those that initially opposed a Victory by President Donald J. Trump and the Trump Administration, just want it to happen." Keeping to tradition, Trump spent Saturday night at Blair House, the president's official guest residence on Pennsylvania Avenue, across from the White House. He arrived there after a party at his golf club in Sterling, Virginia, about 30 miles west of the city, that illuminated the night sky. He had arrived in Washington from his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, aboard a C-32, the military variant of the Boeing 757, painted in the iconic presidential powder blue and white colour scheme. The aircraft that would be known as Air Force One if the president were aboard carried the president-elect as Special Air Mission 47.

# Gaza ceasefire begins, handover of hostages started

**AGENCIES ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)**

A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas initiated in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, ushering in an initial six-week period of calm and raising hopes for the release of dozens of militant-held hostages and an end to the devastating 15-month war. A last-minute delay by Hamas put off the truce's start by nearly three hours and highlighted its fragility. First Red Cross convoy picked up three women Israeli hostages in Gaza. Even before the ceasefire took effect, celebrations erupted across the territory and some Palestinians began returning to their homes. Israel, meanwhile, announced the names of the first three hostages expected to return home later Sunday, in exchange for the planned release of 90 Palestinian prisoners. The truce, which started at 11.15 am local time, is the first step toward ultimately ending the conflict and returning nearly 100 hostages abducted in Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack. An Israeli official confirmed that Romi Gonen, 24, Emily Damari, 28, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, were set to be released later Sunday. Gonen was abducted from the Nova music festival, while the others



Displaced Palestinians flash V-sign as they return to Rafah, while a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas went into effect, in Rafah, Gaza Strip. PTI

were kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Damari is an Israeli-British dual citizen. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the

families had approved the publication of the names. Hamas was supposed to provide the names before the start of the ceasefire, originally planned for 8.30 am. It released the names about two hours later, citing technical reasons and saying it was still committed to the agreement. In the interim between 8.30 am and when the ceasefire took hold, Israeli fire killed at least 26 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It did not say whether they were civilians or fighters. The military has warned people to stay away from Israeli forces as they retreat to a buffer zone inside Gaza.

## Valmiki Basti key to elite New Delhi seat

**SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI**

New Delhi's Valmiki Basti is set to play a pivotal role in deciding the fate for Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal, as well as BJP candidate Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma and Congress candidate Sandeep Dikshit in the upcoming Delhi elections. Residents of the Basti have expressed concerns over their sitting MLAs limited presence in the area and the negative impact of the excise policy on the rising problem of alcoholism. However, there remains a notable sympathy among the populace for the former Chief Minister Kejriwal who has faced jail time, alongside an appreciation for the ruling party's initiative that offers free bus rides to women. The area holds significant importance in both Delhi and national politics, as it was here that Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the 'Swachh Bharat' Abhiyan and former CM Arvind Kejriwal introduced the 'jhaadu' (broom) as the symbol of his party in 2013. Valmiki Basti comprises approximately 321 houses



File photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

and has a voter base of around 6,000 to 7,000 residents. A vendor named Ram Karan expressed his belief that Kejriwal was unjustly imprisoned by the BJP in connection with the money laundering charges linked to the excise policy case. "They have done him a great injustice by sending him to jail, and so far, they have been unable to prove the charges against him," he stated.

## Sky clear, city air still poor

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

The national Capital's air quality index (AQI) dropped to the 'very poor' category on Sunday, with the city recording 368 as average AQI at 4 pm even as the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) stage 3 remains revoked by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM). The city recorded an AQI of 362 at 6 pm in the very poor category, taking a dip from Saturday when it was at 263 in the 'poor' category at 7 pm. The city woke up to a foggy morning, with the minimum temperature recorded at 9.1 degrees Celsius, 1.6 notches above the season's average. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the maximum temperature settled 6.5 notches above normal at 26.1 degrees

**WEATHER**

AQI 368  
MAX 26.1°C(+6.5)  
MIN 9.1°C(+1.6)

Celsius. People will wake up to a less chill morning on Monday as the met department has predicted moderate fog on Monday, with the maximum and the minimum temperatures likely to settle around 24 and 11 degrees Celsius, respectively. The humidity level oscillated between 71 per cent and 100 per cent. Earlier on Friday, the CAQM had revoked the actions under Stage III ('Severe' Air Quality) of the GRAP following an improvement in the national Capital's AQI after it reached 302 a day before.

## No casualty in Mahakumbh fire; PM talks to Yogi



Smoke billows out after a fire broke out in a camp during Mahakumbh, at Sangam in Prayagraj. PTI

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

Prayagraj witnessed a massive fire on Sunday during the ongoing Mahakumbh, as pandals in Sector 19, near the Shastri Bridge, were consumed by flames. Approximately 200 tents were impacted, with approximately 20 of them completely reduced to ashes. Although no casualties were reported, the fire resulted in substantial damage to valuables, and several LPG cylinders exploded, worsening the situation. Initial reports indicate that the fire started from the tent belonging to Gita Press. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to inquire about the fire incident.

## Police claims Saif attacker nabbed



Police personnel take the accused, arrested in connection with the alleged attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan, to a hospital for medical examination before producing him at a court, in Mumbai. PTI

**T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**

The 72-hour-long drama involving the elusive accused in the murderous attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan finally ended on Sunday, as the Mumbai police finally arrested the real culprit - a Bangladeshi national - behind the sensational crime from the neighbouring Thane city. A day after the Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel detained a 31-year-old suspect in connection with Thursday's attack on Saif, the Mumbai police zeroed in on the real accused - identified as Shariful Islam Shahzad (30) - from Hiranandani Estate at Thane (west). Shariful, who hails from Rajabariya village in Nalchity sub-region of Jhalokati district in southern Bangladesh, had illegally crossed over to India some six months and been living in Mumbai under the false name of Bijoy Das.

The police said that during the questioning after his arrest, Shariful admitted to having committed the crime. After his arrest, Shariful was produced before a holiday court in Mumbai, which remanded him in police custody for five days. The police had sought Shariful's custody for 14 days to establish the motive behind his breaking into Saif's house, to ascertain where he had hidden the cloths that he wore at the time of crime, what was the motive behind his entry to Saif's house, where did he procure the weapon, how did he enter India and how did he break into Saif's house and why did he assume a false name after coming to India. During the knife attack carried out on him allegedly by Shariful in the small hours of January 16, Saif had sustained six stab wounds, including the one in his spine while he was grappling an intruder in the actor's 12th floor apartment in posh "Satguru Sharan" building at Bandra (W) in north-west Mumbai. The knife attack on the actor had taken place between 2 am and 2.30 am on Thursday, after a failed attempt of a burglary. After his admission to the Lilavati Hospital, the actor had undergone a surgery for removal of a knife stuck in his spine and also plugging the leakage of spinal fluid. During a surgery carried out on him immediately afterwards, the doctors attending on Saif removed a 2.5-inch piece of knife from Saif's spine. During the preliminary interrogation, Shariful admitted to have sneaked into the actor's building on the night of January 15. Earlier, while seeking the custody of the accused for 14 days, the police cited several grounds for his custody. "The robbery was the motive behind the crime was robbery," a senior police officer said. The theft attempt failed after a house maid saw and raised an alarm, prompting Saif to come out of his bedroom. The actor resisted Shariful's attempt, resulting in a scuffle between the two in which the latter stabbed him six times before fleeing the building empty handed.

## Exiled Kashmiri Pandits seeks homeland in Valley as UT

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**

Members of the exiled Kashmiri Pandit community Sunday took a pledge to intensify their struggle to reclaim their separate 'homeland' with a Union Territory status in Kashmir valley on the occasion of the completion of 35 years in exile. On 19th January 1990, the Kashmiri Pandit community was driven out of their homes under the shadow of guns. To mark this day, each year 'Holocaust Remembrance Day' is observed to mark their ongoing struggle for a permanent resettlement. Over 500,000 Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee,



Members of the exiled Kashmiri Pandit community sitting in a tent in Jammu. PTI

and pain they went through during the 35-year-long period of exile. Sushma Pandita, seated inside a temporary tent in a park inside Jagti township, explained that 35 years ago when we first reached Jammu we were accommodated inside a makeshift tent city. "We were living in our multi-floor houses in the valley. Since then we have been living in these camps where we were accommodated in one-room and later two-room apartments. We have spent 35 years of life in these miserable conditions. We will not live in these matchbox houses now. We want to return to our homes and hearths".

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# Dallewal Receives Medical Aid after 55 Days of Hunger Strike; 121 Farmers End Fast

Centre invites for meeting on Feb 14; Dallewal to continue fast till legal guarantee on MSP

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

After 55 grueling days of hunger strike at the Khanauri border, Jagjit Singh Dallewal — a 70-year-old farmer leader and president of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Sidhpur) — finally received medical assistance. The decision came after the Central Government announced a high-level meeting with the farmer representatives on February 14 in Chandigarh, aimed at addressing their demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Dallewal, who made it clear that he would not end his fast until the Centre agrees to a legal guarantee for MSP for all crops, was administered glucose and other necessary components via drip from January 19 midnight.

Earlier, a delegation of officials from the Centre, led by Union Agriculture Ministry's joint secretary Priya Ranjan, held meetings with Dallewal and representatives of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM), who had been protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border (Shambhu and Khanauri, district Patiala) since February 13, 2024.

Subsequently, a letter was handed over, which extended an invite to SKM (non-political) and KMM and Dallewal for a meeting at 5 pm on February 14 at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26, Chandigarh, to continue the

talks which had been held last on February 15, 2024. The letter also urged Dallewal to end his hunger strike and participate in the talks.

The development assumed significance considering Dallewal's deteriorating health raised serious concerns, with doctors warning of potentially fatal consequences. Dallewal's hunger strike, which began on November 26, has been a symbol of the unyielding resolve of Indian farmers fighting for their rights.

The ongoing protest at the Khanauri border has garnered nationwide attention, with 121 farmers also joining Dallewal in a fast-unto-death to emphasize the urgency of their demands. On Sunday, these farmers broke their fast by sipping juice.

## Dallewal's Deteriorating Health Sparks Concern

Dallewal's health had been a matter of grave concern as the hunger strike stretched into its 55th day. Medical examinations revealed alarming health metrics — his weight had plummeted by 20 kilograms, dropping from 86.95 kg to 66.4 kg. Kidney and liver function tests showed deteriorating results, and doctors warned that continuing the hunger strike beyond February 14 could prove fatal.

Dr Swyaman Singh, a member of the medical team monitoring Dallewal, said: "The prolonged fasting has already taken a significant toll on his body. Immediate medical intervention was necessary to stabilize his condition temporarily... but there is dire need for solid food intake."

Late Saturday night, after repeated appeals from fellow farmers and family members, Dallewal consented to intravenous treatment and glucose administration. However, he remained steadfast in his decision to continue the hunger strike until tangible progress is made on

the farmers' demands.

## 121 Farmers Break Fast

In a show of solidarity, 121 farmers joined Dallewal in the hunger strike at the Khanauri border. The group, which included 111 farmers from Punjab and 10 from Haryana, had been fasting since January 15 on the Haryana side of the border. On Sunday, they concluded their fast in the presence of senior officials, including Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Mandeep Singh Sidhu and Patiala Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Nanak Singh.

Farmer leaders Kaka Singh Kotda, Sukhjeet Singh Hardo, and Baldev Singh Sirda facilitated the event, urging the participants to conserve their energy for the upcoming negotiations. Addressing the gathering, Kaka Singh Kotda emphasized, "This is not the end of our struggle. We will continue to fight until our demands are met."

## Centre invites farmers to meeting on Feb 14

The turning point in the standoff came on Saturday when a delegation from the Union Agriculture Ministry, led by Joint Secretary Priya Ranjan, visited the protest site. After discussions with Dallewal and other farmer leaders, the delegation formally invited them to a meeting scheduled for February 14 in Chandigarh. The Central Government has proposed to address the farmers' 12-point charter of demands, which includes a legal guarantee for MSP on all crops; implementation of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013; farm debts waiver; pensions for farmers and agricultural labourers; compensation for families affected by Lakhimpur Kheri violence; assurance against rising electricity tariffs, among others.

The meeting is seen as a crucial opportunity to resolve the ongoing stalemate. However,

farmer leaders remain cautious, citing previous failed negotiations in February 2024, when the government's proposal for a five-year MSP guarantee was rejected as insufficient.

Notably, the Supreme Court has also stepped in, expressing concern over Dallewal's deteriorating health. A bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh had directed the Punjab Government to submit Dallewal's medical records for evaluation by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). The Court had questioned how Dallewal had managed to maintain relatively stable vitals despite nearly two months of fasting.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the Punjab Government, had assured the Court that adequate medical facilities had been arranged near the protest site. He also noted that both State and Central Governments were actively engaging with the protesting farmers to find a resolution.

Meanwhile, Punjab Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian described Dallewal's health as "extremely worrisome" and urged the Central Government to act swiftly. "The farmers have shown immense patience and resilience. If the Centre's intentions are genuine, they should not delay addressing the demands," Khuddian stated.

Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also underscored the importance of dialogue. He highlighted Punjab's role as the nation's agricultural backbone and called for immediate action to safeguard farmers' interests. "Punjab feeds the country. It is imperative that the concerns of our farmers are addressed with sincerity and urgency," Mann said.

He emphasized that dialogue remains the only solution to farmers' issues. "It is encour-

aging that the Centre has agreed to meet with farmers. If the government doesn't engage with them, who will? Dialogue is essential to resolving their problems," Mann said.

He shared that the meeting, scheduled for February 14, would take place at a venue where he had previously mediated discussions. However, he did not confirm his participation in the talks.

Mann reiterated his government's support for farmers, highlighting their role as the country's food suppliers. "The Centre must listen to their demands and work towards a resolution. We've facilitated discussions before, and we'll continue to stand by them," he said.

The current agitation stems from long standing grievances over MSP and agricultural reforms. Protests at the Khanauri border began in February 2024, following a failed march to Delhi due to heavy security blockades. Over the past year, the movement has evolved into a broader call for systemic changes in agricultural policy.

Dallewal, a respected leader and convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), has become a symbol of resilience and determination. His hunger strike is a reminder of the stakes for India's farming community, which seeks not only economic security but also recognition for its critical role in national food security. The February 14 meeting represents a crucial opportunity for both the government and farmers to break the deadlock. However, skepticism remains high among farmer leaders, who fear that the talks could once again end without concrete outcomes.

Baldev Singh Sirda, one of the key leaders, warned, "If the government fails to deliver a satisfactory resolution, our protests will intensify. We are prepared for a long battle."

# Haryana Govt Considering New Schemes in 2025-26 Budget to Promote Startups



## Govt offering special incentives to youth for Startups, says CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Government is actively considering new schemes in the upcoming budget for the financial year 2025-26 to promote startups. The announcement was made by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday, who maintained that the State Government is giving special incentives to youth for Startups. Haryana is a home to many young entrepreneurs whose startups are now setting benchmarks, with turnovers ranging from Rs 100 to 200 crores, he added.

Saini, addressing the party workers after listening to the first 'Mann Ki Baat' programme of 2025, said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had praised the startups in Ambala and Hisar. Modi highlighted the growing startup culture in cities like Ambala and Hisar in Haryana. He expressed his happiness that cities like Ambala and Hisar are emerging as hubs for startups. The PM remarked that the startup culture is not confined to large cities alone, with more than half

of the startups in smaller cities being led by our daughters.

The Chief Minister said that the State Government is committed to establishing Haryana as a leading startup hub. The government is making concerted efforts to position Haryana as a major player in the national startup ecosystem, aligning with the goals of 'Make in India' and 'Startup India. The aim is not only to accelerate the state's economic development but also to create new employment opportunities for the youth, ensuring that Haryana earns a distinctive identity as a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship across the country. Describing PM Modi's Mann Ki Baat programme as a source of inspiration for the youth, Saini urged all party workers to listen to the programme every month with citizens at their respective booths. He called on the workers to connect as many people as possible, especially the youth, with the Mann Ki Baat programme. It is noteworthy that in a previous episode, PM Modi had also praised the efforts of Kaithal's young farmer, Virendra Yadav, for his work on stubble management.

Saini said that both the Central and State Governments are continuously working for

the welfare of the common people, with the direct benefits reaching the eligible individuals. He highlighted that the outcome of this work was evident in the formation of the BJP government with a massive majority for the third consecutive time in Haryana. He acknowledged that people have high expectations from the government and emphasized the need to meet those expectations. He urged party workers to address the grievances of the people.

The Chief Minister further said that for the first time in history, 24,000 youth have been provided government jobs simultaneously as soon as the government was formed. He added that people have already accepted that the Bharatiya Janata Party will form the government again in 2029.

The Chief Minister said that Prime Minister Modi had mentioned the contributions of the Constituent Assembly members, the Maha Kumbh, and India's achievements in Space during his Mann Ki Baat programme. In addition, he recalled the bravery of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in his fight against the British, highlighting that every year, his birth anniversary is celebrated as Parakram Diwas on January 23.

# Punjab Govt Doctors Defer Service Suspension Call to Jan 23 Following Assurance

PNS ■ PATIALA

The Punjab Civil Medical Services Association

(PCMSA), representing approximately 2,500 government doctors, has deferred its call to suspend services until January 23. The decision to delay the agitation followed a detailed discussion between PCMSA representatives and senior Health Department officials on January 17 and after assurances to address their longstanding demands.

The Association had initially planned to resume its agitation from January 20, urging the Government to fulfill key demands, including the reinstatement of Dynamic Assured Career Progression (DACP) and enhanced security measures for doctors working in public healthcare facilities.

PCMSA president Dr Akhil Sarin said that the meeting was productive, and the proposals presented by the Health Department were well-received. "The Health Department assured us that the necessary notification regarding our demands would be issued soon, likely in the first half of the coming week," he said.

Dr Sarin added that the Association, while acknowledging the Health Department's sincere efforts,

has decided to place trust in the government for now. Consequently, the agitation has been postponed by four days, with the next general body meeting scheduled for January 23 to review the situation.

## PCMSA's Core Demands

The PCMSA has been advocating for reinstatement of DACP — a policy that ensures timely promotions and career progression for doctors; and enhanced protection for doctors to ensure their safety while working in government hospitals.

The Association has emphasized that addressing these issues is critical for the well-being of medical professionals and the efficient functioning of the state's healthcare system.

PCMSA Patiala unit president Dr Sumeet Singh expressed optimism about the government's assurances but noted that the Association remains vigilant. "We will closely monitor the progress of the promised notification. If the commitments are not fulfilled, we will reconsider our course of action in the next meeting," he said.

