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Congress State vice president resigns ahead of ULB polls

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In a major jolt to Uttarakhand Congress ahead of the Urban Local Bodies election, the vice president (Organisation) Mathura Dutt Joshi resigned from the primary membership of the party on Saturday. He along with two other senior leaders, Bittu Karnatak and Jagat Singh Khati, joined the BJP in a programme organised at the State office of the party. Joshi has served the Congress party in many capacities and was considered to be the second in command in the party organisation of the State. Joshi sent his resignation letter to the national president

Mallikarjun Kharge. In the letter he said that he is resigning from the party after serving it for 48 long years.

The Congress party also expelled Joshi for a period of six years from the party for engaging in anti-party activity. Joshi had expressed his annoyance at the denial of the Mayoral ticket to his wife from Pithoragarh and had threatened to resign from the party.

The Congress party has nominated Anju Lunthi as the mayoral candidate from Pithoragarh. Lunthi had contested the by-election of

Pithoragarh Assembly constituency in 2019 which was necessitated after the death of Prakash Pant after the senior leader and the current MLA Mayukh Mahar declined to contest the by-election.

The candidature of Lunthi has also not gone down well with the party MLA from Pithoragarh, Mayukh Mahar who is openly supporting an independent candidate in Pithoragarh.

Bittu Karnatak, another senior leader of Congress resigned from the party after being denied mayoral ticket from Almora.

BJP set to establish local body government, says Dhama after senior Congress leaders join party

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama said that the Bharatiya Janata Party is set to form the government at the local body level. He said this at a programme held at the party's State office here on Saturday where senior Congress leaders joined the party. The now former Congress State vice president Mathura Dutt Joshi, Bittu Karnatak and former district Panchayat head Jagat Singh Khati along with their supporters joined the Congress on the occasion. The former senior Congress leaders who shifted claimed that the public believes in the developmental agenda of the BJP and this is why members of other parties are also joining the BJP. There is no respect for capable, decent

of Uttarakhand have appreciated our developmental agenda and elected us again in the 2022 Assembly election, in addition to electing the BJP in the five Lok Sabha constituencies and ensuring our victory in the Kedarnath Assembly bypoll. Similarly, we will register a bumper victory in the local body polls," Dhama said.

Bhatt welcomed the former Congress leaders into the BJP, adding that he will ensure their honour in the party. "All of you have joined the BJP to participate in the State's developmental journey. If this trend of Congress leaders joining the BJP continues, it won't be long before the Congress will not be in a position to remain the



and dedicated workers in the Congress, which is unfortunate, they added.

Dhama and the BJP State president Mahendra Bhatt welcomed the Congress leaders into the party. Speaking on the occasion, Dhama said that all dedicated and capable political workers are welcomed to the world's biggest political party. He said that their entry will surely benefit the BJP in the urban local body elections. Questioning the maturity of the Congress leadership, he said that it had ignored capable and decent members. "The people

main opposition party. The factionalism and denigration of capable leaders in the Congress is concerning because such an attitude is unfortunate for democracy and the society," he said.

Joshi said that he had worked devotedly for the Congress but this is not valued anymore. "I have joined the BJP and assure that I will serve this party dedicatedly. I am impressed by the way India and Uttarakhand are progressing under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and CM Dhama," he said.

Winter Char Dham Yatra to be a game changer for Uttarakhand: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama said that the winter Char Dham Yatra is eliciting very good response. He said that more than 40,000 pilgrims had visited the winter abodes of the Char Dham till December 30 and the number increased significantly on the New Year eve. The CM was addressing the oath taking ceremony of Uttaranchal Press Club on Saturday. He said that the success of the winter Char Dham Yatra is very encouraging as it will prove to be a game changer. Dhama said that the winter Char Dham Yatra will ensure that the Yatra remains operational throughout the year. Reiterating the commitment of his government on implementation of Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the CM said that the code will be implemented in the State this month. He said that the State government is working on preparing a stringent land law in Uttarakhand. Dhama said that the State government has asked the State adminis-

The CM said that the unemployment rate in the State has declined by 4.4 per cent and the State government is moving on the right track to double its GSDP by the year 2027. He claimed that the GSDP has already witnessed an increase of 33 per cent. In the start-ups the State is now in the leader's category. The CM said that despite interruption of some days due to the disaster, more than 35 lakh pilgrims visited the Char Dham last year. He said that the NITI Aayog has stamped its approval on the growth story of Uttarakhand as it has placed it on number one position in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). "The State is in the top five states in the country in attracting investment and is in first position in the Himalayan States," he said.

Dhama said that the first international Pravasi Uttarakhandi Sammelan will be organised on January 12.

The objective of the conclave is to include the efforts of the non-resident Uttarakhandis in the development of the State.

The CM said that the State government has increased the corpus of the journalist welfare fund and directed the officers to start a group insurance scheme for the journalists. Dhama said that the media played an important role in the freedom struggle of the nation and in the statehood movement of Uttarakhand.

He congratulated the new executive body of the Uttaranchal Press Club.

The founder president of the club Devendra Bhasin, director general information Banshidhar Tiwari, president of press club Bhupendra Singh Kandari, general secretary Surendra Dasila and others attended the programme.

District hospital seeks clarification from Health DG on minister's bedsheets direction

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The administration of the Deen Dayal Upadhyay District Hospital has once again sent a letter to the director general of Health seeking clarification on an order issued by Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat regarding the use of different-coloured bedsheets in patient wards.

Informing about this, the medical superintendent of the hospital Dr VS Chauhan said that the Health minister recently instructed all government hospitals in the State to implement a routine practice of changing bed linens in patient wards. Additionally, he recommended that the hospital management utilise bed linens of various colours

each day. In line with the Health minister's guidance, the hospital administration has begun to acquire bedsheets in different colours corresponding to each day of the week. During the procurement of bed linens, the hospital administration encountered confusion regarding the frequency of linen change—whether they should be changed daily or weekly, he added.

He further said that to avoid any violation of guidelines, the administration has paused the purchase of bed linens and sent a letter to the director general of Health for further clarification.

Unfortunately, after receiving the response letter from

the director general of Health, the hospital administration is still unclear about the instructions regarding the specifics of the order. This includes details about the colours to be used and the frequency of changes. In light of this, they have sent another letter to the director general of Health to clarify the order in detail. Chauhan emphasised that the hospital administration will only resume the purchasing process for bed linens once all order details are clarified by the authorities. It will be recalled that the district hospital plans to acquire approximately 2,000 to 3,000 bed linens in various colours, with funding provided by the State government under the Ayushman scheme.

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UVSP to start class X & XII board exams on Feb 21

PNS ■ RAMNAGAR

The Uttarakhand Vidyalyai Shiksha Parishad (UVSP) will start the written board examinations for classes X and XII in 2025 on February 21. The exams will conclude on March 11. This information was shared by the secretary of the UVSP Vinod Simlati. Informing further about this, Simlati said that a meeting was chaired by the UVSP director on Saturday. During this meeting, it was decided that the written board examinations for 2025 will be held from February 21



to March 11. Additionally, practical examinations under the UVSP will take place from

January 16 to February 15. He further said that 1,245 examination centres have been selected across the State for the board examinations. Regarding the number of students enrolled for the board examinations, Simlati stated that a total of 2,23,387 students from classes X and XII will be taking the board examinations in 2025. Of these, 1,13,688 students will be sitting for the class X examination. Additionally, 1,09,699 students will be sitting for the class XII examination, he added.