# Punjab Govt Empowers PRTC Employees with Historic Salary Hike

PNS ■ PATIALA/CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government has approved a significant salary hike for 1,148 employees of the Punjab Roadways Transport Corporation (PRTC). The employees, who have been serving continuously for over a year, will now receive an increment of Rs 2,500 along with an additional 10 percent increase in their salaries.

The decision was announced after a critical meeting between the PRTC Contract Workers Union, chaired by PRTC chairman Ranjodh Singh Hadana, and Transport Minister Lajjit Singh Bhullar. Senior officials, including Additional Chief Secretary (Transport) DK Tiwari, PRTC managing director Bikramjit Singh Shergill, and general

manager Maninderjit Singh Sidhu, were also present during the deliberations.

Bhullar highlighted the importance of employee satisfaction in driving the state's progress. "A nation progresses when its citizens are happy. This salary hike is a testament to our government's commitment to uplifting the workforce and ensuring fair compensation," he stated.

The salary increment proposal was tabled during a Board of Directors meeting and received unanimous approval. Directives for implementing the hike had already been issued to seven departments, ensuring swift execution, he said.

Beyond the immediate salary increment, the Punjab Government has initiated steps

to regularize contract employees and ensure salary uniformity across PRTC. Minister assured that a comprehensive policy for regularizing employees under service rules is in the works, with the related file to be reviewed by the Advocate General of Punjab.

A follow-up meeting with senior officials and union representatives will be held soon to finalize the policy. The government has also addressed other key demands raised by contract workers, including adding new buses to the PRTC fleet to boost operations; regularizing contract employees to provide job security; removing employees from the waiting list and assigning them active duties; and increasing commissions for advance booking agents.

Emphasizing fairness of salary revision, PRTC chairman Hadana noted that drivers would see an increase of Rs 2,500, while other categories of employees would receive increments proportionate to their roles, including a further 30 percent hike for specific groups.

Previously, employees hired after September 15, 2021, were compensated only with minimum wages, which created disparities in remuneration. To address this issue, the Board of Directors decided to implement the Rs 2,500 increment and the additional 10 percent hike for employees who have been continuously employed for over a year. However, the changes will apply prospectively, and no arrears will be paid for past periods.

# Hry Minister inspects proposed metro expansion route in Gurugram

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Industries and Commerce Minister Rao Narbir Singh on Sunday directed the Gurugram Metro Rail Authority (GMDA) officers to ensure that the proposed metro expansion between Millennium City Center to Millway Station, Sector-22, and Cyber City in Gurugram causes minimal disruption to the public and existing services.

Singh, while giving necessary directions during an inspection of the proposed metro expansion route with officers of Gurugram Metro Rail Limited (GMRL) and GMDA, emphasized on DPR being prepared with a special emphasis on public convenience.

After inspecting the route, he directed officers to expedite the construction work while

ensuring public convenience a priority.

He said that the need for a well-planned traffic diversion strategy to ensure smooth traffic flow during construction.

Directions were also issued that during the project, essential services, such as the drainage system, electricity, water supply, and sewage, should remain unaffected. If any problems arise, the necessary redressal measures should be completed before starting metro construction work, he added.

The Minister further directed the GMDA officers that any construction of flyovers or underpasses work should be carried out parallel to the metro construction project. He said that officers should finalize the proposed route alignment within a month and ensure that Gurugram's drainage system is not affected.

# Chd Mayoral Polls: Candidates of Cong-AAP alliance, BJP to file nominations today

## City to get new Mayor on Jan 24

MANOJ KUMAR ■ CHANDIGARH

The candidates of both major players — Congress-Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alliance and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — will file their nomination papers for the mayoral election on Monday. Both the political groups are yet to announce their respective candidates for the three posts of mayor, senior deputy mayor, and deputy mayor.

Currently, AAP has a sitting mayor in the MC House with the support of the Congress party. This time also, they have decided to continue with the same arrangement.

Sources said that these political parties have delayed to declare the names to minimize internal tussles as much as possible. Both the political groups are currently working hard to get the magic number to clinch all three coveted posts.

Earlier, the Chandigarh Administration had decided on three days — January 18, 19, and 20 — for filing the nomination papers. Nominations for all three posts must be filed by January 20. The notices were issued for the same by the MC secretary. The election will be held at 11 am in the Assembly Hall of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, Sector 17, on January 24, with results to be announced right away.

At present, AAP has 21 votes in the MC House — including 13 its own, seven from Congress,

and one ex-officio vote of Congress MP from Chandigarh Lok Sabha seat Manish Tewari. Conversely, the BJP has only 15 votes and is relying on cross-voting or defection of INDIA bloc councillors to tip the balance in its favour.

MC House, in October, had resolved that voting should be conducted through a show of hands instead of a secret ballot, to ensure a transparent and equitable election process in the future.

However, the Administration has not accepted the demand. In Chandigarh, the elections for the three municipal posts are held annually in December end or first week of January. According to the rotation system, the first term is reserved for a woman candidate from general category, the second is for any candidate from general category, third for a candidate from Scheduled Caste category, fourth for a woman candidate from general category and fifth for general category. Seats for the Senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not reserved.

Moreover, AAP and Congress councillors, part of the INDIA bloc, are set to once again challenge the BJP for key positions in the MC.

In BJP, the name of municipal councillor Harpreet Kaur Babla is almost final for the post of mayor, but internal tussles are rampant in AAP for the mayoral post. In AAP, the contest is between the names of municipal councillors Prem Lata, Anju Katyral, and Jaswinder Kaur. Based on the previous year's political formula, the Congress will contest for the posts of

Senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Furthermore, senior local leaders of Congress and AAP have also held discussions to ensure their alliance's victory for the second time in a row.

Sources said that after filing the nomination papers on Monday, there is a possibility that the party leadership of both groups may ask their respective municipal councillors to go out of the city, as they did in the past. This is part of a strategy to keep their flock together.

BJP's central party leadership has already deputed the party's senior leaders from the Centre to plan strategy. BJP's Ghaziabad MP Atul Garg has held meetings with the party's local senior leaders.

## AAP, Cong have unholy alliance in Chd: BJP's Garg

BJP leader Garg, talking to reporters, questioned the morality of the alliance between AAP and the Congress in Chandigarh while accusing the two parties of forming the alliance only for their personal political interests.

Garg pointed out the apparent contradiction in the Congress party's position, as Congress leaders in Delhi, including Rahul Gandhi, Ajay Maken and Ashok Gholi, have repeatedly called Arvind Kejriwal and AAP "thieves" and "thugs," and urged people to distrust them. However, in Chandigarh, the same Congress party is now joining hands with AAP, raising serious questions on the sincerity and consistency of their stand.

He further alleged that the term of outgoing AAP-Congress

Mayor Kuldeep Kumar is a total failure. "Under the AAP-Congress rule, the MC has been pushed towards financial bankruptcy, with no money left to even pay the salaries of employees. Moreover, no significant development took place during their tenure and their internal conflicts, including frequent fights between AAP and Congress councillors and even terming the tenure of BJP mayors better, are well documented," he said.

Garg lauded the achievements made under the leadership of BJP Mayors, which include major development projects like cleaning of legacy waste from Daddu Mazra dumping ground, 24x7 water supply project in Mani Mazra, new Waste-to-Wonder Park in Sector 48, Sensory Park in Sector 22 and new Community Centres in Sectors 20, 30, 35 and 45. These initiatives have reflected the BJP's commitment towards public welfare and development in Chandigarh.

## HC to Hear AAP's Plea Today

The Punjab and Haryana High Court will take up for hearing on Monday the plea filed by AAP seeking deferment of Chandigarh mayoral polls to February and conducting voting by show of hands. Earlier, the Division Bench of Justice Sureshwar Thakur and Justice Vikas Suri had on Friday deferred the plea, filed by AAP leader and incumbent mayor Kuldeep Kumar, for Monday (January 20) — also the last date to file nominations for January 24 Mayoral polls.

# Govt will fulfill 'Rs 1,100 Monthly Allowance to Women' Promise Soon: Punjab CM

PNS ■ MOGA

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday announced that the State Government would soon implement its pre-poll promise of providing Rs 1,100 per month to women. Mann, interacting with media during his visit to Moga, said that the scheme's budgetary provisions would be made in the upcoming state budget, reaffirming the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) commitment to fulfilling its election promises.

"We've consistently delivered on our promises in Delhi, and we are committed to doing the same in Punjab. Our focus is on the politics of work, not religion or greed. This scheme will empower women and contribute to societal progress... money for it will be allocated in the next budget," said Mann.

The CM's visit to Moga was marked by the launch of two significant projects — the foundation stone for an expansion of the District Administrative Complex (DAC); and the inauguration of a solar energy project.

The monthly allowance scheme for women, one of AAP's flagship promises during the state elections, aims to provide financial support to women above the age of 18. The initiative seeks to uplift women, promote economic independence, and strengthen



their role in society.

Mann highlighted that the State Government is fully committed to empowering women and fostering gender equality. "Women play a crucial role in the progress and development of society. This scheme is not just a financial initiative but a step towards recognizing their contributions and enhancing their opportunities," he said.

At the women's empowerment summit held at ISF College, Moga, the Chief Minister also commended local women entrepreneurs. He mentioned a corporate initiative that had increased the income of women and households by an average of 40 percent, emphasizing the government's intent to collaborate with businesses for sustainable economic growth.

## Development Projects in

Moga

During his visit, Mann laid the foundation stone for the expansion of the DAC at a cost of Rs 10.31 crore. The project includes constructing 48 rooms on the third and fourth floors and installing a 95 KW solar power system to generate renewable energy. He assured that the project would be completed within eight months, enhancing administrative efficiency in the district.

Mann also inaugurated a solar energy project at the DAC, which will produce 12.5 percent of the office's electricity requirements, showcasing the government's commitment to sustainable development.

## 'Road Safety Initiatives Yield Results'

Addressing road safety, Mann praised the effectiveness

of the state's Sadak Surakhiya Force (SSF), noting that daily road accident fatalities in Punjab had decreased by 47 percent since its formation.

"Earlier, we used to witness 14 road accident deaths daily. Today, the number has significantly dropped due to timely interventions by the SSF. Moreover, the injured are receiving prompt medical attention, which has increased survival rates," he said.

Mann also lauded the SSF for its service in returning lost valuables during accidents. "In just one year, the SSF has returned Rs five crore in cash and Rs three crore worth of valuables to accident victims. These efforts deserve recognition, and the SSF personnel who excelled will be honoured on Republic Day," he announced.

## Focus on Upcoming Delhi Assembly Elections\*\*

Mann also touched upon the AAP's prospects in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, scheduled for February 5, with results to be declared on February 8. He expressed confidence in the party securing over 70 seats, stating, "The AAP is set to form the government in Delhi for the fourth consecutive time. Our governance model resonates with people, and we remain committed to delivering results."



# PM Modi praises ECI for its commitment to fair polling

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the Election Commission on Sunday, saying it has used the power of technology to strengthen people's power and also shown commitment to a fair polling process. Modi's praise for the poll body in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast came ahead of its foundation day on January 25, observed as the National Voters' Day, and amid frequent criticism from the opposition for its alleged pro-BJP bias. Noting that January 25 is important because on this day the Election Commission of India was established, Modi said Constitution makers have accorded a very important place to the EC and equally to

people's participation in democracy. "When the first elections were held in the country in 1951-52, some people were doubtful whether the country's democracy would survive. But our democracy proved all the apprehensions wrong - after all, India is the mother of democracy," he said. In the past decades as well, the country's democracy has strengthened and prospered, the prime minister asserted. "I would also like to thank the EC, which has modernised and strengthened our voting process from time to time. The Commission has used the power of technology to give more strength to the power of the people. I congratulate the EC for its commitment to fair elections," he said. "I would like to urge the people of the country to use



their right to vote, always, in maximum numbers and also become a part of the country's democratic process and strengthen this process," he said in his first Mann Ki Baat of 2025 which was held on the third Sunday this month as against the last, which is usually the case, as next Sunday is Republic Day. His remarks come amid Opposition parties' criticism and questioning of the integrity of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Modi's remarks can be seen as an endorsement of the EVMs.

Pointing out that this year's Republic Day is very special as it is the 75th anniversary of the Indian Republic, Modi said, "I salute all those great personalities of the Constituent Assembly, who gave us our sacred Constitution. During the Constituent Assembly, long deliberations were held on many subjects. Those discussions, the thoughts of the members of the Constituent Assembly, their words, are our great heritage." The prime minister played short audio clips of three members of constituent assembly. Chairman Rajendra Prasad, B R Ambedkar and Syama Prasad Mookerjee - to highlight the values they promoted. Speaking of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, he said people of various castes and regions

have come together. There is no discrimination of any kind, he added. He also pointed out that this month the first anniversary of the 'Pran Pratishtha Parv' of Ram Lalla was celebrated on the day of 'Paush Shukla Dwadashi'. Modi further said that in the beginning of 2025 itself, India has attained many historic achievements in the field of space. During the broadcast, he also highlighted that a few days ago, Indian scientists have undertaken space docking of satellites. Modi also highlighted how IIT Madras's ExTeM Centre is working on new technologies for manufacturing in space. Ahead of Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary on January 23, Modi hailed his valour.

# LoP Rahul Gandhi launches 'White T-shirt Movement'



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Sunday announced the launch of a 'White T-shirt Movement', championing the rights of the masses, even as he accused the Narendra Modi government of turning its back on the poor. Gandhi announced the launch in a social media post and urged people to be a part of it. "If you believe in economic justice, oppose rising wealth inequalities, fight for social equality, reject all forms of discrimination, and strive for peace and stability in our country, wear your white T-shirts and join the movement," said a video voiceover posted by Rahul Gandhi. "Today the Modi government has turned its back on the poor and the working class and has left them to their own devices. The government's entire focus is on enriching a select few capitalists," he said. He said that because of this, inequality is constantly increasing and the condition of the workers "who nourish the country with their blood and sweat" is getting worse and they are forced to endure various kinds of injustice and atrocities. "In such a situation, it is the responsibility of all of us to raise our voice strongly to get them justice and rights. With this thought, we are starting the #WhiteTshirtMovement," he said on X. "I appeal to my youth and working class colleagues to participate in this movement

in large numbers. To join this campaign and get detailed information about it, visit this link - <https://whitetshirt.in/home/> or give a missed call on this number -- 9999812024," the post further read. The website of the 'White T-shirt Movement' states that a 'white T-shirt' is not just a piece of cloth but is a symbol of the party's five guiding principles -- compassion, unity, non-violence, equality, and progress for all. "These values resonate the spirit of India's 8000-year-old civilisation, which is based on harmony and diversity. Today, growing inequalities that are rooted in income, caste and religion demand action beyond ideology," it says. The message further reads, "Our commitment must be derived from the philosophy of Dharma and Karma, Dharma being the duty to selflessly serve society, while Karma is the resolve to uphold rights and fight for justice." The website says that the five principles can create a society where every individual is valued and freedom is not held hostage by the ambitions of a few. "Let us all be agents of change and embrace this way of life with pride. The white T-shirt is our symbol - a call for a just and unified India. By wearing it, we honour the spirit of Bharat Jodo, which echoes the goals of the Bharat Jodo Yatra: bridging divides and building a cohesive, equitable nation," it says.

# SKM welcomes Government decision to hold talks with agitating farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Samyukt Kisan Morcha on Sunday hailed the Central Government's proposal of talks with farmers as a great victory and welcomed fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's decision to receive medical support. "SKM considers union government's decision to hold discussions with farmers organisations a great victory," they said in a statement. Union Agriculture Ministry officials and farmers are meeting on February 14. The group, which led the 2020-21 farmers' protests against the three now-repealed farm laws, said the government was forced to hold discussions due to the farmers' growing unity. "SKM welcomes the decision of fasting farmer leader Sardar Jagjit Singh Dallewal to receive medical support and wishes him a quick recovery and good health. The continuous efforts made by SKM leaders for farmers' unity and pan-India agitation against the anti-farmer union



government has forced the Govt. To retract from its divisive strategy," the collective said. The SKM also called upon all farmers to "respond and rise in protest" against the Union government and force it to "roll back its anti-farmer policies." They termed the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing (NPFAM) an attempt to bring back the repealed farm laws. The farmers' body also called upon all its units to send out memorandums to Members of Parliament through email instead of holding Kisan Dharna at MP offices on

# India, Italy decide to expand counter-terror cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Italy have vowed to enhance their cooperation in combating terrorism including by effectively countering the "misuse" of technology for terrorist activities. Extensive deliberations were held on ways to expand bilateral cooperation in dealing with terrorism at a meeting of the India-Italy Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime held in Rome on January 16 and 17, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a readout on Sunday. The two sides discussed emerging domestic, regional and international terrorist threats and exchanged views on a wide range of areas of cooperation in counter-terrorism and transnational organised crime, it said. Recognising the need for enhancing cooperation for effectively countering the misuse of technology for



terrorist purposes, the two sides shared experiences in preventing and mitigating the menace, the readout said. India and Italy also stressed the importance of an effective prosecution of those responsible for terrorist acts. In the talks, the two strategic partners reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation in the multilateral fora, including in the UN, GCTF (Global Counterterrorism Forum) and FATF (Financial Action Task Force), the MEA said. "The two sides also discussed ways and means to advance various bilateral agreements," it said. The meeting was co-chaired by K D Dewal, Joint Secretary for Counter-Terrorism in the MEA, and Alessandro Azzoni, Senior Deputy Director for Political Affairs and Director for Security at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Indian delegation also met officials of Italy's Inter-Agency Law Enforcement Academy in Caserta and discussed strengthening of capacity building measures between the academy and its counterpart organisation in India.