HC rejects Welhams' petition seeking cancellation of GO on Covid fee waiver

PNS ■ NAINITAL

The Uttarakhand High Court has rejected the petition filed by Dehradun-based boarding school Welham Boys' School challenging the government order regarding exemption of other charges for students except tuition fees during the Covid-19 pandemic. The HC stated that the State government has the constitutional right to issue such an order. It will be recalled that during 2021, when physical classes were not being conducted in schools, this school had filed a petition seeking the cancellation of the said government order. The matter was heard by the bench

of justices Manoj Kumar Tiwar and Pankaj Purohit. The petitioner had contended that the government does not have the right to pass any order related to the fees in private non-aided boarding schools. The petition had sought the cancellation of the 2021 order issued by the government. During the hearing, the counsel representing the government stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic when educational institutions across the nation were closed, some private non-aided boarding schools were charging their students tuition fees, hostel fees, mess charges, laundry

charges, horse riding charges, developmental charges, swimming fee and other such expenses. The government's orders had stipulated that since physical classes were not allowed and virtual classes were being conducted, the schools would charge only the tuition fees from those students who are attending the online classes. The government had to intervene in its role as the guardian of public interest so that private schools do not take advantage of their prominent position to exploit students and their parents the government counsel stated.

Social media influencers to promote 38th National Games

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Sports minister Rekha Arya said that to promote the upcoming 38th National Games on a global scale, the State will involve

case not only the sports events during the National Games, but also the tourist attractions, religious sites, cultural cus-

Games should be made a public event, encouraging every citizen of the state to act as ambassador for Uttarakhand. Arya also ex-



social media influencers. She said this during a meeting held on Saturday with some of the State's social media influencers.

tomms and local cuisine of Uttarakhand. This approach aims to highlight the diverse features of Debhoomi and share them with the world. Arya stated that this initiative would not only enhance the popularity of the National Games but also boost tourism in the State in the long run.

pressed her intention to support the social media influencers by asking how the Sports department could assist them in their efforts. She assured them that the government would provide all necessary information. The influencers present at the meeting also shared their suggestions on how to make the National Games more popular.

Arya emphasised that, in addition to providing formal coverage of the games, social media influencers should create content through their blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram accounts. She encouraged them to show-

Further, she said that the upcoming National

USCW submits spa SOP to State administration for approval

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Acknowledging the safety concerns of citizens at spa centers, the Uttarakhand State Commission for Women has recently prepared Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and submitted them to the State administration for approval. Notably, there have been multiple reports of incidents involving spa establishments across the State that have allegedly exploited women. As a result, the relevant authorities and the USCW have made an attempt to address these issues. Addressing the media recently, USCW chairwoman Kusum Kandwal addressed the complaints she received regarding spa centres. She also shared information about the SOP prepared by the commission, which outlines the proper functioning of these establishments.

and confirming that staff hold the necessary qualifications in massage therapy. Further, she emphasised that it is essential for spa centres to ensure that male clients receive massages from male therapists, and that female clients are served by female therapists.

Talking to 'The Pioneer', Kandwal said that she has been consistently monitoring and acknowledging the exploitation of women at spa centres throughout the State. In several instances, she personally visited these locations to address the situation, Kandwal claimed. However, to achieve a permanent solution, the commission has recently drafted SOP to ensure the proper management of spa centres Statewide. The SOP includes guidelines for the operation of these establishments, which encompass verifying the credentials of spa employees, providing separate massage rooms for male and female clients

She further emphasised that the aforementioned SOP has recently been submitted to the State administration for approval. Any modifications or updates will be undertaken by the State administration, after which the SOP will become applicable for implementation. The commission has been awaiting the approval of the SOP. It is anticipated that the SOP for spa centres will be approved following the conclusion of the nodal code of conduct for the urban bodies election. She said that after the election, she will send a reminder letter to the administration regarding the approval of the SOP for spa centres.

Warm spell continues, plains colder than mountains

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The dry and warm weather has continued in Uttarakhand with mountainous regions like Mukteshwar registering a minimum temperature higher than the minimum temperature in the Terai, in Dehradun on Saturday. The weather is likely to remain similar on Sunday with the State Meteorological Centre forecasting dry weather likely to prevail across the State today. The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a mainly clear to partly cloudy sky with the likelihood of mist/fog occurring during morning hours. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be

about 22 degrees Celsius and eight degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

The maximum and minimum temperatures on Saturday were 26.4 degrees Celsius and 7.8 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 20.5 degrees Celsius and eight degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 22.1 degrees Celsius and 8.9 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 21 degrees Celsius and 9.6 degrees Celsius in New Tehri. The maximum and minimum temperatures in all these locations were at least one to maximum 10 degrees above normal on Saturday.

Research, AI & drone technology key for growth of the State: Governor

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The governor lieutenant general (ret'd) Gurmit Singh said that the State should move forward on the path of development with the help of technology, research, artificial intelligence and drone technology.

in mind the needs of the time, considering the totality and various dimensions of education and focus on how the all-round development of society, state and nation can be done through education.

He was addressing the ninth convocation ceremony of Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani on Saturday.



The governor said that India can set new records through knowledge and science. He said that he is very happy that the number of girl students receiving degrees in the convocation ceremony is more than boys. This shows that the government's resolution of 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' is being reflected as an achievement. He said that the way girls are achieving success today, India is moving towards becoming a developed nation in the year 2047.

Addressing the programme, Vice Chancellor Om Prakash Singh Negi said that Uttarakhand is offering 94 courses under 14 branches. He said that various skill and employment-oriented programs are being conducted in the university. He said that the university has adopted five villages under which many works related to education and computer awareness are being done in the adopted villages.

Uttarakhand Open University has also designed many of its courses according to the needs of the state. In these courses, students are studying the historical-cultural and literary heritage of the state of Uttarakhand. The university has taken initiatives in every field according to the needs of the state.

The Governor said that the Open University has provided opportunities to many people who could not pursue formal education, who wanted to enhance their academic qualifications, and who wanted to study for self-enrichment and advancement of knowledge. The Open University has made higher education accessible to the masses and people from different age groups, including teenagers and working adults, have benefited from this education system. Distance learning has played a commendable role in increasing the reach of higher education. The University has played a vital role in providing higher education opportunities to students from remote areas, rural areas and economically weaker backgrounds.

He said that education is not the accumulation of knowledge and information. The governor exhorted the students to recognize their potential and self-confidence.

IN BRIEF

First randomisation of ULB poll personnel done in Tehri

NEW TEHRI: For the successful conduct of the Urban Local Body election slated on January 23, the first randomisation of the poll personnel here was done on Saturday in the presence of the district magistrate Tehri Garhwal Mayur Dixit in New Tehri. The DM inspected the ballot boxes and directed the staff assigned with the polling duty to ensure a free and fair poll. They should visit the polling booths and design the information placards to be placed at the booths, he said. Among the senior officers present on the occasion were the chief development officer, Abhishek Tripathi and additional district magistrate AK Pandey.



Woman sub-inspector in Ramnagar suspended

NAINITAL: Nainital SSP Prahlad Narayan Meena suspended a woman sub-inspector working at the Ramnagar kotwali on the charge of dereliction of duty on Saturday. Police said that the suspension followed allegations that the officer had been sitting on the cases registered at the kotwali, thus neglecting her duty of preparing the required documents to deliver justice promptly.

SDRF recovers body from barrage

RISHIKESH: An SDRF team recovered a body from the Pashulok barrage on Saturday. On finding a body floating on the barrage, Lachmanjula police station informed SDRF. The team led by the sub-inspector Pankaj Kharola reached the spot and the operation started. The body was later handed over to the district police for identification. Police said that the body was yet to be identified.

DM flags off bike rally from Mussoorie Diversion

DEHRADUN: The Dehradun district magistrate Savin Basnal flagged off a cycle and bike rally dedicated to road safety and environment from Mussoorie Diversion, Rajpur Road early on Saturday. The rally ended in Mussoorie. The DM said that the rally had been organised with two objectives: environmental protection and road safety. Both were important, he said, adding that it was the collective responsibility to protect the environment and mitigate mishaps by sincerely observing the traffic safety rules.

In his address, secretary Higher Education, Ranjita Kumar Sinha said that Uttarakhand is the first state in the country to implement the New Education Policy (NEP-2020). He said that people associated with the field of higher education should constantly keep

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3	सकमुंडा जलाशय निर्माण एवं पेयजल कार्य	जयहरीखाल	जिला योजना	15000.00	1000.00+जी.एच.टी.	4 माह
4	अदवाड़ा टैंक एवं पेयजल कार्य	रिखणीखाल	जिला योजना	10000.00	500.00+जी.एच.टी.	2 माह
5	अनंदौली पेयजल कार्य	रिखणीखाल	जिला योजना	16000.00	1000.00+जी.एच.टी.	4 माह
6	नैनीताल पश्चिम पेयजल योजना रखरखाव एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य	रिखणीखाल	जिला योजना/राज्य सैक्टर	50000.00	2000.00+जी.एच.टी.	12 माह
7	निगोली ऑपरेटर कक्ष एवं वितरण प्रणाली कार्य	रिखणीखाल	जिला योजना/राज्य सैक्टर	30000.00	2000.00+जी.एच.टी.	4 माह
8	सिखेत पेयजल कार्य	रिखणीखाल	जिला योजना	10000.00	500.00+जी.एच.टी.	4 माह
9	दुम्हर्ष पेयजल कार्य (सामान्य मरम्मत)	नैनीताल	जिला योजना	16000.00	1000.00+जी.एच.टी.	4 माह
10	कमेडा जौन रखरखाव एवं अनुसूचित कार्य	नैनीताल	जिला योजना	24000.00	2000.00+जी.एच.टी.	6 माह

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S. No.	Name of the Borrower/Guarantor	Details of Security/Property	Date of Demand Notice	Date of possession notice affixed	Amount Outstanding
1.	Branch: Kotdwar Borrower: Smt Pushpa Devi W/o Sh. Sohan Lal Gaur R/o Lalpur, P.O. Pada -mpur Sukhro, Lalpur, Kotdwar, and Shri Arun Gaur S/o Sh Sohan Lal Gaur R/o Lalpur, P.O. Padampur Sukhro, Lalpur, Kotdwar (Co-Borrower)	Detail of the property mortgaged-Immovable property measuring area 0.029 hec or 290 Sq m, situated at Village lalpur, patti Sukhro, Tehsil Kotdwar Distt Pauri Garhwal Uttarakhand, belonging to Smt. Pushpa Devi W/o Sh. Sohan Lal Gaur, through gift deed dated 29.10.2013 in Book No. 1, Zild No. 397, page 145, A.D. Bahi no. 1, Zild no. 500, Page no. 251-258 at Serial No. 4050 registered in the office of Sub Registrar office Kotdwar, Distt Kotdwar, Distt Pauri Garhwal Uttarakhand. Property bounded as: North: Property of Smt. Pushpa Devi, West: Gharat Road, East: After Gul, Property of Khandwal Ji, South: Property of Sudarshan Ji.	02.09.2024	30.12.2024	Rs. 11,61,574.17 + interest thereon w.e.f. 01.06.2024 and other expenses less recovery if any

Date: 04.01.2025 Place: Kotdwar Authorised Officer

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The general public is informed that I have changed my name from Pankaj Singh to Pankaj Negi and in future I should be known as Pankaj Negi S/o Kanak Singh Address:892, Sarvpriya Vihar Colony, Kakhhal, Haridwar, UK

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Verma, Bhiduri vs Kejriwal, Atishi: High stakes Delhi polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With less than a week left before the announcement of Delhi assembly polls, the BJP has released its first list of 29 candidates, awarding tickets to four sitting MLAs, two former MPs, and eight former MLAs. The BJP's first list features eight prominent leaders who switched over from the Congress and AAP in recent months.

Former West Delhi MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma will contest against AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi assembly constituency. The New Delhi seat, held by Kejriwal since 2013, will witness the former chief minister taking on the sons of two other former chief ministers. Verma is the son of Sahib Singh Verma, who had a two-year tenure as chief minister in the 1990s. Former West Delhi MP Verma started his preparations for contesting from the seat even before he was announced as the official candidate, saying he had been given the go-ahead by national leaders. The Congress candidate from the seat is former three-term chief minister Sheila Dikshit's son Sandeep Dikshit.

"I thank my party's top leadership... I hope that the trust that the party has shown in me, I'll live up to it... When Delhi was facing COVID-19, when they needed Oxygen, Arvind Kejriwal Ji was distributing a 'free bottle on every bottle'... There are many works in Delhi - like cleaning



Yamuna, and curbing pollution... when the BJP forms the govt, we will do all these works," Verma said after the BJP released its first list. Former South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri will face chief minister Atishi in Kalkaji. Congress has fielded Alka Lamba from here, making it a triangular contest.

Four former Delhi ministers - Kailash Gahlot and Raaj Kumar Anand, who served in the outgoing AAP government, along with Arvinder Singh Lovely and Rajkumar Chauhan, who held key portfolios during Sheila Dikshit's government from 2003 to 2013 - have also been given tickets. Gahlot's seat has been shifted from Najafgarh to

Bijwasan, while Anand will contest from the reserved constituency of Patel Nagar. The two-time Najafgarh MLA resigned as minister and quit AAP to join the BJP in November. Tarvinder Singh Marwah, a three-time former Congress MLA from Jangpura who joined the BJP in 2022, will contest from the same seat. He is pitted against senior AAP leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia. Former Delhi minister Arvind Singh Lovely has been fielded from the Gandhi Nagar seat in east Delhi, replacing incumbent BJP MLA Anil Bajpai. Bajpai had defeated Lovely from the seat in the 2020 polls.