# Government suspends officers of Kadipur Tehsil after irregularities in property registrations found

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

To crack down on corruption prevalent in the revenue department. Irregularities in over 1,500 property registrations were found in Kadipur Tehsil here in Gurugram. Following a complaint related to illegal registries and General Power of Attorney (GPA), the government suspended Amit Yadav, Naib Tehsildar of Kadipur Tehsil, and initiated a departmental enquiry against him. It is being said that an inquiry against Yadav has also been completed in which massive irregularities in property registration were revealed. Following an enquiry conducted by the administration, preparations are now being made for a charge sheet against the suspended Naib Tehsildar. The source claimed that based on this enquiry, an FIR would be registered against the suspended officer and the people responsible for this illegal practice soon. The



information about the irregularities found in these registries has been sent to the headquarters by the administration. Apart from this enquiry, a parallel investigation of the entire matter was also given to SDM Gurugram Ravinder Kumar. That investigation has also been completed. According to sources, during the investigation, it was disclosed that there were over 260 such registries were done without proper documentation, and even stamp duties were not up to mark, which has also caused a loss of revenue. "The investigation of alleged registries and GPA done in Kadipur tehsil has been completed. In connection with

this information has also been sent to the government. The case will be registered after the investigation report which will be submitted by the SDM Gurugram," an officer privy to the matter said. Meanwhile, the sources claimed that the charges of illegal registries and GPA were fixed at the Kadipur Tehsil. The suspects used to take Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh per GPA and Rs 1.5 lakh to 3 lakh was fixed per registry. Apart from this, a private individual was also appointed at the Tehsil office to collect money from middlemen and parties for executing illegal property registration. Recently, A "secret" letter compiled by the Haryana Revenue and Disaster Management Department had also revealed that 370 patwaris (revenue officials) as corrupt. The list also includes 170 private individuals who double up as middlemen-cum-assistants for these officials. A

report has been sought from respective Deputy Commissioners from across the state within 15 days. The officials are accused of taking money from people directly or through middlemen in lieu of getting their work such as takseem (partition of land records), land measurement, mutation of property and corrections in land records done in the Revenue Department. Gurugram district has the maximum number of middlemen (26), who allegedly take money on patwaris' behalf. "These private individuals appointed by these officials exploit common people by demanding bribes in exchange for completing official procedures. Sometimes, the visitors approaching the patwari offices are deliberately turned away, forcing them to meet these unauthorised agents to get their work done," Ramesh Yadav, the complainant said.

# Haryana's Industry and Commerce Minister visits proposed route of metro expansion

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

As part of the process of Metro expansion between Millennium City Center to Cyber City in Gurugram, Haryana's Industry and Commerce Minister Rao Narbir Singh visited the proposed route of expansion with the officials of Gurugram Metro Rail Limited (GMRL) GMDA and gave them necessary guidelines on Sunday. The process of making the DPR of the Metro project is ongoing. Special attention will be given to the facilities of the general public under the guidelines of the Cabinet Minister. Singh inspected the entire proposed route and instructed the officials to take the work of Metro forward at a fast pace keeping in mind the convenience of the people. Apart from this, while instructing the officials, he said that people should not



face any kind of inconvenience during the construction of Metro and the traffic should run smoothly, a good plan should also be made in that regard. "Whenever a big construction infrastructure is built, the officials should make such a plan that it lasts for a long time and people get benefits. In this entire project, special care should be taken that the existing services like drainage system, electricity, drinking water, sewerage and other important facilities in the proposed route should be disturbed as little as possible,"

he said. The cabinet minister also instructed the GMDA officials that whatever construction work the authority has to do with this project regarding the flyover or underpass should also run parallel to the metro construction work. While giving instructions to freeze the alignment work on the proposed route in a month, he said that the officials should take special care in this entire work and that the drainage system of Gurugram should not be affected in any way in this entire process. It is worth noting that in relation to the project, Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini has already held a meeting with the concerned officials in Gurugram in December. In which it was told by officials that the detailed project report (DPR) of the metro rail running between Millennium City to Cyber City, Gurugram has been

approved by the Haryana Government and the Central Government and the foundation stone of this project was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rewari on February 16, 2024. In the meeting, the officials said that the construction work of the metro expansion in Gurugram will start on May 1, 2025. There will be a total of 27 stations on this 28.50 km long metro rail line and a depot will also be built, out of which 8 stations will be model stations. Rs 896.19 crore will be spent on this project by the Central Government and Rs 4556.53 crore by the Haryana Government. Apart from this, this metro will be based on CBT, i.e. Communication-Based Train Control Signal, and the maximum speed will be 80 km per hour. Initially, 3 coaches will be installed in this metro connectivity, and after that, it will be increased to 6 coaches.

# Modi, Shah hails NDRF on foundation day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AMARAVATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed the National Disaster Response Force, describing the courage, dedication and selfless service of the brave personnel as a shield in times of adversity. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is a premier central agency tasked with responding to disasters. It is celebrating its 19th raising day. In a special event at Amaravati, Home Minister Amit Shah said backed by resilient infrastructure in the area of disaster management, India has emerged as a global leader in the sector by adopting a 'zero casualty' goal during calamities. "On this special occasion of the raising day of the National Disaster Response Force



(NDRF), we salute the courage, dedication and selfless service of the brave personnel who are a shield in times of adversity," Modi said in a social media post. Their unwavering commitment to saving lives, responding to disasters and ensuring safety during emergencies is truly commendable, the prime minister said. "The NDRF has also set global standards in disaster response and management," he said.

# Focus at 24th party Congress will be on increasing mass base: CPI (M) leader Prakash Karat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Strengthening the CPI (Marxist) and increasing its mass base will be the focus of the 24th party Congress scheduled to be held in Madurai in April, interim co-ordinator of the party Prakash Karat said. The Congress will also deliberate on the election of the new general secretary, the party's top post. Karat said increasing the party's mass base is key as the Left has not grown in the country in the past few years. "The CPI(M)'s 24th party congress is going to be held in the first week of April in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. In this congress, we are going to discuss how we can strengthen the CPI(M) as a national party, increase its political influence and, mass base," Karat told PTI. "We think this should be

given priority because the left in recent years has not grown in the country," he said. The CPI(M), which fielded 52 candidates in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, won four seats in all, two in Tamil Nadu and one each in Kerala and Rajasthan - up from three in 2019. In 2004, at its peak, the CPI(M) had sent 43 MPs to the Lok Sabha, getting around 5.4 per cent of the total votes. Karat added that the unity of Left parties is also an important issue that will be taken up. "We are already working out how to unite all the Left parties and forces together so that we can project the Left platform and alternative policies," he said. The party's former general secretary said that a stronger Left would contribute to the creation of a stronger, united opposition to the ruling



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "And the third thing, which is that this is not contradictory to each other, we think a stronger Left will also contribute to stronger united opposition to the BJP, that is the secular opposition parties. The left will be an important component of this wider unity," he said. The CPI(M) and other Left parties are a part of the opposition's INDIA bloc.

The party, founded in 1964 and the largest of the Left bloc, faced a setback last year with the sudden demise of sitting general secretary Sitaram Yechury. Karat said while his absence is felt, the party has a strong, collective leadership. "For our party, it was a very crucial juncture, we had just begun the preparations for our party congress, which normally starts six months

ahead of the meeting. His absence is definitely, keenly felt... But the party has a strong collective, leadership," Karat said. In the party congress, the CPI(M) will elect a new central committee, a politburo, and a general secretary. As a part of the preparations, the party is holding several state-level meetings. A three-day central committee meeting to discuss a draft political resolution for the upcoming party congress, held in Kolkata, concluded on Sunday. The central committee is second after the politburo in the CPI(M) leadership chain. The resolution will be debated and adopted at the party congress and will set the party line on various issues. According to the CPI(M) constitution, the All-India Party Congress is the supreme

organ of the party and is convened by the central committee ordinarily once every three years. At the meeting, the outgoing central committee will recommend a panel of names for the election of a successor committee. A delegate can raise objections about any name in the panel proposed as well as propose any new name or names, with prior approval of the member. The central committee then elects from among its members a politburo, including the general secretary. The number of members in the politburo is decided by the central committee. There are 16 members in the CPI(M) Politburo at present, and 83 members are there in the central committee. The 24th Congress of the CPI(M) will be held from April 2 to 6.



# Prayagraj Mahakumbh becomes a milestone for women empowerment

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Prayagraj Mahakumbh 2025 is poised to etch its name in history, not only as a spiritual spectacle but also as a beacon of women's empowerment. The 13 Akhadas, custodians of Sanatan Dharma's traditions, are preparing for the grand Amrit Snan on Mauni Amavasya, which will also witness an unprecedented number of women being initiated into asceticism.

This year's Mahakumbh is marking a transformative shift, with the 'diksha' ceremonies seeing significant participation from women ascetics. According to Sanyasini Divya Giri of the Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhada, over 200 women are set to receive sanyas diksha (initiation) under their Akhada alone. Across all Akhadas, the total is expected to exceed 1,000, a landmark achievement for inclusivity in Sanatan Dharma. The registration process is already underway, with the diksha ceremonies scheduled for January 27.

**Women Embracing the Path of Renunciation**

In Sanatan Dharma, the decision to renounce worldly ties stems from spiritual awakening or transformative



personal events. Divya Giri noted that many of this year's initiates are highly educated women, choosing the ascetic path for deeper self-realization. One such aspirant is Radhenand Bharti, a Ph.D. scholar in Sanskrit from Gujarat's Kalidas Ramtek University. Hailing from a prosperous Rajkot business family, her quest for spiritual fulfillment led her to renounce material ties. After 12 years of serving her guru, she is now

ready to embrace the ascetic life. **Akhadas Acknowledging Women's Power**

The Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhada has been instrumental in promoting women's contributions within the Akhada system. It recently renamed its women's wing to Sanyasini Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhara, granting it a separate identity. This recognition, approved by Mahant Hari Giri, underscores

the growing acknowledgment of Matrushakti (women's power) within traditionally male-dominated frameworks. For the first time, the women's wing will have its own dedicated camp at the Mahakumbh, symbolizing progress and inclusivity. Divya Giri expressed pride in this development, calling it a step towards greater recognition of women's spiritual roles. **Female Naga Sadhus: A Life of Rigorous Dedication**

Female Naga Sadhus, who dedicate their lives entirely to God, embody the ultimate form of renunciation. Their initiation process is arduous, requiring strict celibacy for 10-15 years, unwavering devotion to their guru, and the ability to endure rigorous ascetic practices. A key initiation ritual involves performing Pind Daan (symbolic funeral rites) and shaving their heads as gestures of renunciation. Unlike male Naga Sadhus, who often remain Digambara (naked), female Naga Sadhus wear a single piece of unstitched saffron cloth known as "Ganti." They are revered within their Akhadas and addressed as "Mai," "Avdhutani," or "Naagin." Despite their devotion and sacrifices, female Naga Sadhus are yet to be considered for leadership roles within the Akhadas, reflecting enduring traditional gender norms.

**A Historic Shift in Spiritual Legacy**

The Prayagraj Mahakumbh 2025 is not just a congregation of faith but also a testament to evolving traditions. With the increasing participation of women in ascetic practices, the event underscores a pivotal moment in Sanatan Dharma's journey toward inclusivity and empowerment.

# Garland seller 'Monalisa' becomes viral sensation at Mahakumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** MAHAKUMBH NAGAR



Amid the spiritual fervor of the Mahakumbh, an unexpected star has emerged - Monalisa, a garland seller from Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh. Her striking beauty and calm demeanor have captivated social media, turning her into a viral sensation. However, the overwhelming attention has forced her to leave the event. Monalisa, who arrived at the Mahakumbh with her family to sell garlands to pilgrims, quickly became the talk of the grand congregation. Videos highlighting her dusky complexion, amber eyes, sharp nose, and serene smile went viral, with social media users comparing her elegance to the iconic Mona Lisa.

Admiring her "kajrali eyes" and graceful presence, countless people flocked to Sector-7 of Mahakumbh to click selfies and shoot videos, disrupting her daily activities. "It became impossible for her to sell garlands because she was constantly surrounded by people asking for selfies and videos," her father shared. The intense attention left Monalisa distressed, leading her family to send her back

to their hometown of Maheshwar. Her two sisters continue selling garlands at the Mahakumbh, while Monalisa's sudden departure has sparked discussions about the challenges of unintended internet fame. In one widely shared video, Monalisa was asked about her marital status. She gracefully replied, "Why would I like any of them? All of them are my brothers." Her respectful demeanor and adherence to cultural values resonated with viewers, earning her further admiration. She also mentioned her willingness to marry only someone chosen by her parents, further fueling online debates. Monalisa's story recalls past Mahakumbh sensations, such as Harsha Richariya and the "IIT Baba," whose unique presence also garnered widespread attention. While Monalisa's rise to fame adds a human-interest element to the Mahakumbh, it underscores the challenges of viral fame, especially for individuals unprepared for its overwhelming impact.



# 'Matka Crossing' of Mahakumbh: Visitors flock to click selfies with massive earthen pot

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The spiritual and devotional hub of the Mahakumbh area has gained a unique identity in Sector-7, now popularly referred to as the "Matka Crossing." This unofficial title has been bestowed by pilgrims visiting the Swachh Sujal Village, an initiative by the Jal Jeevan Mission, featuring a massive earthen pot sculpture at its entrance. This grand installation, showcasing a cascade of clean water, has become a key attraction, drawing hordes of visitors. On Sunday, over one lakh pilgrims visited the

Swachh Sujal Village, marveling at its artistic beauty and innovative message on water conservation. Ajay, a pilgrim from Delhi visiting the Mahakumbh with his family, was exploring the various stalls in Sector-7. At one point, separated from his family, he called them and said, "I am at the Matka Crossing, come here." Many other pilgrims have similarly adopted this name for the area due to the striking sculpture. Adjacent to the Swachh Sujal Village's main entrance, the towering earthen pot has also become a favorite selfie point. Dipali, a visitor from Mumbai,

expressed her admiration, saying, "This pot is incredibly captivating. It shows how this Mahakumbh is not just about spirituality but also a confluence of art and culture." Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the Swachh Sujal Village offers visitors a chance to witness Uttar Pradesh's development story. Through artistic displays, the exhibition showcases the transformation of rural areas under the Jal Jeevan Mission. It highlights how regions like Bundelkhand, once plagued by acute water scarcity, now have access to clean drinking water in every household.

# Pipa bridges: Vital links between Sangam and Akhada areas at Mahakumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** MAHAKUMBH NAGAR



The temporary pipa bridges are playing key role in the grand arrangements of the Mahakumbh. These bridges are serving as vital links between the Sangam area and the Akhada area during the massive event. The administration has divided the sprawling 40-square-kilometer Mela area into 25 sectors. These pipa bridges are an integral part of the Mahakumbh, offering a low-maintenance solution for the vast crowds. However, their operation requires constant monitoring, ensuring the safety and smooth movement of devotees 24/7. Engineer Alok Kumar from the Public Works Department explained that the pipa bridges are temporary structures built with large hollow iron containers (pontoon) floating on the water's surface. These are commonly known as 'pipe ka pul' in Prayagraj. These bridges have been built to facilitate movement not only for the public but also for the grand entry of 13

Akhadas, chariots, elephants, horses, and over 1,000 vehicles during the Amrit Snan at Mahakumbh. According to Kumar, he was entrusted with this significant task to build Pipa bridges in August 2023. To construct 30 pipa bridges for the Mahakumbh, 2,213 pontoons were used, the largest number ever. Over 1,000 workers, engineers, and officials worked tirelessly, often for 14 hours a day. The construction of these bridges was completed by October 2024 and subsequently

handed over to the Mela administration. The construction of 30 pipa bridges over the Ganga River for the Mahakumbh is the largest such project to date. After the conclusion of the fair, these bridges will be dismantled and stored for future use at other locations. The hollow pontoons, made of strong iron sheets, are lowered into the river with the help of cranes. Girder beams are then placed on these pontoons and secured with nuts and bolts. Hydraulic machines are used

to position the pontoons accurately. After that, thick wooden planks, sandy soil, and iron angles are added to further stabilize the bridges. Finally, checker plates are laid on the bridge surface to ensure it remains strong for the movement of pilgrims and vehicles. Each pontoon weighs about 5 tons, yet it floats on water. The secret lies in Archimedes' principle. PWD engineer Alok Kumar explained, "When an object is submerged in water, it experiences an upward force equal to the weight of the water displaced by it. This principle helps the heavy pontoons float." The design of the bridges is such that they can withstand up to 5 tons of weight. If the weight exceeds this limit, there is a risk of the bridge being damaged or sinking. Therefore, crowd management on the bridges is crucial. The construction of the 30 pipa bridges has cost Rs 17.31 crore. The bridge from Nagwasuki Temple to Jhoosi is the most expensive, costing Rs 1.13 crore, while the cost

of the Gangeshwar and Bharadwaj bridges ranged between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 89 lakh. The technology of pipa bridges is over 2,500 years old. They were first used in 480 BC by Persian King Xerxes I during his invasion of Greece. These types of bridges were also used during the Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC) in China. In India, the first pipa bridge was built in October 1874 over the Hooghly River between Howrah and Kolkata. It was designed by British engineer Sir Bradford Leslie. The bridge was supported by wooden pontoons but was damaged due to a cyclone. Eventually, it was dismantled in 1943, and the famous Howrah Bridge was constructed in its place. After the Mahakumbh 2025, these bridges will be disassembled and stored in safe locations. According to officials, some of the bridges will be stored in Sarainayat (Kenihar), Trivenipuram, and Parade Ground in Prayagraj. Others may be repurposed as temporary bridges in various districts of Uttar Pradesh.

# Ruling NDA slams Rahul Gandhi for dismissing state's caste survey as 'fake'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** PATNA

The ruling NDA in Bihar on Sunday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for terming as "fake" the caste survey conducted by Nitish Kumar government in the state. On his first tour of the state since Lok Sabha polls, Gandhi on Saturday vowed to push for a nationwide caste census and declared that he would see to it that the exercise was "not fake... Intended to befool people" like the one conducted in Bihar in 2022-23. Reacting to the statement, state minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary of the JD(U) said "we cannot expect anything better from a politician who is unable to differentiate between Indian government and Indian state". The allusion was to a recent remark by Gandhi in Delhi, which has led to an FIR against the Congress in BJP-ruled Assam. Chaudhary reminded Gandhi that "his party had been supporting the caste survey all through. The government has also been willing to set right anomalies if these were pointed out with tangible evidence. In such a backdrop, the comment by Gandhi is just



another example of his propensity to speak things that sound ridiculous". Senior BJP leader and former minister Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain expressed similar sentiments and pointed out "till recently, Rahul Gandhi used to claim credit for Bihar's caste survey. It is bewildering on his part to call the survey fake". State minister Dilip Jaiswal, who is also the Bihar BJP chief, mockingly said, "Before holding forth on caste census, Rahul Gandhi should tell us to which caste does he belong". Incidentally, the Congress was a partner in the government headed by Nitish Kumar when the findings of the survey were

made public in October 2023. The survey highlighted a rise in the population percentage of Dalits and backward classes. Reacting to the attack on the party's top leader, state Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh claimed Gandhi had meant to underscore that the survey has since been "put in cold storage". "Nitish Kumar left us and joined hands with the BJP shortly after the survey's report was published. He has since been dragging his feet which makes one question his intentions," the former Union minister alleged. The Rajya Sabha MP pointed

out that "quotas for Dalits and backwards were raised in light of the findings of the survey. The legislation was set aside by the Patna High Court and the government has challenged the order in Supreme Court. Nitish Kumar is now hiding behind the excuse that the matter is before the court". "If the CM is serious about ensuring that deprived sections receive benefits, he should withdraw the petition, bring in a fresh legislation and then use his party's clout in the Centre to protect the new law from any judicial intervention by getting it placed in the ninth schedule of the Constitution," he said.