Kejriwal promises water bill waivers post elections

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) debt accumulated to over Rs 73,000 crore, former Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party convener Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday made another promise to the people of Delhi that his party would waive inflated water bills if his party was voted to power in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls likely to be held next month. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal urged the people not to pay inflated water bills and said that 12 lakh families got bills of zero amount. "But when I went to jail, I don't know what these people (BJP) did behind my back." He assured that these erroneous bills would be waived off after the elections, offering relief to affected residents.

The AAP government is providing 20,000 litres of free water to Delhi households. Interestingly, Kejriwal's AAP is in the power in Delhi. This comes after announcing six freebies to the people of Delhi including Mahila Samman Scheme under which Rs 2100 per month to be given to every woman, Pujaris and Granthi's monthly salary and free treatment to senior citizens. Insiders say the DJB's financial losses have jumped from Rs 344.05 crore in the 2019-20 fiscal to Rs 1,196.22 crore in 2021-22, while the board has a debt of more than Rs 73,196.55 crore, which includes Rs 37,366.59 crore in principal amount and Rs 35,829.96 crore in interest.

Fresh violence erupts in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

After the apologies by Manipur chief Minister N Biren Singh, fresh violence were reported from the north eastern State as security was beefed up in Kangpokpi district where the Superintendent of Police was injured in a mob attack for failing to "remove" the central armed forces as per the demands of Kuki groups. A mob on Friday evening attacked the office of M Prabhakar, throwing stones and other "projectiles" to vent their anger over the continued deployment of central forces, particularly the Saibol village. Vehicles of district police kept within the compound of the SP's office were vandalised. Prabhakar



Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla chairs meeting to review the state's security and law and order situation, at Raj Bhavan, in Imphal

was injured after being hit on the forehead by some projectile, officials said. Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla who took over the charge chaired a meeting with senior police, CRPF, BSF, Assam Rifles officials on Saturday and reviewed the

comprehensive security situation in the state. The Governor of Manipur chaired a security meeting at Raj Bhavan in Imphal. Taking stock of the prevailing law and order situation, the Governor reviewed the security apparatus and its

arrangements throughout the state, with a particular focus on border areas," the release issued by Raj Bhavan said. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023.

A senior officer in Imphal said a huge contingent of security forces have been deployed in the area. "Situation is now under control and being closely monitored," he added. In a statement, the police said that besides stones, the protestors attacked the SP office with petrol bombs. "Security forces retaliated against the mob and resorted to the use of adequate force to disperse the mob and the situation was brought under control," it said.

Nagaland CM calls for end to factionalism in Naga talks

PNS ■ KOHIMA

Nagaland deputy chief minister Yanthungo Patton, while emphasising that the Centre is willing to offer only one solution to the longstanding Naga political issue, on Saturday urged Naga underground factions and people to come together for a permanent resolution.

Addressing the 175th anniversary celebration of Lhisemia Thiuo, the amalgamation of different clans of Lhisemia Khel (sector) of Kohima village, Patton said, "The Centre, under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is ready to give us a solution only if our



Naga factions are united." The Centre has been holding political negotiations with the NSCN-IM since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 1997 and also inked the Framework Agreement in 2015. It also entered into parallel negotiations with the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (WC NNPGs), composed of at least seven Naga factions, in 2017. They signed the Agreed Position in November 2017. Negotiations between the Centre and Naga groups were declared to have concluded on October 30, 2019, by the then interlocutor and Governor of Nagaland, R N Ravi.

Fog causes rail, air traffic disruption



A train moves on a Srinagar-Baramulla railway track amid snow on a foggy winter afternoon, on the outskirts of Srinagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi airport on Saturday saw 19 flight diversions, many cancellations and over 400 flight delays as low visibility conditions due to dense fog impacted operations for the second straight day, reducing the visibility to zero in several areas for an unprecedented nine-hour stretch, the longest spell of the season. "Zero visibility prevailed for nine hours at Palam between 6 pm and 3 am (UTC), marking the longest spell of the season. The city's primary weather station, Safdarjung, recorded eight

hours of zero visibility, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). India's largest airline, IndiGo, temporarily halted both arrivals and departures. Airlines, including IndiGo and Air India, issued travel advisories urging customers to check their flight status before heading to the airport and allow extra time for travel. An official said 19 flights were diverted at the airport between 12.15 am and 1.30 am due to reduced visibility. Of them, 13 were domestic, four international and two non-scheduled flights. More than

WEATHER		
AQI		378
MAX		20°C
MIN		7.8°C

45 flights were cancelled due to bad weather conditions at Delhi as well as at the destination airports, the official said. As per information available on flight tracking website Flightradar24.Com, over 450 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport. "While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not

CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information. "Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," the Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a post on X at 6.56 am. CAT III facility allows aircraft to operate in low-visibility conditions. Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital is operated by DIAL, handles around 1,300 flight movements daily. "# 6 E Travel Advisory: Departures and arrivals at #DelhiAirport are currently on hold due to reduced visibility," IndiGo said in a post on X at 1.05 am on Saturday. Air India said in an update on X at 1.16 am that poor visibility due to dense fog was impacting flight operations in Delhi and parts of northern India.

A thick blanket of fog had enveloped Delhi on Friday as well, delaying more than 400 flights. In an update on X at 10.58 am, IndiGo said dense fog continued to affect visibility in Delhi, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Srinagar, Guwahati, and Patna, even during daytime. "We assure you that our teams are working diligently to assist all impacted customers, ensuring your journey resumes as soon as the weather improves," it said in another post at 11 am.

Delhi man scams 700 women using fake dating profiles

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested a 23-year-old man who allegedly scammed over 700 women after befriending them on dating applications by posing as a US-based model. The cyber police station of West district arrested Tushar Bisht on charges of exploiting online platforms such as Bumble and Snapchat to lure his victims, blackmail them using private photos and videos, and extort money. According to police, during the day, he works as a recruiter at a private company in Uttar Pradesh's Noida. At night he turns into a US-based model on a soul-searching trip to India. His day job offered him security, and his nocturnal activities brought in the money through manipulation and blackmail. Tushar Singh Bisht, 23, was arrested from the Shakarpur area of East Delhi on Friday for defrauding over 700 women by posing as a model on dating platforms. A resident of Delhi, Tushar has a



bachelor's degree in business administration (BBA). For the past three years, he had been employed as a technical recruiter at a private company in Noida. His father works as a driver, his mother is a homemaker, and his sister is employed in Gurugram. "Posing as a US-based freelance model, the accused created fake identities using a virtual international mobile number and photographs of a Brazilian model," Deputy Commissioner of Police (West),

Vichitra Veer, said in the statement. Bisht used the fake profiles to connect with women aged between 18 and 30 years on various online dating platforms. "His primary targets were users of Bumble, Snapchat and WhatsApp," the statement said. The DCP said Bisht gained his victims' trust by engaging in conversations, and convinced them to share private and intimate images and videos. "Once he obtained the content, he resorted to blackmail, threatening to leak the sensitive material online, or sell them to dark web unless the victims paid him," the DCP said. Preliminary investigation revealed that the accused interacted with over 500 women on Bumble and 200 others on Snapchat and WhatsApp, police said. The accused's mobile phone contained incriminating evidence, including objectionable data of victims, a virtual mobile number, and details of financial transactions involving extortion.