# Himachal CM directs forest department to protect migratory birds at Pong Dam

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Sunday directed the officers of the forest department to ensure the safety of migratory birds from Siberia and Mongolia that flock to Pong Dam. Sukhu, who visited the Pong Dam in Kangra district for bird watching, also toured the ancient temples at the famous tourist site, Bathu-Ki-Lari. He highlighted the area's immense potential for tourism and emphasised the state's efforts to promote tourism in the region. He noted that migratory birds from Siberia and Mongolia attract visitors from across the country to Pong Dam and directed the forest department to take necessary steps to protect these birds, according to a statement issued here. To improve tourist experience, two boats have already been deployed and two additional speedboats would soon be added. Basic facilities for tourists will also be developed in the area, he informed. The number of migratory birds visiting Pong Dam has risen significantly this year, with 92,885 birds recorded by December 2024. The count



is expected to exceed one lakh by the end of the season. A total of 85,000 birds visited the dam during the entire season from October 2023 to January 2024. On average, around 100 species of migratory birds visit Pong Dam annually and 85 species have already been observed this season. The government's initiatives have led to an increase in tourist footfall, with nearly 30,000 tourists visiting the area last year. Efforts are underway to introduce water sports activities at the Regional Water Center near the Pong Dam Barrage, further boosting tourism in the region. In Basa, located in the Jawali assembly constituency, a Wildlife Interpretation Centre has been established

at a cost of Rs. 3.20 crore. The centre aims to enhance the tourist experience and provide educational resources about the region's biodiversity and the migratory patterns of birds. The center also offers accommodations, including dormitories for students from colleges and schools, allowing them to stay and learn about Pong's rich wildlife. "This unique opportunity will enable young minds to connect with nature, learn about the importance of conservation, and develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world," Sukhu said. "We invite bird enthusiasts, nature lovers and students to visit the area to experience the beauty and wonder of Pong's avian life," he added.

# 121 farmers end fast-unto-death at Khanauri Protest Site

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** CHANDIGARH



A group of 121 farmers, who sat on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri protest site in solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, ended their indefinite strike on Sunday after he took medical aid. Dallewal (70), who has refused any aid since he sat on a fast-unto-death on November 26, agreed on Saturday to take medical aid following the Centre's invitation for talks on February 14 to discuss farmers' demands. With his health deteriorating and the government not agreeing to their demands, a group of 111 farmers joined Dallewal's fast-unto-death on January 15, and sat on the Haryana side of the border near Khanauri. On January 17, 10 more farmers, who were from Haryana, joined them. The 121 farmers ended their fast by sipping juice in the presence of Deputy Inspector General of Police Mandeep Singh Sidhu and Patiala Senior Superintendent of Police Nanak Singh.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Trump in the Oval Office

As Trump begins his second term, he is likely to reshape domestic policies and redefining America's role in the world

Donald Trump will begin his second term as President of the United States today, marking a significant moment in US political history. The swearing-in ceremony has dignitaries from around the world in attendance. Notably, Chinese Vice President Han Zheng will represent China, highlighting the importance of US-China relations in the coming years. President Trump's second term is anticipated to commence with a series of decisive actions. Reports suggest that he plans to issue approximately 100 executive orders on his first day in office, targeting areas such as immigration, trade and energy. These orders aim to deport illegal immigrants, end birthright citizenship and reinstate the 'Muslim ban.'



Economically, he plans to raise tariffs, cut taxes and eliminate regulations. Trump seeks to boost fossil fuel production by reducing green energy initiatives. His cultural policies include banning transgender women from female sports and restricting hormone treatments for minors.

In the international arena, President Trump's approach to China is poised to be assertive. He has proposed imposing tariffs ranging from 10 per cent to 20 per cent on imports, with the possibility of escalating to 100 per cent for BRICS countries like China and Russia if they move away from using the US dollar. Additionally, Trump has indicated a focus on addressing issues such as fentanyl trafficking and the operations of Chinese companies like TikTok in the US. A recent phone call between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping covered topics including trade, fentanyl and TikTok, suggesting a complex and potentially contentious relationship moving forward. Another area which is more relevant to us here is his attitude towards Indian companies and tech professionals working in the US with H1-B visas. The relationship between the United States and India is expected to experience both opportunities and challenges during President Trump's second term. The personal rapport between President Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi may facilitate continued cooperation. However, Trump's "America First" policies could lead to heightened trade barriers, especially in sectors like information technology and pharmaceuticals, where India has significant interests. Despite these potential hurdles, India's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific region and its role in diversifying global supply chains away from China may provide avenues for strengthened collaboration between the two nations. As President Trump embarks on his second term, the global community will be closely monitoring how his administration's policies unfold, particularly in relation to major economies like China and India. The decisions made in the coming months will have profound implications for international trade, security and diplomatic relations.

### PICTALK



A farmer prepares an agricultural land for paddy cultivation, in Nadia

## Need for a unified global strategy against terrorism



SUDHIR HINDWAN

Nations must come together to share a common vision and adopt a multilayered approach that prioritises security, innovation and collaboration



In the face of escalating transnational terrorism, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive global anti-terror strategy. Such a plan should involve a shared strategic vision and a unified, multilayered approach to ensure safety and security across borders. To counter the evolving threats, nations must develop a fresh perspective that emphasises mature international cooperation and robust retaliation strategies to deter destabilising activities.

### Strengthening International Cooperation

Collaboration among nations is essential to design and implement an integrated strategic framework. This includes pooling development funds, fostering mutual trust and crafting plans to address shared security challenges. India, with its growing prominence on the global stage, is well-positioned to lead such efforts. Its successful handling of key responsibilities—such as the G20 Presidency, leadership in the Quad Group, and chairing organizations like Interpol and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—demonstrates its capability to drive global strategic initiatives.

India's role in enhancing multi-layered security cooperation can serve as a model for addressing issues like the financing of terrorism, enhancing policing collaboration, countering cyber threats, and leveraging technological advancements. Tightened border and maritime security measures, coupled with efficient intelligence-sharing, are critical components of this strategy.

### Adapting to Evolving Challenges

The nature of global threats has become more severe, with adversaries employing increasingly sophisticated tactics. This calls for an adaptable and proactive approach to strategic policy-making. Nations, particularly in Asia, must diversify their strategies and implement forward-looking recommendations to effectively counter emerging challenges. A modernised approach to safety and security is imperative to outpace organised threats and propaganda-driven terror networks.

### Bridging Policy Gaps

A significant gap exists between theoretical strategies

and their practical application in countering terrorism. Regional political actors must engage in rigorous policy analysis and embrace innovative approaches to address these shortcomings. More integrated programs that support both military and law enforcement agencies are necessary to strengthen their efficiency in combating propaganda and terror. Community development within regional alliances like the Quad can also foster resilience against destabilising forces.

### Addressing Underlying Socio-economic Factors

In a globalised world, the imbalance of power and inequality in the international economy often fuel terrorism. Socio-economic disparities create fertile ground for non-state actors to exploit psychological vulnerabilities and propagate extremist ideologies. To counter this, nations must dismantle the mechanisms that enable the spread of false narratives and ill-intentioned ideologies.

### Specialised Counter-Terrorism Frameworks

A robust counter-terrorism strategy must include spe-

cialised think tanks and talent development programmes. These institutions can provide tactical expertise, real-time feedback, and innovative solutions to address evolving threats.

Interactive communication between intelligence, law enforcement and military branches can further enhance operational efficiency. A modern, vigilant, and assertive network of military, police, and paramilitary forces must replace outdated systems to address the complexities of modern terrorism.

### The Path Forward

To combat terrorism effectively, nations must overcome entrenched mindsets and outdated practices. Strategic planning should evolve to address the realities of state-sponsored terrorism and propaganda. Establishing a new consensus on international security and fostering a collaborative global environment are vital for achieving long-term stability.

(The author is a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor and expert in international relations; views are personal)



IN A GLOBALISED WORLD, THE IMBALANCE OF POWER AND INEQUALITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY OFTEN FUEL TERRORISM

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SELECTORS RETAIN ROHIT SHARMA

Madam — The news that the selectors have retained the Indian skipper Rohit Sharma for the upcoming series against England for ODIs and for the Championship Trophy. While Rohit was averaging 6 runs in his last six innings, on the other side, the Karun Nair is waiting for his chance by having proved his immense worth with 752 runs in 7 innings with an average of 752 with 5 recent unbeaten centuries to his credit at the much-acclaimed Vijay Hazare Trophy, still waiting for his place patiently. It is also disprising the Board's statement that the players must play the local games to prove themselves to claim their place at the international level was not considered in Karun Nair's case.

One can expect that during the crisis in the upcoming series, when the team struggles, in the name of injury, Nair may get a call back from Rohit to join the team, as we have seen such inclusions in the past. One thing is evident that the selection criteria lack complete transparency and without the godfather, finding a place is becoming increasingly difficult in the team. Ironically, Sanju Samson was dropped for the series by assigning reasons that the board was not happy because he didn't play the local games. Stranger than fiction of selection won't do good for the sport and currently for the Indian cricket.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

### JOB OVER FREEBIES

Madam—The Delhi assembly elections have transformed into a marathon race for freebies without realising the negative impact on the state's economy and the diversion of massive funds for turning the potential workforce passive. Delhi loses its charm if the development, infrastructure, education, health, job creation and entrepreneurship are sacrificed. Delhi people should not ask for jobs as the parties are promising enough for their sustenance. Alas! After all, votes appear to decide their lives. The taxpayers pay taxes for the development, security and growth of the nation but virtually provide funds for freebies.

## Centre announces 8th Pay Commission



In a major decision, the Union government has announced the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries and pensions of over 1 crore central government employees and pensioners. With more money in the hands of the employees and pensioners after the implementation of recommendations of the next pay commission, the gov-

ernment is expecting a boost for overall consumption and demand in the economy. Though every employee deserves more, the appointment of a pay commission is an exercise against fiscal prudence.

At a time when 60 per cent of revenue expenditure is spent only on salary, pension, interest and subsidies, leaving only 40 per cent for development activities, the implementation of the 8th pay commission will further shrink the share of development activities in revenue expenditure. Every pay commission brings inflation to the economy, which affects the poor most. In addition, the financial condition of the states is not ready to bear the burden of another pay commission.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

Delhi is one of the biggest sources of revenue collection in income tax and GST. At least the taxpayers should have the option in their ITRs to invest or spend their taxes towards national security, education, industrial and civil infrastructure, health and welfare schemes.

All the welfare schemes and freebies are funded at the cost of higher electricity, water and municipal taxes paid by the non-eligible class besides taxes paid by them. In the long run, the taxpayers may be demotivated to pay taxes honestly as the political parties are squandering their hard-earned money on freebies, which are the antithesis of growth and development. At least the BJP was expected to promise jobs to the youth and empower them instead of turning them into dead wood like other parties. We should not lose the demographic dividend by parasitising the youth.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

### EXPECTATIONS BURDEN WOMEN

Madam — Refer to The Silent Struggles of a Daughter-in-Law. A call to change

(January 18). The natural shift in family roles—where elders move from decision-makers to mentors (less responsibility, less freedom) and younger generations take on more responsibilities and more freedom in decision-making—can become complicated when societal pressures interfere. High expectations with society's rigid rules on newer generations often result in rigid roles, particularly for daughters-in-law, who are expected to navigate complex expectations. This situation may hinder the balance within the family.

To achieve the ultimate goal of love, care, and empathy, families must embrace internal management and communication rather than following society's rigid rules that allow shared responsibilities and individuality. This fosters understanding and reduces the generational gap, creating harmony and mutual respect among family members. The ultimate goal is a stable and loving society.

Riti Dwivedi | Indore

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## When elephants roamed beyond: A remarkable journey through China



C K NAYAK

A historic event captivated the world as a herd of 15 wild elephants embarked on a 500-km journey from Xishuangbanna to the bustling city of Kunming

Some time back an extraordinary event unfolded in China: for the first time in recorded history, a herd of 15 wild elephants embarked on an unprecedented journey. Leaving their natural habitat in Xishuangbanna (commonly referred to as Banna), the elephants traveled over 500 kilometers to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Xishuangbanna, an autonomous prefecture for the ethnic Dai people, lies in the southernmost part of Yunnan, bordering Myanmar and Laos.



This remarkable migration captured the attention of the world, with live 24/7 broadcasts and drones following their every move. The Chinese authorities, committed to the conservation of these majestic creatures, responded with care rather than confrontation. However, their journey caused panic among local residents, who abandoned their homes in fear. Despite trampling crops and cornfields along the way, the elephants did not harm any humans. In some instances, curious jumbos ventured

human activity. Large-scale commercial rubber cultivation, introduced to Banna, has significantly disrupted the region's rainforest ecosystem.

These plantations, consisting of monocultures of Brazilian rubber trees, replace diverse habitats, further encroaching on the elephants' range. Asian elephants, an endangered species, number only about 300 in the wild in China, primarily in Banna. Protecting these animals is a national priority. Emergency workers and volunteers were mobilised during the migration, providing tonnes of corn, pineapples and other food to ensure both the safety of the elephants and the local population. Trucks and drones were deployed to guide the animals along safe paths, offering them a feast akin to a celebratory banquet. Xishuangbanna is a biodiversity hotspot, home to a wide variety of flora and fauna.

The region's tropical climate and historical isolation have preserved its rich ecosystems. In addition to Asian elephants, the area supports other endangered species

such as green peacocks, wild oxen, and monkeys. The Wild Elephant Valley Forest Park, located 47 kilometers north of Jinghong city, serves as a key conservation site. Spanning 369 hectares, this park provides a haven for wildlife and a unique opportunity for visitors to observe elephants.

The reserve features observation towers, allowing visitors to watch wild elephants bathing, playing, and strolling. A cableway provides breathtaking views of the valley, while the park's elephant-domestication school entertains visitors with performances by trained elephants, including dancing, headstands, and football tricks. Looking ahead, the Chinese government plans to establish an Asian Elephant Breeding Centre in Banna to further conservation efforts. These initiatives aim to protect not only the elephants but also the rich biodiversity of this unique region, ensuring a harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)





## FIRST COLUMN

## A REUNION OF HEARTS, MINDS AND THE DIVINE

Today, we are connected not just by the bonds of friendship but by the threads of technology



RAVI VALLURI

Three decades ago, we were perhaps merely a group of motley friends and acquaintances. We were a bunch of strapping youngsters and petite women who had flowered from their teens, all tutees in an estimable institution. Three decades back we professed and cherished a heterogeneity of political ideologies spanning the left, right and center spectrums, in an era of a controlled economy and what also was the pre-globalisation era. This was a generation ago. Meanwhile, the Soviet economy crumbled and disintegrated, the Berlin Wall collapsed and diverse countries swiftly embraced consumerism and capitalism. A talismanic Zuckerberg bought a contrivance called WhatsApp from Jan Koum. All the technology and gadgets have provided seamless connectivity and people across the globe have been moored, and so it was with us. In a trice, we were all trussed up through WhatsApp.

A few months of endless chatting on WhatsApp resulted in a clarion call for a reunion. This was followed by frenetic preparations and a homecoming took place at the opulent Rajputana Sheraton, Jaipur. The assembly and the bonding were indeed amazing. For three days and four nights we were to shed our past baggage and live another life. The friends of yesteryears conducted themselves as a group of children rediscovering their roots. This is purely a physical pining. The geometry and architecture of the human mind are unmindful, unsuspecting and unaware of the exalted, elevated and lofty state it is capable of. This is the pining and longing for the Divine. The same longing that Radha Arjuna or Sudama possessed for Lord Krishna. This is true of all religions, faiths and spiritual masters. Like Yusuf, Dawud, Sulayman, and Ibrahim beckoned Allah. Akin to what the apostles, and more recently, Saint Teresa felt for Jesus or Ananda for Buddha. This is divine love without any attach-



ments and entanglements. This is not an emotion of craving but that of five Es. What are these five Es? The devotee, seeker and devout are subsumed with exhilaration, ecstasy, euphoria, elation, exultation and ebullience. This is the authentic and genuine pining for the Divine. It is a meditative state in which the seeker or the disciple basks in the glory of the Master and utters his name with the doctrine of the three Cs: credence, confidence, and conviction.

Yes, the enlightened Buddha does say nothing is permanent in life, and impermanence is the only constant factor. However, the heart and mind aching for the Divine is voracious. It transcends all boundaries and frontiers. Feelings and emotions encompass the human mind with constructive and efficacious thoughts, where it becomes intrepid to scale and surmount any misadventure. To elaborate further, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar poses a teaser, "Do we give quality time to the Divine?" He goes on to add, that we do that only after partying hard, watching some tantalizing movies and entertaining guests. The remainder or balance of our time is set aside by the mind to pine for the Divine.

The universe thus showers upon us only that quantum of benediction and bounty, depending upon our tapas or the tractive effort of the mind. However, through methodical and punctilious practice of techniques like yoga, pranayama, meditation and the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya, the mind can achieve the state of continuous communion with the Divine by remaining in the present moment. So, what happened to the group that met after thirty years? They are in abiding and sustained touch. Perhaps a dash of spiritual sparkle is required to cement the bonding from within and without.

(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)

## LPG subsidies: Give it to the poor and needy



UTTAM GUPTA

As state-owned oil companies grapple with massive losses from selling LPG below cost, the Govt is set to allocate Rs 35,000 crore in subsidies to mitigate the financial burden



During the current financial year (FY) 2024-25, the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) are expected to incur an under-recovery of Rs 19,550 crore, Rs 10,400 crore and Rs 10,570 crore respectively on sales of LPG to household consumers. To make up for this loss totalling Rs 40,500 crore, the Union Government is likely to provide a subsidy of Rs 35,000 crore. In the Budget for 2025-26, to be presented on February 1, 2025, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will make a provision of Rs 10,000 crore in the revised estimate (RE) for the current FY and the remaining Rs 25,000 crore in the budget estimate (BE) for 2025-26.

The under-recovery arose because these corporations sold LPG for Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder against the cost of supplying at the retail point being higher. The cost is calculated as the refinery-gate price or RGP (taken as import parity price or IPP and export parity price or EPP in the ratio of 80:20) plus freight, marketing costs, marketing margin, dealers' commission, and taxes and duties. During the current FY, the cost is Rs 1043 per cylinder, and the loss is Rs 240 per cylinder which on total sales of 169 crore cylinders would be Rs 40,500 crore. Modi - government had stopped giving subsidies on LPG during FY 2021-22. Then, how come, it continues to make huge payments from the budget? LPG is an environment and human-friendly fuel that meets the needs of millions of households (HHS).

Subsidy on LPG ought to be given only to those HHS who are poor. The government also needs to track the income status of the beneficiaries and withdraw support from those who become better off and can pay cost-based prices. Ignoring these cardinal principles, the subsidy was given to anyone who had an LPG connection. It went to all and sundry including the rich. The poor who alone should have got it sat at the bottom. According to the Economic Survey (2015-16), only 0.07 per cent of LPG subsidies in rural areas went to a fifth of the



LPG IS AN ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN-FRIENDLY FUEL THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF MILLIONS OF HOUSEHOLDS (HHS). SUBSIDY ON LPG OUGHT TO BE GIVEN ONLY TO THOSE HHS WHO ARE POOR. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO NEEDS TO TRACK THE INCOME STATUS OF THE BENEFICIARIES AND WITHDRAW SUPPORT FROM THOSE WHO BECOME BETTER OFF AND CAN PAY

poorest households. In urban areas, the poorest fifth got only 8.2 per cent.

A lot of subsidies went to fake beneficiaries or the diversion of stocks (albeit subsidised) of LPG cylinders to hotels, restaurants, and other commercial users. Despite lacking sound justification, sheer populism drove politicians to give subsidies to all and sundry. They found ways to give it without taking the burden on the Centre's balance sheet. Initially, the subsidy on LPG (besides petrol and diesel) was cross-funded/subsidised by charging more on the sale of other products such as fuel oil, naphtha, ATF, etc. hence, no burden on the budget. In 2002-03, the Vajpayee-led NDA government ended the above system and decided to give subsidies on these products directly from the budget with the intent to eventually disband them. But, that was not to be.

The UPA government which took charge in 2004, even while continuing with subsidised sales, used disingenuous methods such as the issue of oil bonds to IOCL/BPCL/HPCL (instead of losses incurred by them due to selling these products at below-cost prices), and sale of domestic crude oil by stated owned upstream oil and gas companies viz. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Limited (OIL), etc. at a discounted price to these fuel refiners-cum-retailers. In June 2010, petrol was decontrolled followed by diesel in November 2014. As for LPG, the Kelkar Committee recommended the removal of 25 per cent of the subsidy in 2012-13 and 75 per cent in the following two years. Modi Government which took charge in May 2014, started acting on it but in a calibrated manner. On January 1, 2015, it launched a direct benefit transfer (DBT) of subsidy.

Under DBT, oil PSUs deliver the cylinder to the beneficiaries at a full cost-based price and follow it up by depositing a subsidy in the beneficiary's account.

In turn, they claim reimbursement of the subsidy amount from the Centre. This helped in eliminating fake beneficiaries and curbing misuse that was inherent in the erstwhile system wherein subsidy was embedded in the price. But, the government couldn't muster the courage to trim the number of beneficiary HHS sans Modi requesting the rich to give up on their own.

The FY 2020-21 was a boon, viewed from a subsidy angle. In that year, there was a steep decline in international prices (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) leading to a fall in the cost of supplying an LPG cylinder to a low of Rs 600; hence, it could be given to all HHS at Rs 600 requiring no subsidy support. The BE of Rs 36,000 crore for that year was used largely to clear past dues of oil PSUs and provide free gas connections under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). During 2021-22 when the international price rose due to waning COVID and demand revival, the cost of LPG zoomed to over Rs 900 per cylinder.

This prompted the government to give subsidies but only to the PMUY beneficiaries. They were 9.6 crore out of a total of 33 crore HHS. It spent Rs 14,000 crore during that year. During 2022-23, it spent Rs 9,170 crore. But, this doesn't tell the full story. From June 2020 to June 2022, the government had asked the three fuel retailers namely IOCL/BPCL/HPCL to sell LPG at a price below cost and gave them a one-time grant of Rs 22,000 crore to compensate for the losses incurred in 2021-22 and 2022-23 (against under-recovery of Rs 28,250 crore).

This was nothing but subsidy (albeit 'hidden') given to all and sundry, and not just PMUY beneficiaries. In the Budget for 2023-24, it kept the BE for LPG subsidy at Rs 2,257 crore. As in the previous two years, that allocation was meant to cover subsidy to PMUY beneficiary HHS @ Rs 200 per cylinder for up to 12 refills per year. However, to benefit all the 33 crore HHS, on August 29, 2023, the Union Cabinet approved a reduction in the price by Rs 200 per cylinder effective from August 30, 2023, thereby enabling the PSU retailers to sell it at Rs 903 per cylinder (Delhi). Taking 4 fills per HH, @Rs 200 per cylinder, the annual burden comes to Rs 26,400 crore (200x4x33).

Since the decision was effective from August 30, 2023, for the remaining seven months of FY 2023-24, the outgo would be around Rs 15,300 crore. On March 9, 2024, the fuel retailers namely IOCL/BPCL/HPCL were asked to cut the price by another Rs 100 per cylinder (courtesy, of general elections) to Rs 803.

During the current FY 2024-25, the price has remained unchanged despite the cost remaining at an elevated level. The under-recovery for 2023-24 and 2024-25 thus comes to over Rs 40,000 crore of which the Centre now wants to reimburse Rs 35,000 crore. This and the earlier payment of Rs 22,000 crore for loss incurred by IOCL/BPCL/HPCL during 2021-22 and 2022-23 could have been avoided if only it had stuck to its earlier stance of restricting LPG subsidy only to the poor HHS and keeping it transparent. But, this is unthinkable in the current political climate wherein all decisions based on sound economic logic are hamstrung by populism.

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

## The silent epidemic: The untold story of gender inequality against men in India

Indian society, long entrenched in patriarchy and gender inequality against women, is now grappling with an overlooked dimension of the issue—gender inequality against men

Indian society has always been dominated by patriarchy and gender inequality against women. However, the two recent suicides of a techie and a head constable, both alleging extortion and harassment by their estranged wives and families, point to a highly skewed, female-oriented and obsolete legal framework. Gender inequality largely remains a half-told story, deprived of the male counterpart.

The legal system in India favours women with the dowry laws in India being specifically highly discriminatory. As per section 113B of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (now Bhartiya Saksham Adhiyam, 2023) if a married woman commits



KAJLEEN KAUR

suicide within 7 years of marriage, it is assumed that the husband or his family abetted suicide, while the same does not apply to women. Marriage litigation experts claim that when women file complaints against their husbands and families, the dynamics of abuse and unclear documentation frequently make

these cases highly complex and a woman's statement is usually considered at face value, creating a significant imbalance in the legal process.

Additionally, females also get a preference in the custody of children especially in younger ages below 5 years, in most divorce cases, as per the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022 data, men accounted for 1,22,724 suicides out of a total of 1,70,896.

This is 71.81 per cent of all suicides. The data also highlights that a man commits suicide every 4.45 minutes while a woman every 9 minutes. Moreover, the rate of

suicide among married men is three times that of married women. In 2021 as many as 81,063 married men committed suicide while the women's figure stood at 28,660.

Family problems and marriage-related issues were the leading causes of suicide in metropolitan cities, accounting for 32.5 per cent of the cases. Gender inequality towards men finds limited discussions both culturally and in academic research, not just in India but globally. However, a closer look at the facts reveals a biased feminist societal structure predominantly. According to the founder of a Delhi-based organisation, Purush Ayog, society stereotypes assume that 'males



cannot be victims', which leads to ignorance and neglect of the issues facing them. A study by Stoet and Geary, 2019 for 134 countries claimed that men were more disadvantaged in 91

(68 per cent) countries than women. They argued that the Global Gender Gap was flawed, due to lopsided measuring techniques, which did not include situations where men are disadvan-

tagged, due to the absence of literature.

Another study in France found that discrimination against men in female-dominated workplaces is more prevalent than discrimination against women in male-dominated workplaces. Similar examples of reverse sexism, with anti-male prejudice are vastly prevalent, but ironically barely quoted. The mental health research is also focussed on women, and scholars warn of the problems faced by men as a 'silent epidemic'. In the legal framework, the female culprits are less likely to have longer and more stringent imprisonment for similar crimes. Women's liberalisation and empowerment are necessary

for a progressive social structure and developed economy. Still, a gender-equal status should not be thrived at the cost of male exploitation.

In modern-day society, with evolving gender roles and relationships; better education and awareness; and a feminism gaining force, balanced matrimonial laws are more pertinent than ever. The government must consider amending marriage laws to include prenuptial agreements to address financial complexities, disputes, and legal rights.

(The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



# 'Trump wants to visit China, talked about possible trip to India'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump wants to travel to China after he takes office as part of his effort to deepen relations with Beijing, and also has talked to advisors about visit to India, a media report said Saturday.

Trump, who arrived at the Dulles International Airport aboard a special plane along with First Lady Melania and son Barron, had during his election campaign threatened to impose additional tariffs on China.

"President-elect Donald Trump has told advisors he wants to travel to China after he takes office, according to people familiar with the discussions, seeking to deepen a relationship with Xi Jinping strained by the president-elect's threat to impose steeper tariffs on Chinese imports," The Wall Street Journal reported.

"Trump has also talked to advisors about a possible trip to India, according to people close to him," the financial daily said. According to familiar sources, a preliminary level of talks were initiated when External Affairs Minister S

Jaishankar visited Washington DC around Christmas last month.

India is all set to host the QUAD Summit composed of leaders from Australia, Japan and the United States. The visit could happen as early as April or in the fall later this year. It is also being considered as a possibility that Prime Minister Narendra Modi might be invited by Trump for a White House meeting this spring.

A day earlier, Trump had spoken with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi has deputized Vice-President Han Zheng to attend Trump's swearing-in ceremony, the first time a senior Chinese official will be present at a US presidential inauguration. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar would represent India at the inaugural.

Trump invited Xi to his inauguration, however, the Chinese leader never attends the swearing-in of foreign leaders. After the talks, Trump said he held a "very good" phone call with Xi.

"I just spoke to Chairman Xi Jinping of China," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "It is my

expectation that we will solve many problems together, and starting immediately." Trump said the pair discussed trade, fentanyl, TikTok and other subjects, and asserted that the call was "very good" for both countries.

"President Xi and I will do everything possible to make the World more peaceful and safe!" Trump said.

A According to The Wall Street Journal, a Beijing meeting would come at a fraught moment in the relationship between the world's leading superpowers. Along with potential new tariffs on Chinese imports, Trump has also pushed Beijing to crack down on Chinese chemical producers that supply the ingredients for fentanyl to Mexican cartels, it said.

**TRUMP LIKELY TO SIGN 100 EXECUTIVE ORDERS**

When Donald Trump walks into the White House Monday afternoon soon after his swearing-in, 100 plus executive orders would be waiting for him on his Oval Office Desk, which his team has prepared for him to kickoff his second term without wasting any



minute.

These executive orders are mainly aimed at fulfilling his poll promises. In an interview to NBC news, Trump said he is planning to sign a "record-setting" number of executive actions on day one. "Well, at least in that category," Trump said when asked if these executive orders would be more than 100. An executive order is an order issued unilaterally by the president who carries the force of law. Unlike legislation, executive orders do not require Congressional approval. Though Congress cannot overturn them, they can be challenged in the court of law.

"We have a record-setting number of documents that I'll be signing right after this (inauguration) speech," Trump said. He would be sworn-in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20.

One of his close associates Stephen Miller told a news channel that these would mainly be around five topics: sealing the Southern border, mass deportation, preventing transgender people from women's sports, removing restrictions on energy exploration and improving government efficiency.

Among his executive orders is expected to be pardoning his

supporters who were arrested by law enforcement agencies for their role in the attack on the US Capitol on January 6 four years ago.

Trump, 78, is also expected to roll back some of the executive orders and actions of the outgoing President Joe Biden. Prominent among them include the Paris Climate agreement, lifting restrictions on fossil fuel production and expanding domestic oil drilling. "This flex of power will quickly implement much of his agenda as Congress takes up his legislative priorities," Sara Carter said.

"I've been told it's going to be shock and awe as far as executive orders and all the lists of things that are going to happen on January 20th. And that they're going to throw a lot into the first day," Fox News anchor Bret Baier said. Many call it an ambitious agenda.

"I don't think it's hyperbole. Is it ambitious? Yes. But it's absolutely doable," said EJ Antoni, public finance economist at The Heritage Foundation, who has analyzed past executive orders told The Washington Times. "When you think about the amount of

time his team has had to prepare those executive orders, it's perfectly reasonable to think those orders will be on the Resolute Desk on the day of the inauguration," he said.

Republican Senator Ted Cruz Congressman Jodey Arrington have introduced legislation to repeal an Executive Order issued by President Biden on January 6, that banned American energy exploration on over 625 million acres of offshore territory. Trump is expected to reverse this through his own executive order.

In an interview to NBC News in December, Trump said he would fulfill a campaign promise to levy tariffs on imports from America's biggest trading partners. He is likely to sign executive orders previously announced tariffs on countries like China, Mexico and Canada.

Biden on his first day had issued nine executive order. Six of these were overturning the decisions of his predecessor Trump. In the first week, he had signed 22 executive orders. During his campaign trail, Trump had given an indication of his first day executive orders.

"On day one, I will launch the largest deportation program of criminals in the history of America," Trump repeatedly said on the campaign trail. "I want to close the border, and I want to drill, drill, drill," he said at another rally.

Politico said Trump's emphasis as he enters the Oval Office on Monday is sending a loud signal that the border is closed to illegal crossings and that anyone who is living in the US unauthorised, especially those who have committed crimes, is not safe from deportation.

"He'll do so through a slew of executive orders and actions, launching the process of resurrecting policies from his first term, shredding Biden administration immigration policy and taking what Trump officials have labeled the "hand-cuffs" off of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials," the media outlet reported.

Axios reported that Trump is setting the stage for an explosive first day in office: pardons for Jan. 6 rioters, a vacuum sealing of the southern border and a massive regulatory roll-back affecting vast swathes of the American economy.

## Who is Itamar, Isarel minister who resigned from Netanyahu cabinet?

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Israel's far-right national security minister resigned from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet on Sunday to express his disapproval of the Gaza ceasefire deal.

The resignation of Itamar Ben-Gvir does not threaten the ceasefire, but it does weaken Netanyahu's governing coalition. If other far-right lawmakers leave the government — as Ben-Gvir has encouraged them to do — the prime minister could lose his parliamentary majority, potentially forcing early elections.

It was the latest act of defiance by the 48-year-old ultranationalist settler leader who transformed himself over the decades from an outlaw and provocateur into one of Israel's most influential politicians.

The ceasefire will pause the war and free dozens of hostages held by militants in Gaza. Ben-Gvir opposed the deal because it requires Israel to free hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and to withdraw troops from Gaza's southern border with Egypt — and because it leaves open the possibility of Hamas staying in power in Gaza.

Ahead of the resignation, he said the ceasefire was "reckless" and would "destroy all of Israel's achievements." In his Cabinet post, Ben-Gvir oversaw the country's police force. He used his influence to encourage Netanyahu to press ahead with the war in Gaza and recently boasted that he had blocked past efforts to reach a ceasefire.

He also has paid multiple visits to Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site — the contested hill-

top compound that houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque — including last month. In one such visit in July, he said he came to pray for the return of the hostages "but without a reckless deal, without surrendering."

The move, while legal, was seen as a provocation, violated a longstanding ban on Jewish prayer there, and threatened to disrupt months of sensitive negotiations. The site is revered by Jews as the Temple Mount. Ben-Gvir has been convicted eight times for offences that include racism and supporting a terrorist organisation. As a teen, his views were so extreme that the army banned him from compulsory military service. Ben-Gvir gained notoriety in his youth as a follower of the late racist rabbi Meir Kahane. He first became a

national figure when he broke a hood ornament off then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's car in 1995.

"We got to his car, and we'll get to him too," he said, just weeks before Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist opposed to his peace efforts with the Palestinians.

Two years later, Ben-Gvir took responsibility for orchestrating a campaign of protests, including death threats, that forced Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor to cancel a concert for peace in Jerusalem. The political rise of Ben-Gvir was the culmination of years of efforts by the media-savvy lawmaker to gain legitimacy. But it also reflected a rightward shift in the Israeli electorate that brought his religious, ultranationalist ideology into the mainstream and diminished hopes for Palestinian independence.

## TikTok shuts down as US ban takes effect

PTI ■ HOUSTON

TikTok's app effectively shut down in the US, just hours before a law banning the popular video-sharing platform was set to go into effect.

"A law banning TikTok has been enacted in the US. Unfortunately, that means you can't use TikTok for now," a message reads when American users open the app.

"We are fortunate that President Trump has indicated that he will work with us on a solution to reinstate TikTok once he takes office. Please stay tuned!"

While the Biden administration dismissed TikTok's shutdown threat as a "stunt" and handed enforcement to the Trump administration, TikTok maintained that without clear assurances, it had no choice but to suspend its services in the US.

An internal email to employees stated that President Trump has expressed his intention to work



on a solution to restore TikTok once he assumes office on January 20th. TikTok assured teams are working to resume services as soon as possible.

On Saturday evening, a warning appeared in both TikTok and CapCut apps at 9 PM Eastern time:

"We regret that a US law banning TikTok will take effect on January 19th, forcing us to temporarily suspend our services. We're working to restore our service in the US as soon as possible. Thank you for your support. Stay tuned."

By 10:30 PM ET, users were blocked from accessing both

apps, with TikTok displaying a message that the app "isn't available right now," but expects resolution under President-elect Trump.

It comes after days of speculation and confusion over the platform's future.

The Supreme Court on Friday unanimously upheld the divest-or-ban law, which gave TikTok's China-based parent company ByteDance until Sunday to divest from the app.

The law directed Apple and Google to remove the service from app stores.

It also required web-hosting firms, including TikTok's back-end cloud provider, Oracle, to stop supporting the app or face penalties that could reach into the billions of dollars, NPR reported.

Trump said Saturday that he would most likely give TikTok a 90-day extension.

"The 90-day extension is something that will be most likely done, because it's appropriate. You know, it's appropri-

ate. We have to look at it carefully," Trump said in a call with "Meet the Press" moderator Kristen Welker. "It's a very big situation." The law, which passed Congress with wide bipartisan majorities and was signed by President Biden in April, allows the president to provide a 90-day extension, as long as progress is being made toward a divestiture.