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India 141-6 at stumps, lead by 145 runs against Australia in fifth Test

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Staying true to his aggressive style of play, generational talent Rishabh Pant conjured up a spectacular 33-ball-61 to somehow keep India afloat even as Australia remained in driver's seat in the fifth Test, which is poised for an intriguing finish. It was largely due to Pant's breathtaking knock that India finished the second day at 141 for 6 for an overall lead of 145. Pant entrained the packed SCG with four monstrous sixes and six boundaries.

His back-to-back sixes off Mitchell Starc into the heritage Ladies Members Stands were for posterity. Pant's knock prevented Indian second innings from falling apart with the visitors top and lower order struggling to negotiate Aussie attack on a track that was aided seam and bounce.

This was after unheralded bowling duo of Prasidh Krishna (3/42) and Nitish Reddy (2/32) complemented Mohammed Siraj

(3/51) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/33) to shoot Australia out for 181.

On a difficult track, Virat Kohli (6) and his top-order colleagues found Scott Boland (3/38) too hot to handle.

Kohli lost his wicket on outside the off stump line for the eighth successive time in this series.

The match is certain to end on the third day but if India will be able to defend the total will very much depend on whether skipper Jasprit Bumrah is fit to bowl full tilt. Bumrah underwent precautionary scans for an unspecified injury after he left the field in the post-lunch session in which he bowled just one over.

If even a half-fit Bumrah bowls, it won't be easy for Australia to chase even a 175-run target on a track with variable bounce and widening cracks.

Pant Power

Having curbed his natural instinct to attack during a sedate 40 in the first essay after being torn to shreds by the most important member of the Indian coaching staff for indiscreet shot selection



at the MCG, Pant perhaps cleared his mind about what he needed to do. He came in at a time when not just

Boland but even debutant Beau Webster was getting the ball to move a proverbial mile off the deck.

There was steep bounce available at the Randwick End (far end) where Kohli got out. Boland pitched it on hard length and got

both seam and bounce. The result was a now familiar dab towards slips as Kohli's future beyond 123 Tests looks doubtful.

This was after both KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal got a couple of rippers.

However once Pant came out, he was a man-on-a-mission as the first ball disappeared into the long-on stand. The fallen pull shot also came out of the closet. It was exhilarating stuff.

Pant rode on bounce and hit Webster over point but the two sixes off Starc do take the cake. It was understood that Pant was mentally not in frame due to unsolicited sermons from a coaching staff member, who despite knowing the dashing southpaw's game told him to play otherwise.

At one point, a clueless Pat Cummins was forced to put six fielders near the boundary ropes. The skipper himself who saw the back of Pant, inducing edge from a ball that rose. Indian and Australian fans gave a standing ovation to the diminutive

southpaw.

Third pacer steps up
In the post lunch session, Prasidh and Reddy more than made up for skipper Bumrah's absence as India took 51 overs to bowl out the hosts.

Steve Smith's (33) dismissal off Prasidh just before lunch disturbed Australia's rhythm.

Post lunch, Prasidh came from round the wicket from the Paddington End and removed Alex Carey (21) with an angled-in delivery. Carey was looking good but once Karnataka speedster found his length, he was literally unplayable.

Debutant Webster (57) justified his selection with a half-century but it was Reddy, coming for his second spell, sparked a collapse with wickets of Cummins and Mitchell Starc, both done in by subtle movement off the surface.

The final blow was dealt by Prasidh. He used the uneven bounce and cracks off the surface to get one bounce awkwardly at Webster and Jaiswal snaffled the catch.



Enough variable bounce to keep us in the game: Prasidh Krishna

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India's overall lead is not even close to the 200-run mark but pacer Prasidh Krishna says the unpredictable nature of the SCG track will keep them in the hunt since batting won't be easy for Australia in the fourth innings because of the variable bounce.

India ended the second day at 141 for six for an overall lead of 145. A win in the Sydney Test will ensure that India retain the Border Gavaskar Trophy.

"It is getting difficult in some areas. The ball is keeping low sometimes but there is enough bounce for us to be in the game and look for those edges. Try and beat them on either side of the bat," Prasidh said during the media interaction. He didn't put a number on what would be a defendable total for the visitors.

"There is no particular number in mind but then as many runs as we score would be great. We are ready to bowl them out for whatever," the Karnataka speedster, who got the prized scalp of Steve Smith in the first innings, said.

Prasidh got Smith at the stroke of lunch but during his spell in the first session, he was guilty of missing his length. He either went too full or too short.

"The difference was when I got back from lunch, I actually looked at where I was bowling. I sat with the analyst and we had a better idea of what my reference point is. When I came in to bowl next, that really helped."

Prasidh came to Australia at least three weeks earlier

compared to the senior team and played in the India A games. He looked good at MCG against Australia A.

"I did get a bit of confidence bowling in Australia and having played some red ball cricket previously in the Dulip Trophy I was in good rhythm. When I got the ball in hand, obviously there was a bit of nerves when I started off, the first over went well, the next few didn't go really well. But then I have enough people in the team who I can actually go to sit down and discuss what went wrong, what could have been better."

Prasidh thanked bowling coach Morne Morkel for helping him with his bowling plans. "Morne and myself, we kind of have a lot of discussions about what has to be done and things are going well for now."

The last Test that he played was in Cape Town in January 2024 and it has been a ride fraught with ups and downs for the lanky speedster, who had to undergo a back surgery in New Zealand.

Asked what changes he has brought in his bowling, he spoke about the mental shift from opening the bowling with Red SG Test for Karnataka and then coming one change for the national team where he got a semi-old Kookaburra with suppressed seam.

"That was a really good learning curve for me because every time I played for my state I was bowling with a new ball, coming here having to bowl one change, I looked at what everybody in the world does when they are bowling one change.

"I was just focused on my

achievements, she added, "I have seen so many of my co-athletes who are winning awards and are achievers. So, getting one of the national awards is something very prestigious."

"It is a proud moment for me. All the medals and awards are like a gift for me — a recognition of my hard work, dedication to the game, practicing every day, following everything, and being disciplined."

Born and raised in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, Nithya had lost her mother when she was just one year old. Her father and grandmother became her unwavering support system, with her brother standing by her side as a constant companion.

"I used to stay inside the house a lot, So just to get me

McDonald surprised by Pant's subdued play in first innings

PTI ■ SYDNEY

It was not at all surprising that Rishabh Pant bulldozed the Australian attack with his stroke-play in the second innings but his ultra-defensive approach on the opening day indeed was, Australia head coach Andrew McDonald said on Saturday.