Following Friday's Supreme Court decision, TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew thanked the president-elect for his commitment to finding a solution to keep the app accessible in the US. Chew, who met with Trump at Mar-a-Lago last month, is set to attend Monday's inauguration, the Hill reported.

While the app's message and Trump's remarks suggest the app could be revived in the US soon, it remains unclear exactly what that would look like and how long a divestiture deal could take to hammer out.

## British Indians welcome launch of Bradford City of Culture 2025

Bradford/London (PTI): Bradford in the northern England county of West Yorkshire recently launched its City of Culture 2025 festivities, with British Indians enthusiastically joining in to showcase the region's diversity, vibrant bazaars and curry restaurants.

Bradford was designated the UK City of Culture for 2025 after winning government backing from a record-breaking 20 bids.

The initiative, covering the entire Bradford district across West Yorkshire, opened last weekend with a glittering performance that paid homage to the region as a melting pot of cultures — with one in three residents identifying as being of South Asian heritage.

"Our communities can and should be empowered to come

together, tell their story and create change in their local area. That is what the UK City of Culture competition is all about," said Lisa Nandy, the British Indian Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

"So much enthusiasm and hard work has gone into organising Bradford's year. There is a real buzz in the city as people get ready to showcase their talents. I would encourage everyone to go and see some of the fantastic events in the new year," she said.

A year-long roster of performances, exhibitions, events and activities inspired by the extraordinary variety of the landscape, from the city's historic centre to the bucolic countryside that surrounds it, will pay homage to

Bradford's potent heritage as everything from a former industrial powerhouse to the world's first UNESCO City of Film.

Deepak Sharma, Trustee of Bradford Hindu Council — one of the many community groups who were hard at work since 2018 to put together the winning bid, is ecstatic about the Diwali, rangoli and Yoga events in the pipeline for the year. "What our community is looking to do with Bradford being the City of Culture is looking to showcase our roots and diversity here," said Sharma, born in Bradford to parents who migrated from Punjab. "We're going to do some rangoli with children, Yoga for International Yoga Day and a series of events planned for the summer such as mehndi festivals.

## Biden spending final full day in office in South Carolina which helped him become president

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Joe Biden is spending his final full day in office Sunday in South Carolina, a state that holds special meaning after a commanding win in the 2020 Democratic primary there set him up to achieve his life's goal of being elected president of the United States.

On the eve of Monday's inauguration of Republican President-elect Donald Trump, Biden planned to deliver a final farewell from the state that brought him to the dance, as he likes to say. Biden, accompanied by his wife, first lady Jill Biden, was scheduled to visit Royal Missionary Baptist Church in North Charleston to worship and speak on the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.,

the White House said. Monday is the federal holiday honouring the slain civil rights leader. Afterward, the Bidens will tour the International African American Museum. It was built on a waterfront site where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans were brought to the US from the late 1760s through 1808, according to the museum's website. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-SC, a key Biden ally, said the trip was Biden's way of saying "thank you" to the state. "Joe Biden is showing once again who he is by coming back to the state that really launched him to the presidency," Clyburn told The Associated Press in an interview.

The president delivered a televised farewell address to the nation on Wednesday. Back in

2020, Biden saw his campaign flounder after he lost the opening contests in New Hampshire, Iowa and Nevada. But at the fourth stop, South Carolina — where Black voters make up a majority of the Democratic electorate — he was lifted to victory after Clyburn's endorsement. "I know Joe. But most importantly, Joe knows us," the congressman said at the time. After winning election and taking office, Biden pushed for South Carolina to move to the head of the line and be the state that opened the Democratic Party's nominating process for 2024, instead of New Hampshire. He easily won the state's primary that year. "In 2020, it was the voters of South Carolina who

proved the pundits wrong, breathed new life into our campaign, and set us on the path to winning the presidency," Biden said in a statement after winning the primary for the second time.

"Now in 2024, the people of South Carolina have spoken again and I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the Presidency again — and making Donald Trump a loser — again." It didn't turn out that way.

After faltering in a debate against Trump, Biden dropped out of the race under pressure from many Democrats, though Clyburn notably was not among them. Biden endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris, who replaced him as the Democrats' nominee. She lost to Trump.

## Nearly 60 people killed in Colombia

San Juan (PTI): Officials in Colombia say about 60 people have been killed in the country's northeast region following failed attempts to hold peace talks with the National Liberation Army. Among those killed are seven people who sought to sign a peace deal, as well as community leader Carmelo Guerrero, according to a report that a government ombudsman agency released late Saturday. Officials said the attacks occurred in several towns located in the Catatumbo region, with at least three people who were part of the peace talks being kidnapped. Hundreds of people are fleeing the area, with some hiding in the nearby lush mountains. Colombia's government has demanded that the National Liberation Army, known as ELN, cease all attacks and allow authorities to enter the region and provide humanitarian aid.



Christian Orthodox believers walk after a swim in the icy water of the Danube river in Belgrade, Serbia, on Sunday

## Families of wildfire victims mired in grief

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES

The house was burning with her brother-in-law and nephew inside when Jackie McDaniels flagged down a firetruck and begged for help. "Whoever is in there is no longer alive," she recalled one of the firemen telling her before urging her to flee her Altadena neighbourhood. "I pray to God that they were. But it was horrible to have to leave them there." Now McDaniels, like so many, is facing the gripping realities of grief and questions about what more could have been done. Experts say these survivors are victims themselves; the fires that swept through the Los Angeles area this month were fast-moving and fierce. "It's really just a different beast of a fire when it's this propagating entity of just total mayhem," said Benjamin Hatchett, a fire meteorologist with the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere

at Colorado State University. But that doesn't ease the pain or the questions for the families of the more than two dozen killed, some unable to escape, others unaware of what was coming, having survived other blazes unscathed. Among the dead is Dalcy Curry, who rubbed shoulders with some of the elites of old Hollywood in her youth. To family, she went by a different name. "Momma Dee, that's the fire," her granddaughter and namesake, Dalcy Kelley, recalls saying as she drove the 95-year-old to her Altadena home on January 7 after a day of medical tests. But the flames they saw seemed so far away and power was still on. Now Kelley wishes she would have asked more questions, wishes she would have returned earlier.

"I will live with that regret for the rest of my life," she said. That saddens Jennifer Marlon, a wildfire and climate research scientist at Yale's School of the

Environment. She said larger factors were at play, the summer the warmest on record in California, drying out the vegetation that fuelled the flames. "These are, by and large, not situations that people could have really anticipated," she said. "It's incredibly tragic that people are blaming themselves and wracked with guilt." Yet it is a common response, said Tory Fiedler, a Red Cross disaster mental health manager who is helping to coordinate the response to the wildfires. "Most of us get our sense of self and value from what we do in service to others," she said. "When I'm not able to do that, I feel bad about that," she added. "I feel guilty that I didn't get to help. I didn't do enough. I survived and other people didn't, and I can't help them. And it's not just I survived and other people didn't, but I don't know what to do about that."

Compounding the pain is the

fact that many families are still awaiting formal notification from the medical examiner, a process that could take weeks. During that painful wait, Carol Smith has been praying. Her son, Randy Miod, a 55-year-old surfer, known to friends as Craw Daddy, had lived in his Malibu home for three decades, first as a renter and then the owner.

Known as the "Crab Shack," it was a popular hang-out spot for surfers, with loaner boards always available.

She said he never evacuated for wildfires, including during the Franklin Fire in December that knocked out power to his home for three days. "I'm scared," she recalled him telling her the last time they spoke. She begged of him, "Please, go somewhere safe, so I don't worry." But he wasn't budging, telling her: "I've got the hose. And he said, 'Pray for the Palisades and pray for Malibu. And I love you.'"



# Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government launches op in Kurram district

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provincial government on Sunday launched an operation in troubled areas of Kurram district after armed men attacked an aid convoy transporting goods to Parachinar and killed several people, officials said.

The operation started in four village councils of Lower Kurram district, including Bagan, Mandori, Chapri and Chapripao, to secure the roads and establish lasting peace in the region, where sectarian clashes have left dozens dead since November, they said. The KPK government spokesperson has officially announced the initiation of the operation in troubled areas of the restive Kurram district. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting attended by Chief Secretary KPK, IG Police, and other civil and police officials.

The meeting decided to take strict action against terrorists without any discrimination. The state supports peaceful elements, and oppressors would be brought to justice, officials said.

Deputy Commissioner Ashfaq Ahmed issued a notification on Saturday to establish camps in Thal and Hangru for the displaced people. The Express Tribune newspaper reported. Security forces will assist police and civil administration in action against miscreants. The government sus-

# Security forces kill 5 terrorists

PTI ■ KARACHI

Karachi (PTI): Pakistani security forces on Sunday killed five suspected terrorists attempting to cross into the Balochistan province of Pakistan from Afghanistan, the ISPR said. According to the military's media wing, the terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group were killed while trying to infiltrate the Zhob district of the restive province early Sunday.

Pakistan has regularly asked the Afghanistan Taliban government to take action against the TTP militant group which the Pakistan government blames for terror attacks in Pakistan. The Pakistan government emphasises the TTP militants operate from their hide-

outs in the neighbouring country which shares its borders with two provinces of Pakistan. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been strained due to frequent border skirmishes. Kabul, however, denies the TTP was behind the attacks in Pakistan.

The ISPR statement reiterated that Pakistan has "consistently been asking [the] interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border".

"[The] interim Afghan government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by TTP terrorists for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan," the statement read.

Pakistani security forces are also facing challenges from outlawed separatist groups in Balochistan who have stepped up their terror attacks in the province.

On Saturday night, armed militants who attacked a Levies checkpoint in the Turbat area snatched arms, ammunition, and communication devices from the personnel, a police official said. The official said no loss of lives has been reported in the incident.

Since last year, Pakistan fighter jets have twice carried out bomb attacks on suspected TTP locations/camps in Afghanistan's eastern Pakitka province, killing and wounding several terrorists, security officials claimed.

and helicopter shelling, although some persons were reported still missing, Geo News reported. According to the business community, 33 out of the 35 trucks were taken to Bagan and surrounding areas, and 12 vehicles were set on fire.

Parachinar, upper Kurram, has been under siege for the past 110 days, with people dying due to a lack of essential supplies. The community has urged the government to take immediate action to address the situation, it added.

# US rejects Maduro's re-election, but keeps financial lifeline for his govt

PTI ■ CARACAS

Things seemed to be looking up for Venezuela in 2022. Following years of authoritarian rule and withering economic sanctions, President Nicolás Maduro had agreed to work toward a democratic presidential election. The White House, in return, granted him a financial lifeline: a permit for US energy giant Chevron to pump and export Venezuelan oil.

Oil wells roared back to life and massive tanker ships returned to Venezuela's coast to be filled with heavy, hard-to-refine crude destined for the US. Maduro's promised election was neither fair nor free, and the longtime president was sworn in this month for a third six-year term despite credible evidence that his opponent got more votes. Yet, the sanctions relieve the US offered "to support the restoration of democracy" is still helping fill state coffers.

Venezuela's opposition says Maduro's government has earned billions of dollars from exports allowed by the permit. The White House has ignored calls from the main opposition coalition, as well as Republicans and Democrats in the US Congress, to cancel a permit that now accounts for around a quarter of the South American country's oil production.

Senior administration officials have struggled to explain why the permit has been left in

place under questioning by reporters, saying only that sanctions policy toward Venezuela is frequently reviewed. President Joe Biden told reporters last week he "didn't have enough data" to adjust oil-related sanctions before he leaves office Monday.

Venezuela sits atop the world's largest proven oil reserves and once used them to power Latin America's strongest economy. But corruption, mismanagement and eventual U.S. economic sanctions saw production steadily decline from the 3.5 million barrels per day pumped in 1999, when the fiery Hugo Chávez took power and began his self-described socialist revolution, to less than 400,000 barrels per day in 2020.

California-based Chevron Corp., which first invested in Venezuela in the 1920s, does business in the country through joint ventures with the state-owned company Petroleos de Venezuela S.A., commonly known as PDVSA. The joint ventures produced about 200,000 barrels a day in 2019, but the following year, US sanctions imposed by then-President Donald Trump forced Chevron to wind down production.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a 30% decline in the country's economic activity, Venezuela's Central Bank reported year-over-year inflation of over 1,800%. For many, rummaging through garbage in search of food scraps or valuable items

became a common activity. Locked out of world oil markets by US sanctions, Venezuela sold its remaining oil output at a discount — about 40% below market prices — to buyers like China and other Asian markets. It even started accepting payments in Russian rubles, bartered goods or cryptocurrency.

Once Chevron got a license to export oil to the US, its joint ventures quickly began producing 80,000 barrels a day, and by 2024, they topped their daily output from 2019. That oil is sold at world market prices. The terms of the license bar Chevron from directly paying taxes or royalties to Venezuela's government. But the company sends money to the joint ventures, which are majority-owned by PDVSA.

"What Chevron is doing is buying oil from joint ventures," Venezuelan economist Francisco Rodriguez said. "This purchase of oil is what generates the revenue of the joint ventures," and that revenue pays taxes and royalties to Venezuela's government.

It is not clear exactly how Venezuela's government, which stopped publishing almost all financial data several years ago, uses this revenue. Neither the government nor Chevron have made public the terms of the agreement allowing the company's return to Venezuela. Chevron did not answer questions regarding the joint ventures, including payments made to Venezuela's treasury.

"Chevron conducts its business in Venezuela in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations," Chevron spokesman Bill Turenne said in a statement.

Economist José Guerra, a former economic research manager at Venezuela's Central Bank, said the license's impact is partly reflected in the nation's foreign cash reserves, which increased by roughly \$1 billion between February 2022 and November 2024, according to the institution's data. The government uses its dollar reserves in part to maintain an artificially low exchange rate between the US dollar and the Venezuelan bolivar.

"The only explanation is that Chevron exports without discounts, it exports everything — the 200,000 barrels go abroad — and that is what is feeding the reserves," Guerra said. "I call it Saint Chevron."

The outcome of Venezuela's presidential election, and a subsequent campaign of repression, have prompted new calls to rescind the licenses.

"In the end, one wonders, and quite rightly so, why the Biden administration continues to maintain a license whose objective was not achieved," said Rafael de la Cruz, who is an adviser to the opposition campaign of Edmundo González and María Corina Machado. He said the opposition has estimated that Maduro's government has received about \$4 billion through the operation of the joint ventures.

# South Korea's impeached president arrested

PTI ■ SEOUL

Hours after South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol was formally arrested, triggering rioting by his supporters, his lawyers said Sunday that he remains defiant in his refusal to answer questions over the probe into his declaration of martial law last month.

Yoon was formally arrested early on Sunday, days after being apprehended at his presidential compound in Seoul. He faces possible imprisonment over his short-lived authoritarian push, which set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratization in the late 1980s.

Yoon's arrest could mark the beginning of an extended period in custody, lasting months or more.

The decision to arrest Yoon ignited unrest at the Seoul Western District Court, where dozens of his supporters broke in and rioted, destroying the main door and windows. They used plastic chairs, metal beams and police shields that they managed to wrestle away from officers. Some were seen throwing objects and using

fire extinguishers, destroying furniture and office machines, smashing glass doors and spraying water on computer servers. They shouted demands to see the judge who had issued the warrant, but she had already left.

Hundreds of police officers were deployed and nearly 90 protesters were arrested. Some injured police officers were seen being treated at ambulance vans. The court said it was trying to confirm whether any staff members were injured and assess the damage to its facilities.

In granting law enforcement's request for an arrest warrant for Yoon, the court said he was a threat to destroy evidence. Yoon and his lawyers on Saturday appeared before the court and argued for his release.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and the military, can now extend Yoon's detention to 20 days, during which they will transfer the case to public prosecutors for indictment.

Investigators are examining whether Yoon's Dec. 3 martial law decree amounted to an



attempted rebellion. While South Korean presidents have wide-ranging immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

Yoon's lawyers could also file a petition to challenge the court's arrest warrant. Yoon Kab-keun, one of the president's lawyers, said he will not attend a questioning by the anti-corruption agency set for Sunday afternoon and will remain at the detention center.

Yoon Suk Yeol's appearance in court caused chaotic scenes in

nearby streets, where thousands of his fervent supporters rallied for hours calling for his release. Even before the court issued the warrant for Yoon's arrest, protesters repeatedly clashed with police. At least two vehicles carrying anti-corruption investigators were damaged as they left the court after arguing for Yoon's arrest.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief and several top military commanders have already been arrested and indicted for their roles in the enforcement of martial law. The crisis began when Yoon, in an attempt to break through legislative gridlock, imposed military rule and sent troops to the National Assembly and election offices.

The standoff lasted only hours after lawmakers who managed to get through a blockade voted to lift the measure. The opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14.

His political fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which is deliberating whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him.

Seok Dong-hyeon, another lawyer representing Yoon, called the court order for his

arrest "the epitome of anti-constitutionalism and anti-rule of law." He pointed to the riot and said Yoon's arrest would inspire more anger from his supporters.

Yoon's People Power Party regretted his arrest but also pleaded for his supporters to refrain from further violence. The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative effort to impeach Yoon, said his arrest would be a "cornerstone for restoring the collapsed constitutional order."

It also called for stern punishment of the rioters.

The country's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, expressed "strong regret" about the riot, saying it "directly undermines democracy and the rule of law." He asked for heightened security at the sites related to Yoon's case, also including the Constitutional Court, and measures to ensure order during protests.

After its investigators were attacked by protesters later on Saturday, the anti-corruption agency asked media companies to obscure the faces of its members attending the hearing.

# Will follow timeline set by govt for holding polls: B'desh EC

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh Election Commission said on Sunday that it will hold general elections on the timeline set by the interim government, asserting its commitment to free and fair polls.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin made the remarks during an event where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) handed over technical equipment needed to update the voter lists, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

The Election Commission received 175 laptops, 200 scanners and 4,300 bags for data collection from the UNDP. "We're focusing on the timeframe announced by the honourable chief advisor and working towards it," the CEC was quoted as saying by the bdnews24 news portal.

Last month, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said the next general election in the



country could take place by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026. He had, however, said the timing of the election would largely depend upon the political consensus and the extent of the reforms that must be carried out before it.

Nasir Uddin's comments came days after former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) demanded that the general election be held by July or August of this year.

When asked about it, the CEC underscored that the polls body does not wish to get involved in politics, and added that the voter list

update would need six months. "We don't want to comment on political statements. We'll follow the law, rules and the system," the report quoted him as saying. Asserting that the country's people expect free, fair and impartial elections, Nasir Uddin said the commission is committed to fulfilling the expectation.