Pant had laboured to 40 off 98 balls, taking multiple blows on his body during his 149-minute stay on the wicket. Pant had said that he was not in a frame of mind to attack. Pant, though, changed the gears effortlessly in the second innings, hitting Mitchell Starc for two massive sixes. Scott Boland and Beau Webster were not spared either as they too were lofted for a six each.

"First of all, it's not surprising, the way he plays. We were in fact a little bit surprised in the first innings, the way he went about his work. He's got an incredible ability to put pressure back on to bowlers," McDonald said, doffing his hat to India's biggest match-winner in Test cricket in recent years.

However, Australia didn't allow Pant to completely walk



away as Pat Cummins dismissed him just when things looked like getting out of hand.

"We're planning for that though, we'll plan leading into the summer. We bounced in and out of a few plans there and clearly kept taking on the boundary riders and was getting away with it and no, it was an innings that you would say was right for that time."

Boland has been difficult match-up for Kohli. Virat Kohli has been out eight times in his nine innings while fishing at deliveries on or outside the off-stump and

Australia head coach praised his bowlers, especially Scott Boland, who sent back the India stalwart four times in five Tests.

Does it seem easy to get Kohli out? "No, it's never easy to get Virat out," McDonald, trying to contain his smile of satisfaction.

"I give full credit to the bowlers and the execution of the plan. It's one thing to have a plan, but then to be able to execute is another thing. It's put him (Kohli) under immense pressure. And, look, he's tried some things."

"He's tried walking out of his crease. He's tried different tactics as well. But clearly that relentless nature of our bowlers, in particular, Scottie (Boland), the 'match-up' has been incredibly difficult for him to combat. But he's never an easy wicket, no."

This is a pitch for even contests

The traditional SCG wicket is usually a batting paradise and also helps the spinners towards the end but the ongoing Test has unfolded on a green top with variable bounce on offer.

McDonald did not hide his appreciation for the ground staff for preparing a fair track.

"The ground staff have done an incredible job in terms of, creating a wicket with something in it. Traditionally here it's quite benign and we've had a lot of draws, so a lot of people have been talking about the draws, so you're damned if you do it and damned if you don't. So this game's sped up."

"I think he's trying to produce an even contest between bat and ball. There's no doubt about that. It's made for interesting cricket."

Novak Djokovic beaten by big-serving Reilly Opelka in quarterfinals of Brisbane International

AP ■ BRISBANE

Novak Djokovic was beaten 7-6 (6), 6-3 by big-serving Reilly Opelka in the Brisbane International quarterfinals.

The 37-year-old Djokovic was playing his first tournament of the year. The 24-time Grand Slam champion is preparing for the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 12 and which he has won 10 times.

"Amazing tennis, Reilly. Absolutely deserved," Djokovic wrote on Instagram.

Opelka served 16 aces — including one to finish off each set — to earn one of the biggest wins of the American's career.

"I was just focused on my



spots," Opelka said. "If I hit them, it's hard to get them back. If there's anyone that can, it's him."

"We have nothing to lose coming in against him. He's the greatest player ever," Opelka added. "So you end up playing more free and you

take a lot more risk. If you play your normal level or even above a normal level, he's going to win every time. So it's tough in his position because he gets guys that are good players that they roll the dice. And on a on a day like this when a lot of things go

my way that's how it works out."

New coach Andy Murray will join Djokovic in Melbourne. Opelka achieved a career-high ranking of No. 17 in Feb. 2022 before undergoing hip surgery later that year to remove a benign tumor. He's now No. 293.

"It was tough. A lot of uncertainty, a lot of doubt," Opelka said.

In the semifinals, Opelka will face Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, who beat Jakob Mensik 7-5, 7-6 (5). The other semifinal will feature Jiri Lehecka against Grigor Dimitrov.

Lehecka beat Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 6-4 and Dimitrov advanced when Jordan Thompson retired while Dimitrov was ahead 6-1, 2-1.



I am not going anywhere, I just stood down from this Test: Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Senior India batter Rohit Sharma on Saturday firmly dismissed his retirement rumours, saying he is "not going anywhere" and offered poor form as the reason for him "standing down" from the ongoing Sydney Test against Australia.

Grappling with modest form, Rohit "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test, handing over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah, sparking widespread speculations about his future.

"I have not retired. I stood down, that is what I would say. Basically the chat that I had with the coach and the selector was very simple. I am not able to score runs, there is no form, it is an important match and we need a player with form," Rohit told Star Sports.

"As it is, in our batting, the form of the boys is not that good. So you cannot carry a lot of out of form players in the team. This simple thing was going on in my mind. I am not going anywhere," he added.

The 37-year-old said the team management and selectors backed his decision. "I wanted to tell the coach and the selector that this is what is going on in my mind. They backed my decision. They said that you have been playing for so many years. You know what you are doing."

"So for me, it was difficult to take this decision. But if everything is kept in front, then this decision was sensible. I will not think much further," he added.

In Rohit's absence, Shubman Gill was included in the India eleven for the crucial fifth match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as India is trailing 1-2. The Mumbaier endured a tough time in Test cricket in

2024, accumulating just 619 runs in 26 innings across 14 matches averaging 24.76.

Before standing down, he had scored just 31 runs across five innings in three Tests in this series after joining the team following the Perth Test.

Rohit's bold call triggered speculations that he might pull the plug on his Test career after this series.

"This is not a retirement decision. I am not going to leave the game. There is no such decision. But I am out of this game because the bat is not working."

"But there is no guarantee that the bat will not work after 5 months. There is no guarantee that the bat will not work after two months or six months down the line," Rohit said.

He hoped for a turnaround in his fortunes sooner than later. "We have seen a lot in cricket. Every minute, every second, every day life changes. So, I have a belief that things will change."

"But, at the same time, I have to be realistic as well. So, if a person has a mic inside, or a laptop, or a pen, what he writes, what he says, it does not change our life. We have played this game for so many years."

"So, these people cannot decide when we should go or when we should not play. I am a sensible man. I am a father of two children. So, I have a little brain to decide what I want in life," he noted.

Asked if he took this decision after the Melbourne Test defeat, Rohit said: "No, I took this decision after coming to Sydney. Because after the match, we had only two days in between. And one day was New Year's eve. So on New Year's, I did not want to tell this to the coach and the selector."

It's an answer to all those who made fun of me: Para shuttler Nithya on Arjuna Award

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paralympic bronze medalist and Arjuna Award winner Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan still remembers those tearful days at school when relentless bullying left her devastated and depressed. Now a successful shuttler, the 19-year-old believes the prestigious award has come as a just reward for those days of turmoil.

"When I was in 6th or 7th standard, there was not much growth in me. In schools, there was bullying. I used to be very sad. I used to cry for every small thing. So, yeah, it's kind of an answer to them that I can also do something and achieve big," Nithya told PTI. Reflecting on her

achievements, she added, "I have seen so many of my co-athletes who are winning awards and are achievers. So, getting one of the national awards is something very prestigious."

"It is a proud moment for me. All the medals and awards are like a gift for me — a recognition of my hard work, dedication to the game, practicing every day, following everything, and being disciplined."

Born and raised in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, Nithya had lost her mother when she was just one year old. Her father and grandmother became her unwavering support system, with her brother standing by her side as a constant companion.

My dad was continuously pushing me to play. Badminton has helped me. I feel really free now. Before taking up badminton, I actually wouldn't speak much. Now, I'm able to speak to many people," said Nithya, who won three bronze medals at the 2022 Asian Para Games.

Her father, an avid sports enthusiast, and her brother, who played cricket at the district level, introduced Nithya to the world of sports. Cricket was initially her first love.

"My dad used to play cricket with a big team every Sunday, and I would go with him to watch. My brother was a district player, and I also accompanied him to his academy. Sometimes, we played cricket on the street.



However, when I considered taking up cricket, there were no female athletes," said Nithya.

She watched badminton for the first time during the Rio Olympics, and everything changed. The racquet sport

soon became her chosen sport, turning into an all-consuming passion.

"My brother took up badminton for fitness, and I joined him. Watching Sindhu in 2016 inspired me, and my friends and I started playing badminton in the streets. This sparked my interest in training, and I started practicing twice a week, gradually increasing to daily sessions."

"When COVID hit, I couldn't train, but once it was over, I resumed and discovered Para badminton. That's when I moved to Lucknow (under Gaurav Khanna, Head Coach of Team India) for training," added Nithya, who has recently started training at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy

(PPBA) due to its proximity to her hometown.

A fan of Chinese legend Lin Dan, Nithya discovered the world of Para-Badminton in 2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19 and started competing in international events from 2021.

"Looking ahead to 2025, the Asian Championship will be one of the key Paralympic events this year. Next year, we have the World Championship. My target is to peak by 2028 Los Angeles Games, so there are no shorter goals now—only focusing on the World Championship each year leading up to 2028," said Nithya.

Recently, there was a controversy when two-time Paris bronze medallist shooter Manu Bhaker's name

didn't figure in the initial list of nomination for the national award due to lapses in applying on time.

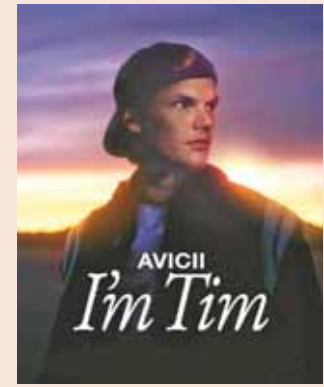
Asked about her opinion, Nithya said the government should recognise them without athletes having to apply.

"When I got a call from my team telling me I had to apply for a national award, I was surprised. I didn't know that athletes had to apply themselves. I always thought the government would recognise and honour athletes directly."

"Government supports us a lot, and they must be aware of our achievements. They back us in tournaments and training, so I believe they should recognise athletes without us having to apply," she signed off.



SUGGESTED BINGES



AVICII - I'M TIM
IMDB Rating: 8/10
OTT: Netflix
Director: Henrik Burman
Cast: Tim Bergling, Chris Martin



CUNK ON LIFE
IMDB Rating: 7.9/10
OTT: Netflix
Director: Al Campbell
Cast: Diane Morgan, Michelle Greenidge, Charles Aitken



STAR WARS: SKELETON CREW
IMDB Rating: 7.2/10
OTT: Disney+ Hotstar
Cast: Jude Law, Robert Timothy Smith, Ryan Kiera Armstrong, Dominic Burgess, Tunde Adebimpe



MISSING YOU
IMDB Rating: 6.3/10
OTT: Netflix
Director: Sean Spencer
Cast: Rosalind Wiseman, Ashley Walters, Richard Armitage, Charlie Hamblett



GUNAAH SEASON 2
IMDB Rating: 7/10
OTT: Disney+ Hotstar
Director: Anil Senior
Cast: Gashmeer Mahajani, Tanmay Nagar, Surbhi Jyoti



Phool Khilein Hai Gulshan Gulshan

"Flowers are the music of the ground, from Earth's lips they speak" — Edwin Curran

Delhi's winter gardens bloom with vibrant colours, offering a peaceful, rejuvenating escape amid chilly mornings, writes SAKSHI PRIYA

As winter settles in, Delhi transforms into a canvas painted with nature's brightest colours. In January and February, the city bursts into bloom, with vibrant flowers filling the air with fragrance and painting the streets in shades of red, pink, white and yellow. The cold breeze brushes against your face, but it's the sight of flowers scattered across parks, streets and gardens that brings warmth to the season. Wrapped in woollen layers, people venture out, eager to experience the charm of Delhi's winter gardens. The city, known for its bustling streets and busy markets, becomes a space of natural beauty, offering a tranquil escape for those who wish to experience the quieter side of life. The streets are alive with flower vendors, their carts brimming with bright blossoms. The colours of the flowers stand out against the grey of the streets, giving a joyful touch to the city's landscape. From Daisies to roses, every flower seems to tell its own story, contributing to the lively atmosphere. Parks and gardens are filled with families, children and friends, all taking time to marvel at nature's work. Among the many spots where Delhiites gather, the Bric's Friendship Rose Garden stands out. Its endless varieties of roses, red, pink, white, and yellow, fill the garden with their elegance. A walk through this garden feels like stepping into a painting, where every bloom is carefully placed to create a masterpiece. The roses, with their soft petals and vibrant colours, seem to tell the story of the



season, a season of beauty, growth, and renewal. Not far from here, Lodi Garden offers its own magic. The soft winter sunlight filters through the trees, casting long shadows on the ground while highlighting bursts of colour from the flowers below. Daisies, with their cheerful white petals, brighten up garden beds, adding a light touch to the winter gloom. Poppies sway gently in the breeze, their bold red petals creating a striking contrast against the muted backdrop. Dianthus barbatus, with its detailed patterns, draws curious gazes from those who pass by. It's a place that invites

you to pause and appreciate the little things, like the texture of a flower's petals or the way the wind makes them dance. The quiet hum of the park, combined with the gentle presence of flowers, creates an atmosphere of calm, offering a break from the city's constant rush. One of the highlights of the season is Amrit Udyan, formerly known as the Mughal Gardens, at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Open to the public for a brief period at the end of January and the beginning of February, the garden offers a breathtaking experience. The garden, with its grand pathways and symmetrical design, is home to a variety of

flowers, each more stunning than the last. Hyacinths, with their soft pastel shades and soothing fragrance, line the walkways, offering a moment of tranquillity in the midst of the garden's grandeur. The roses - carmosine, bonica and bush roses, stand out as the garden's crown jewels. Their delicate petals, in varying shades of red, pink, and white, add an elegant touch to the space. The golden blooms of the yellow sibiruna trees brighten the garden, their cheerful colour lighting up even the quietest corners. Together, these flowers create a space where nature takes centre