He said that the voter list update process would be carried out with transparency, according to the report. Speaking at the event, UNDP Resident Representative Steffen Liller said that discussions would take place with political parties and other stakeholders to determine how cooperation could be best organised.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
[This is to inform regarding property number E-287, Naraina Vihar. The owner, Mrs. Susma Kaushal, has stated that all original documents of the property have been misplaced. If anyone has any objections or concerns, they are requested to inform me, Satish Kumar (Purchaser), via email at ayariserelady@gmail.com within 15 days from today failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.]

# 'No excuse for education bans on Af women, girls'

PTI ■ KABUL

A senior Taliban figure has urged the group's leader to scrap education bans on Afghan women and girls, saying there is no excuse for them, in a rare public rebuke of government policy.

Sher Abbas Stanikzai, political deputy at the Foreign Ministry, made the remarks in a speech on Saturday in southeastern Khost province.

He told an audience at a religious school ceremony there was no reason to deny education to women and girls, "just as there was no justification for it in the past and there shouldn't be one at all." The government has barred females from education after sixth grade.

Last September, there were reports authorities had also stopped medical training and courses for women. In Afghanistan, women and girls can only be treated by female doctors and health professionals. Authorities have yet to confirm the medical training ban.

"We call on the leadership again to open the doors of education," said Stanikzai in a video shared by his official account on the social platform X. "We are committing an injustice against 20 million people out of a population of 40 million, depriving them of all their rights."

# Disneyland Paris unveils nighttime show using Paris Games laser technology

PTI ■ CHESSY (FRANCE)

A cutting-edge nighttime show at Disneyland Paris is heralding a bold new chapter for Europe's most-visited theme park, as a raft of ambitious developments comes to fruition under a 2 billion euro (USD 2.05 billion) expansion plan.

The overhaul includes the completed revamp of the luxury Disneyland Hotel, the upcoming renaming and doubling in size of Walt Disney Studios Park, doubling in size and reimagined as Disney Adventure World. Opening in spring 2025, a new park entrance, World Premiere, will greet visitors with the glamour of a Hollywood film premiere, leading them into immersive themed areas.

"These projects reflect our commitment to innovation and storytelling," said Natacha Rafalski, head of Disneyland Paris, adding that they will further strengthen it as Europe's top tourist destination. Already Europe's most-visited theme park and France's top tourist attraction outdrawing the Louvre, Disneyland Paris welcomed over 10 million visitors in 2023. The expansion includes two eagerly awaited themed

ceremony that featured a performance with Celine Dion. The lasers, which travel 23 miles (37 kilometres), deliver extraordinary power while remaining safe near crowds. "The Paris Olympics used it first. But we saw it first," said Dana Harrel, executive entertainment director at Disneyland Paris.

Featuring Disney and Pixar tales brought to life by dromedary 3D figures, synchronised fountains and a 100-piece orchestra, the show is elevated further by the original anthem "Live in Magic." At the heart of Disneyland Paris' expansion is the transformation of Walt Disney Studios Park, doubling in size and reimagined as Disney Adventure World. Opening in spring 2025, a new park entrance, World Premiere, will greet visitors with the glamour of a Hollywood film premiere, leading them into immersive themed areas.

"These projects reflect our commitment to innovation and storytelling," said Natacha Rafalski, head of Disneyland Paris, adding that they will further strengthen it as Europe's top tourist destination. Already Europe's most-visited theme park and France's top tourist attraction outdrawing the Louvre, Disneyland Paris welcomed over 10 million visitors in 2023. The expansion includes two eagerly awaited themed

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Known to all that my client Sh. Sandeep Gupta owner of the PROPERTY NO. 13, AREA 50 SQ. YDS., KHASRA NO. 133 VILLAGE BINDAPUR, BHANI VIHAR IN BLOCK B-1, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110059 and, Sh. Sandeep Gupta purchase property from Smt. Gian Wati Devi vide Notarized GPA, ATs and dated 17.12.2022. Now Sh. Sandeep Gupta wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and sign his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 769, Contact : 9899013918  
Mobile : 9899013918

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mrs. RICHIA with respect to the Property bearing Plot No. 148 and 149, area measuring 100 Sq. Yds., comprised in Kharsa No. 371, situated in the area of Village Mansarovar known as Mohan Garden, in Block L-Extra, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, which is presently owned by Mr. Parveen Kumar and Mr. Praveen Kumar had purchased the subject property from Prabhjot Kaur Sachdeva vide Notarized Deed of Sale, dated 02.02.2024, and dated 02.02.2024, now Mrs. RICHIA intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from ADITYA BIRLA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED. To comply the requirements of BANKING FC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP Plot No. 136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact : 011-46046316

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform the general public that Mr. Vijay Singh is the CPA Holder of Plot area measuring 50 Sq. Yds. out of Kharsa No. 910, situated in Vishwanath Colony, Manakpuri, Tehsil- Daudi, District G-B Nagar, Uttar Pradesh-201309. He is in possession through Regd. GPA, dated 17.05.1997, doc. No. 2097, executed by Mr. Vijender Singh in favour of Mr. Vijay Singh in respect of the said Plot.

Mr. Vijay Singh intends to transfer the ownership of aforesaid plot by way of Sale Deed to Mr. Ramnath Maurya. Subsequently, Mr. Ramnath Maurya is in the process of mortgaging the said property with SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Home Finance Co. Ltd.) for the purpose of availing loan. To comply the requirements of BANKING FC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP Plot No. 136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact : 011-46046316

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**  
**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, Avisha Chaudhary D/o Shri Virendra Singh Chaudhary R/o 365 chiddasingh abatah near NH-24, Mankanpur Shipra Suncity, Ghaziabad, Pin-201014, have declare that my father's name is Virendra Singh and Virendra Singh Chaudhary. Both names are same and one person. That I will use father name as Virendra Singh Chaudhary in future for all purpose.  
PD(1283)C

**JM FINANCIAL**  
JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited  
Corporate Identity Number : U67190MH2007PLC74287  
Registered Office Address : 7th Floor, Energy, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025  
T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +91 22 6630 3223 www.jmfinancial.com

**DEMAND NOTICE**  
Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned Loans) together with underlying security interest created therefor along with all the rights, title and interest thereon under Section 5 (1) (b) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("SARFAESI ACT") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 ("the Assignment Agreement") in favour of JMFAARC (JM) (herein referred as Assignee). The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of JM assignee. Under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act), in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Loan Code	Demand Notice Date and Amount With NPA Date	PROPERTY ADDRESS
(LC No. 09600002091 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Rohit Kumar (Borrower) Kusum Lata (Co Borrower 1)	23-12-2024 /R 3337791 /-R Thirty Three lakh Thirty Seven thousand Three Hundred Ninety (33,37,791) NPA (10-04-2020)	Ugf Rhs Ptn Without Roof R/F Prop No 1199/7/ 10 Kh No 93 Govindpuri Kalkaji New Delhi NCT of Delhi - 110019
(LC No. 196DE37129 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Vidur Khanna (Borrower) Usha Khanna (Co Borrower 1)	23-12-2024 /R 9855817 /-R Ninety Eight lakh Fifty Three Thousand Six Hundred Seventeen (98,55,817) NPA (01-05-2019)	Hi Flat No 402 Fourth Floor, Supertech Capetown Gautambudh Plot No Gh 01 A Sector, 74 Village, Noida, Uttar Pradesh - 201301

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to JM as aforesaid, JM shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of JM. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date : 20-01-2025  
Place: Delhi

Authorised Officer  
JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited,  
acting in its capacity as trustee of Aranya - Trust



# Budget FY26: Government could cut customs duty on raw materials to boost manufacturing

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The government could reduce customs duty on inputs used in manufacturing medical equipment, electronic goods and footwear industries in the forthcoming Budget to boost local manufacturing, according to tax experts. Deloitte India Partner, Indirect Tax, Harpreet Singh said key demands from the Customs side from the 2025-26 Budget, to be tabled in Parliament on February 1, would be rationalisation, simplification of the regime, and litigation and dispute management. "In the lines of the phased manufacturing plan, we expect some duty cuts in raw materials in electronics, home appliances, healthcare products, and pharmaceuticals. These are the industries where the government wants to give impetus in terms of manufacturing, and hence, we will see the raw materials declining in these sectors," Singh told PTI. On the proposed Customs duty rationalisation



announced in the Budget in July 2024, Singh said the sectors which could see rationalisation are healthcare, manufacturing of medical equipment, white goods, electronics, footwear and toys. The 2024-25 Budget announced that a comprehensive review of the Customs Duty rate structure will be undertaken over the next six months to rationalise and simplify it for ease of trade, removal of duty inversion and reduction of

disputes. To reduce classification disputes, the Budget had announced a review of the customs duty rates. Currently, there are more than a dozen customs duty rates, and the government is looking at reducing the number of rate slabs to 4 or 5. The "government may come out with different slabs for various products, depending on where it is placed in the value chain. Goods may be categorised as Value added/primary and

raw material/Intermediary, and accordingly, slab rates may be fixed," said Anurag Sehgal, Managing Director at Price Waterhouse & Co. LLP. Nangia Andersen LLP Executive Director, Indirect Tax, Sivakumar Ramjee said there is a call for simplifying the customs duty structure to minimise rate multiplicity, correct duty inversions, if any, and reduce classification disputes by way of clarification and rationalisation of duties on

recyclable and reused materials to support sustainable manufacturing practices. "What is expected is a more streamlined rate structure is expected to support domestic manufacturing and align with the 'Make in India' initiative," Ramjee said. Ramjee further said that the industry anticipates the introduction of an amnesty scheme aimed at resolving long-standing customs disputes. With over 40,000 cases pending in courts and tribunals, such a scheme could reduce litigation and enhance the ease of doing business. Huge money is stuck in litigation, and the government should prudently bring a one-time dispute settlement scheme in the Customs law to settle the outstanding Customs disputes, which is increasing year-on-year, he added. Grant Thornton Bharat Partner Manoj Mishra said about Rs 50,000 crore is locked up in Customs disputes, and an amnesty scheme will help in dispute settlement.

# FPIs take out ₹44,396 Crore from equities in January amid weak earnings outlook, rising dollar

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 44,396 crore from Indian equities this month, driven by strength of the dollar, rising bond yields in the US, and expectations of a weak earnings season. This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the month of December, data with the depositories showed. The shift in sentiment comes amid global and domestic headwinds. "The continued depreciation of Indian rupee is exerting significant pressure on foreign investors leading them to pull the money out of the Indian equity markets," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Research, Morningstar Investment Advisers India, said. In addition to that, higher valuation of Indian equities, despite recent corrections, expectation of a rather weak earnings season and uncertainty over the pace of economic growth are making investors wary, he added. According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 44,396 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till



January 17). FPIs have been sellers on all days this month except January 2. "The principal reasons for the sustained FPIs selling are the strength of the dollar and the rising bond yields in the US. With the dollar index above 109 and the 10-year US bond yield above 4.6 per cent, it is logical for FPIs to sell in emerging markets, particularly in the most expensive emerging market India," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Since US bond yields are attractive, FPIs have been sellers in the debt market, too. They withdrew Rs 4,848 crore from debt general limit and Rs 6,176 crore debt voluntary retention route. Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments,

Waterfield Advisors, said that a cyclical improvement in corporate earnings, along with stronger GDP growth driven by resilient domestic consumption and increased government spending on infrastructure projects, could lead to a potential turnaround in FPI flows into India. The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just Rs 427 crore. This contrasts sharply with the extraordinary Rs 1.71 lakh crore net inflows in 2023, driven by optimism over India's strong economic fundamentals. In comparison, 2022 saw a net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore amid aggressive rate hikes by global central banks.



## Want to be a leader in every segment we operate in says ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
ITC is sharpening its competitiveness and strengthening innovative capacity under its "Next Strategy" as the multi-conglomerate aims to be a leader in the segments in which it operates, said its Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri. The cigarettes-to-consumer goods conglomerate has articulated a strategy of the organisation, the ITC Next Strategy' aiming to shape a future-ready enterprise and define the next phase of growth and profitability, Puri told PTI. As part of the ITC Next Strategy, it identified levers of competitiveness, which include digitalisation, sustainability, innovation and supply chain efficiency, among others for its future growth. "These have been identified as areas where specific interventions have been made to become competitive and contemporary. The objective is to keep innovating while leveraging enterprise strengths," said Puri. The idea is to be a leader and to be a very large-scale business, in which ITC has made "appreciable progress" in its ongoing journey over a period of time. "For us, ITC's Next strategy is a journey in action. While we have made appreciable progress in many areas, I would not say that this journey is anywhere near completion. Our vision is to be a very large player in every

segment that we operate in," said Puri. He further added: "In some segments, we are already leaders. It is our goal to be a leader in every segment we operate in." According to Puri, the world is now much more volatile and uncertain given the geopolitical and geo-economic situation and the existential climate crisis. "Given this context, we believe that a large and growing organisation like ours must remain nimble and consumer-centric, sharpening our competitiveness and strengthening our innovative capacity. To do that, we have created an organisation in which people have more ownership and are empowered with a fair degree of freedom and flexibility," he said. ITC, an over Rs 70,000 crore group which operates in Cigarette to FMCG and agriculture, paper board to IT sector - has defined the portfolio strategy for the organisation, across its businesses. "... We plan to keep on growing our core and growing the core itself is a mega opportunity in India, given the per capita incomes, the per capita consumption and also the penetration levels. The second piece is to address adjacencies, and thirdly, start creating categories of the future. The idea is to continuously contemporize and refresh while building the portfolio," said Puri.

## India not seeking duty concessions on liquor, cigarette in FTA with Oman: Sources

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India is not seeking customs duty concessions on over 100 product categories such as liquor, and cigarette in the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), which is under negotiations between the two countries, sources said. They also said that though the FTA negotiations were concluded, Oman has sought revision of its market access offers on some products. The two sides have discussed three to four issues flagged by Oman, and any potential changes would be minimal, they said. India is expected to gain greater market access for about 98 per cent of its goods in Oman, along with significant access to the services sector. "There could be about 125-130 tariff lines (or product

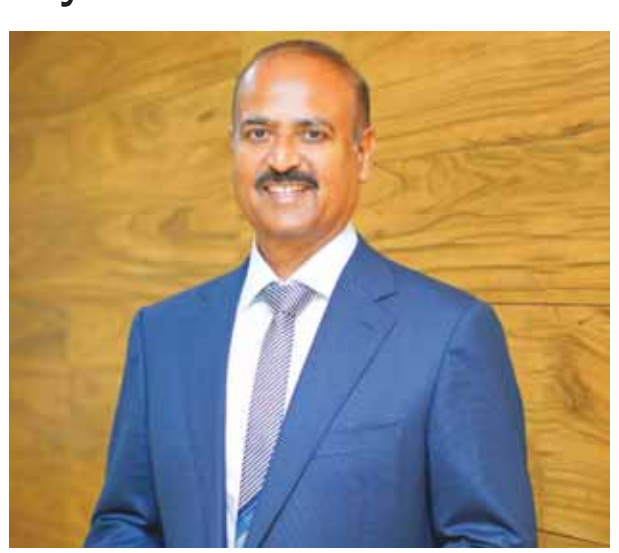


categories), where we have not asked for duty concessions and that included goods like liquor, and cigarettes," they added. On January 14, India and Oman held the fifth round of talks for the agreement, which is aimed at boosting bilateral economic ties. The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in November 2023. Oman's import duty ranges from 0 to 100 per cent along with the existence of specific

duties. On specific meats, wines and tobacco products 100 per cent duty is applicable. According to industry sources, India should not extend duty concessions on petrochemical products, a key demand of Oman. Indian petrochemical industry which comprises both large public sector units and private players have raised their serious concerns and requested the government not to accede to this demand of Oman, they said. "In petrochemical sector, feedstock constitutes a significant portion (about 65-70 per cent) of the total product cost such as Polyethylene (PE), Polypropylene (PP), Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) etc. Therefore, feedstock pricing makes a critical determinant of overall competitiveness in the petrochemical industry,"

the industry sources said. They added that Oman has a distinct feedstock cost advantage due to its abundant natural resources and has a significant exportable surplus of petrochemical products with minimal domestic demand. "Any tariff concessions to Oman would lead to an influx of low cost petrochemical imports, adversely affecting the Indian petrochemical industry," they said. Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. According to the think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Institute), Indian goods worth USD 3.7 billion like gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery will get a significant boost in Oman, once both sides reach a comprehensive free trade agreement.

## Insurance industry pivotal, says GIC Chairman



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The insurance industry, which safeguards millions of lives and businesses, often faces unwarranted criticism fueled by isolated grievances and sensationalism. Despite these perceptions, its contributions are pivotal. In FY 23-24 alone, the industry settled claims worth Rs 1.72 lakh crore, including Rs 80,000 crore for health insurance, with a claim settlement ratio exceeding 80 per cent. In this regard, Tapan Singhel, Chairman, General Insurance Council and MD & CEO, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, said that, as per the IRDAI annual report, last year, the General Insurance industry settled crores of claims worth Rs 1.72 lakh crore, out of which it paid more than Rs 80,000 crore towards health insurance. "Yet those who benefit rarely make the news. On the flip side, isolated grievances and odd bad experiences become the face of the industry. Social safety nets like Ayushman Bharat, covering 55 crore beneficiaries, and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, which disbursed Rs 1.64 lakh crore in claims over eight years, prevent poverty

and support vulnerable populations. Without the insurance industry's support, the scheme would not be in place or effective in states adopting an insurance or hybrid model. Insurance also underpins critical sectors, mitigating financial risks in agriculture, motor, and disaster recovery, and ensuring economic resilience," said Singhel. Notably, Singhel mentioned the industry boasts an impressively low grievance ratio of 0.003 percent against 2.96 billion policies and actively combats fraud, detecting Rs 1.73 lakh crore in fraudulent claims over five years. "Contrary to the belief that insurers generate massive profits, the industry operates at a loss, with a combined ratio of 115 percent, paying Rs 115 for every Rs 100 earned in premiums. Employing over 6 million people, insurance is a cornerstone of economic growth. While improvements are possible, insurance remains essential for societal progress, demanding constructive engagement rather than destructive criticism. Without it, the social and economic consequences would be dire," added Singhel.

## Domestic composite materials industry to touch USD 2.8 Billion by 2030: Report

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Domestic composite materials industry is expected to grow at a 7.8 per cent annual growth rate to reach USD 2.8 billion by 2030, a report said. Composite materials or fibre-reinforced plastics (FRP) help in the circular economy as these are manufactured by combining multiple materials with different properties. The Indian composite materials market is estimated at USD 1.8 billion in 2024, FRP Institute said in its report. "The Indian composite materials market is likely to grow at a healthy CAGR of 7.8 per cent over the next six years to reach USD 2.8 billion in 2030," the Chennai-based body said. The major growth



drivers for the industry will be increasing demand from sectors like electrical vehicles (EVs), renewable energy, transportation and construction industries, consumer and white goods, construction and defence. Government projects like

smart cities, hydrocarbon, freshwater transportation, sewage treatment system, and rehabilitation of water and sewage pipelines will also aid the growth of composite materials consumption. According to the report, India has an extremely low per

capita consumption of composites at 0.55 kg as compared to matured markets such as the US with 11.5 kg followed by Germany at 7.7 kg. FRP Institute along with industry stakeholders will discuss the ways and opportunities to increase the consumption of the materials in India at the upcoming 'International Conference and Exhibition on Reinforced Plastics (ICERP 2025)' scheduled for January 21-23, 2025 in Mumbai. FRP Institute Chairman Shekhar Sardessai said ICERP 2025 will offer an opportunity for professionals to explore new technologies, latest industry trends, and emerging applications of composites across important industries of India's growth story.

## Budget 2025-26 needs to focus on capex, infrastructure spending: RBI MPC member Nagesh Kumar

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget for financial year 2025-26, needs to focus on capital expenditure and infrastructure spending to boost economic growth and make it more sustainable, RBI Monetary Policy Committee member Nagesh Kumar said on Sunday. The eminent economist noted that sustaining infrastructure expenditure and building it further would be very helpful for creating a much more robust trajectory of economic growth in India. "In the context of the slight economic slowdown that we observed in the second quarter,



and overall, there is a need to boost growth and make it more robust, more sustainable. "The finance minister would

do well to continue this momentum (in Budget 2025-26), which she herself started two years ago, of putting great emphasis on capex, infrastructure spending and increasing it to very healthy levels," he said in an interview to PTI Videos. The Union Budget for 2025-26, set to be presented by Sitharaman on February 1, arrives amidst global economic uncertainties and moderating domestic growth. "Because after suffering from the COVID pandemic, the Indian economy suffered a lot, after that it showed a robust recovery, but this pent up demand which drove the Indian economic growth for

the past few years, is now coming to an end. "And so then the Indian economy is back to the trajectory which was there in pre-COVID times, and it now needs to be given a little bit of a boost to public spending," he said. Sitharaman in her last year's budget had said that the government will provide Rs 11.11 lakh crore for capital expenditure for 2024-25 and introduce viability gap funding to spur private investment in infrastructure. India's second quarter (July-September) GDP growth has slumped to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent. Responding to a question on

weakening of rupee, Kumar said it is more than rupee depreciation, it is the strengthening of the dollar. According to him, all different currencies are weakening vis-a-vis dollar, because the dollar is becoming very strong, and that is largely due to the strong performance of the American economy and the expectation that the new administration led by Donald Trump will do something to strengthen the US economy. "So this weakness of the rupee is largely the strengthening of the dollar and which is also leading to the outflows of FII positions from India. So when there is too much demand for dollars, the rupee tends to

depreciate," Kumar observed. He said the fact that other currencies are also depreciating, one has to take a relative look. "My feeling is that rupee is still in real terms a bit appreciated and overvalued," Kumar said, adding that managing rupee at a more competitive exchange rate, which is not overvalued, is healthy for exports, for India's manufacturing efforts. The rupee is currently hovering around 86.60 against the greenback. It had also touched an all-time closing low of 86.70 on January 13. Replying to a question on resurgence of giveaways, also called freebies, Kumar said it is a concern for long-term

development. "Because the resources which could have been used for development purposes, for building infrastructure, for closing the gaps in the infrastructure that exist in the lagging regions or different states are promised to be given as handouts. "It is not a very healthy trend, and should be curbed, because people should be aware of where the money will come from," he said. Emphasising that there is a need to make voters aware that resources which are promised to them are not really freebies, Kumar said freebies cost the public in other forms in terms of development.

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## DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT MEN'S SKINCARE

By Dr MEGHNA MOUR

The men's skincare industry is witnessing a noteworthy transformation, driven by changing perceptions, rising awareness, and evolving consumer behaviours. Globally, the men's skincare products market size was valued at USD 16.94 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to USD 29.61 billion by 2033. Closer to home, the Indian men's grooming market is estimated to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.1% from 2024 to 2030. The growing prominence of social media, influence of celebrities, and exposure to global beauty standards have also inspired a considerable number of Indian men to pay closer attention to their appearance, actively seeking ways to enhance it. Against this backdrop, let's explore the myths and facts surrounding men's skincare and the key trends shaping this segment in 2025.

**MYTH 1:** Skincare is not masculine  
**FACT:** Skincare is health care  
 Historically, skincare has been misperceived as a feminine activity, creating a stigma that dissuaded many



men from prioritising it. However, in today's world, skincare is increasingly seen as an essential aspect of self-care and overall wellness. Experts stress that skin health is as crucial as other aspects of physical well-being, such as diet and exercise. Brands are addressing this shift by introducing gender-neutral products and campaigns that promote inclusivity. The aim is to dismantle outdated

stereotypes and encourage men to embrace skincare as a vital component of their daily lives.

**MYTH 2:** Men's skin is the same as women's  
**FACT:** Men's skin has unique needs  
 A common misconception is that skincare products are universally effective. However, men's skin differs



from women's. It is thicker, has higher collagen density, and tends to produce more oil due to testosterone levels. Recognising these differences, brands are now developing targeted formulations to address specific concerns like excess sebum, larger pores, and post-shave irritation, ensuring that men receive tailored solutions for their skin.

**MYTH 3:** Sunscreen is optional  
**FACT:** Daily SPF is non-negotiable  
 Despite the proven benefits of sunscreen, many men have traditionally neglected sun protection. This oversight contributes to premature aging, hyperpigmentation, and increased skin cancer risk. In 2025, lightweight and non-greasy sunscreens designed specifically for men are driving a shift in habits. These

products are often integrated into daily-use items like moisturizers and serums, making sun protection more accessible and convenient.

**MYTH 4:** Aging signs cannot be reversed  
**FACT:** Prevention and repair are possible  
 While aging is inevitable, modern skincare science offers tools to slow down and even repair its visible effects. Products with retinol, peptides, hyaluronic acid, and collagen-boosting ingredients are increasingly popular among men looking to address wrinkles, fine lines, and sagging skin.

**MYTH 5:** Natural ingredients are always better  
**FACT:** Science-based solutions matter  
 While natural ingredients are popular, they aren't always suitable for every skin type. Men are learning to embrace scientifically backed formulations with proven efficacy over trendy, all-natural claims. Ingredients like niacinamide, salicylic acid, and ceramides remain staples for addressing common concerns such as acne, uneven tone, and hydration.  
 — The author is an MBBS, DDV, DVD and Aesthetic Physician



## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES

By Dr APOORVA SHRIVASTAVA

In today's world, sedentary lifestyles have become increasingly prevalent, driven by technological advancements, desk-based jobs, and reduced physical activity. While these changes have brought convenience, they have also contributed to a surge in health problems such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and musculoskeletal disorders. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, and one highly effective solution lies in accessible, high-quality active physiotherapy.

**THE SEDENTARY EPIDEMIC:** Prolonged sitting and limited movement are now recognised as significant health risks. Studies show that sitting for more than eight hours a day without regular physical activity increases the risk of premature death by up to 20%. Additionally, sedentary behavior often leads to muscle weakness, joint stiffness, and poor posture, which can result in chronic pain and reduced mobility. These issues are not limited to adults. Children and teenagers, too, are increasingly falling victim to inactivity, with screen time often replacing outdoor play. This highlights the urgent need for interventions that promote movement and physical well-being across all age groups.

**THE ROLE OF ACTIVE PHYSIOTHERAPY:** Active physiotherapy stands out as a powerful tool in combating the ill effects of sedentary lifestyles. Unlike passive treatments that involve modalities like heat, ice, or electrical stimulation, active physiotherapy emphasises patient involvement through therapeutic exercises, stretching, and strengthening routines. This approach not only alleviates pain and restores function but also empowers individuals to take charge of their health. High-quality active physiotherapy programs focus on personalised care. A thorough assessment identifies specific issues, such as tight hamstrings, weak



core muscles, or joint misalignment, and targets them with tailored exercises. This individualised approach ensures faster recovery and long-term benefits. Moreover, active physiotherapy can improve cardiovascular health, enhance muscle tone, and boost mental well-being. Regular movement releases endorphins, reducing stress and anxiety—common side effects of sedentary lifestyles.

**ACCESSIBILITY: BRIDGING THE GAP:** Active physiotherapy, despite its effectiveness, often remains inaccessible due to factors like cost, geographic constraints, and a lack of awareness. Bridging these gaps requires targeted strategies to make this essential service more widely available. Expanding tele-physiotherapy platforms can allow

individuals to access guided active rehabilitation programs from their homes, breaking location barriers. Establishing affordable physiotherapy clinics in underserved areas can further ensure inclusivity.

**A PATH TO HEALTHIER LIVES:** The challenges posed by sedentary lifestyles are undeniable, but they are not insurmountable. Active physiotherapy provides an evidence-based, patient-centered approach to restoring health and preventing future issues. By making high-quality physiotherapy accessible to all, society can take a significant step toward combating the epidemic of inactivity and fostering a culture of movement and vitality.  
 — The author is CEO & Founder, Resolve360



By ANURAAG BHARDWAJ

Our surroundings profoundly influence our mental and emotional well-being, shaping how we think, feel, and interact with the world. Thoughtfully designed spaces have the power to reduce stress, boost creativity, and inculcate a sense of belonging. By blending nature, aesthetics, privacy, and community, architecture becomes a tool for healing and connection. Go through how innovative design can enhance mental wellness and enrich our lives.

**BIOPHILIC DESIGN:** Incorporating natural elements like plants, water features, and natural light into our environments can have a profound impact on reducing stress and improving cognitive function. Studies have shown that exposure to natural environments can lower cortisol levels, blood pressure, and heart rate, while also improving mood and cognitive functioning. This is because natural environments have the power to calm our minds and promote relaxation

**SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY:** Architecture plays a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging and connection to our surroundings. When buildings are

## SPACES THAT HEAL



designed with the community in mind, they can create a sense of place and identity. This, in turn, can lead to increased social connections, a sense of belonging, and improved mental health. For instance, public spaces that incorporate natural elements, like parks or gardens, can become community hubs, promoting social interaction.

**PRIVACY AND PERSONAL SPACE:** Having access to quiet, private spaces is essential for mental rejuvenation. These spaces allow us to retreat from the world, recharge, and reflect. In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to get overwhelmed, and having a private sanctuary can be a lifesaver. Architects and designers can incorporate private spaces into buildings, such as meditation rooms, quiet lounges, or even private offices.

**AESTHETICS AND BEAUTY:** Visually appealing and inspiring spaces can uplift our mood and reduce stress. When we're surrounded by beauty, it can stimulate our minds, promote creativity, and even reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Architects and designers can incorporate aesthetic elements, such as natural materials, artwork, or stunning views, to create spaces that inspire and uplift us.

In conclusion, our surroundings play a significant role in shaping our mental health. By incorporating biophilic design, providing private spaces, and creating aesthetically pleasing environments, we can promote mental well-being and improve our overall quality of life.

— The author is an architect and is the founder of Anjaney Vastu & AB Architects







Govt. of Uttarakhand



देवभूमि रजत उत्सव  
Uttarakhand State Emblem



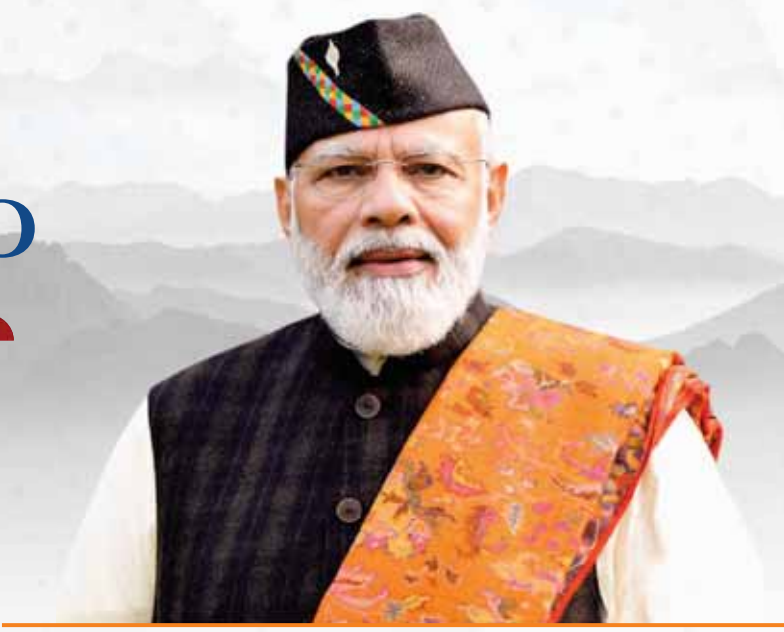
38<sup>वें</sup> राष्ट्रीय खेल  
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रजत जयंती वर्ष



युवा कार्यक्रम  
एवं खेल मंत्रालय  
MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH AFFAIRS  
AND SPORTS



**Pushkar Singh Dhami**  
Chief Minister, Uttarakhand



**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister

A WARM WELCOME TO

# 38<sup>th</sup> National Games UTTARAKHAND

28<sup>th</sup> Jan - 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 2025

SANKALP SE SHIKHAR TAK

## Venues for National Games

**Dehradun:** Squash, Archery, Shooting Pistol & Rifle, 5x5 & 3x3 Basketball, Gymnastics, Netball, Wushu, Judo, Rugby Sevens, Lawn Bowl, Athletics, Weightlifting, Badminton, Table tennis, Tennis

**Rishikesh & Tehri:** Extreme slalom, Canoeing slalom, Beach handball, Beach Volleyball, Beach Kabaddi.

**UdhamSingh Nagar:** Cycling Trek, Cycling Road, Handball, Volleyball, Shooting Trap, Skate, Mallakhamb.

**Haldwani:** Football, Kho-Kho, Taekwondo, Modern Pentathlon, Swimming, Fencing, Triathlon.

**Haridwar:** Hockey, Kabaddi, Kushti, Kalaripayattu.

**New Tehri:** Kayaking and Canoeing (Spring), rowing.

**Nainital(Bhimtal):** Cycling MTB.

**Almora:** Yogasan

**Pithoragarh:** Boxing

**Champawat:** Rafting

About 10,000 players from across the country will showcase their sporting skills

Organization of the National Games will provide a new platform to the sporting talent of Uttarakhand.

Players from across the country will showcase their strength across 35 sports events.

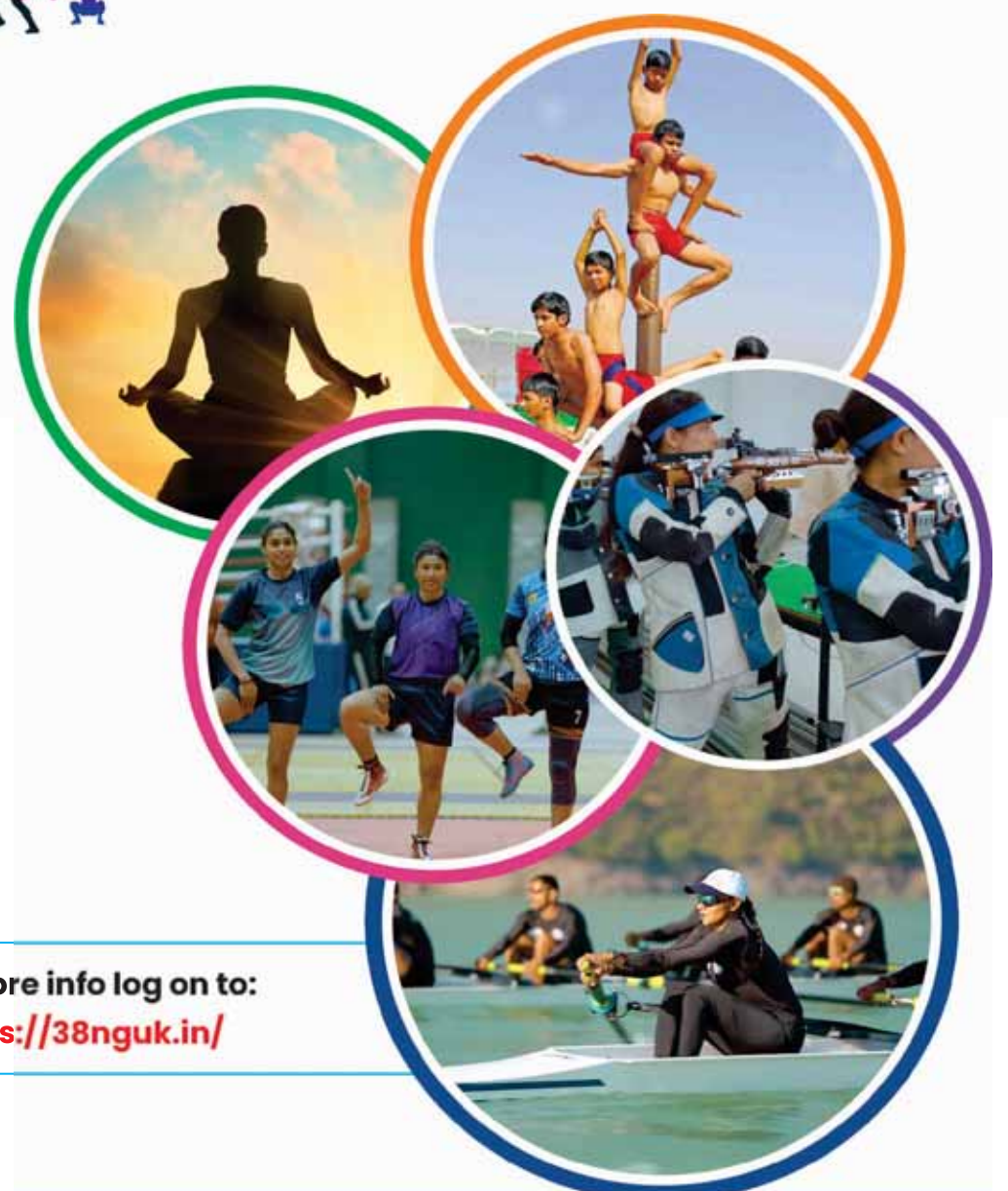
Yoga and Malkhamb have been included in the National Games.



Tejaswini (Torch)



Mauli (Mascot)



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