stage, inviting visitors to slow down and immerse themselves in the beauty around them. The flowers in Amrit Udyan and other gardens around the city don't just beautify the landscape, they also bring a sense of togetherness. Families walk hand in hand, children run along flower-lined paths, their laughter echoing through the air. Couples sit on benches, quietly enjoying the view, while elderly visitors bask in the warmth of the sun. The flowers provide a peaceful backdrop for these moments, adding a sense of calm to the busy lives of the city's inhabitants. It's a time when Delhi feels slower, gentler, and more inviting, with nature offering its own reminder to take a break from the fast pace of modern life. Even in the busiest corners of Delhi, there are small moments of beauty to be found. Flower vendors, with their colourful carts, brighten up the busiest streets. Roundabouts are dotted with flower beds, each one a small oasis of colour in the midst of the traffic. Trees adorned with golden flowers seem to lift everyone's spirits, their bright blooms creating a cheerful atmosphere even in the most crowded areas. These small touches of nature add an unexpected layer of beauty to the city, offering a gentle reminder of the season's charm. While Delhi's streets can often feel chaotic, its gardens offer a peaceful reprieve. Whether you're in the Bric's Friendship Rose Garden, Lodi Garden or Amrit Udyan, the flowers remind you to slow down, to appreciate the beauty around you and to find moments of stillness in the hustle of everyday life.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



In 1989, the movie Khoj brought together Naseeruddin Shah and Rishi Kapoor in a suspenseful tale of deceit and mystery. The story revolved around a man whose wife mysteriously vanished, only to have another woman claim to be his wife. While the film's climax fell flat, its premise remained exciting. Fast forward to the present, and Khoj - Parchaiyo Ke Uss Paar attempts to reimagine the suspense in a web series format. Directed by Prabal Baruah and produced by Juggernaut, this Zee5 thriller stars Sharib Hashmi, Anupriya Goenka, and Aamir Dalvi in pivotal roles. Unfortunately, it struggles to deliver the nail-biting tension audiences expect from such a genre. The story follows Ved played by Sharib Hashmi, a man desperately searching for his missing wife, Meera, played by Anupriya Goenka. As he goes deeper into her disappearance, Ved encounters bizarre events and clues that challenge his grip on reality. A sceptical police officer complicates matters, questioning Ved's narrative and leaving him to prove that the woman posing as Meera is not, in fact, his wife. While the first three episodes, particularly Aar Ya Paar, maintain a semblance of intrigue, the series begins to lose steam soon after. The narrative feels unnecessarily stretched, adding little value to the plot. Despite a strong performance by Sharib Hashmi in a rare lead role, and Anupriya Goenka's stellar portrayal, the storyline fails to capitalise on its potential. The biggest letdown is the

IN KHOJ OF THRILL

Khoj - Parchaiyo Ke Uss Paar falls bland in the mystery and thriller genre despite commendable performances, writes ABHI SINGHAL

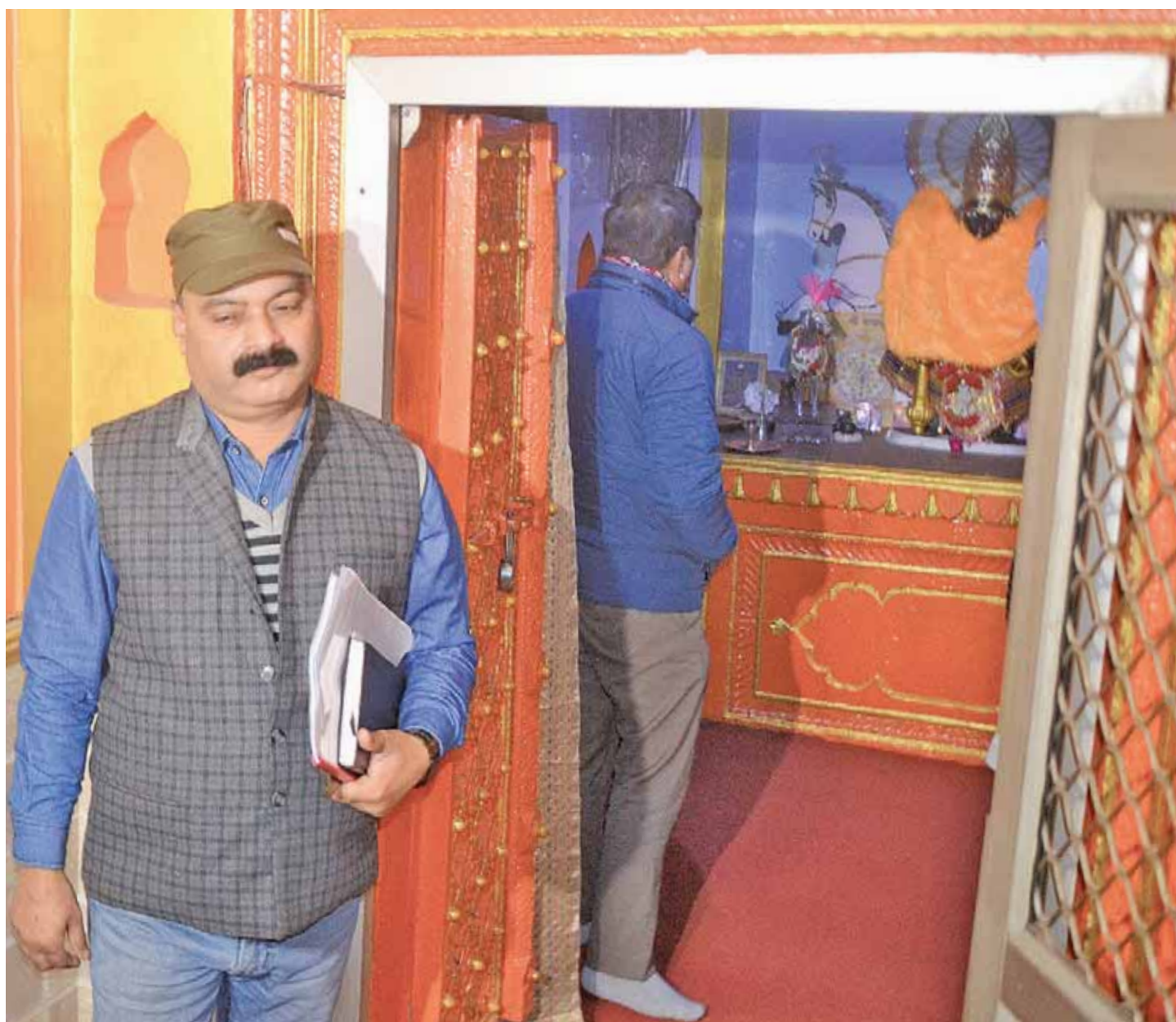


predictability of the plot. The absence of genuine twists and an underwhelming climax detract from what could have been an interesting watch. The final episode abruptly resolves the mystery, leaving viewers dissatisfied. Moreover, the police inspector's role is underdeveloped, adding little to the progression of the narrative. Another notable drawback is the lack of an impactful background score, which

could have significantly enhanced the suspense. The awkward cliffhanger endings to each episode feel forced, especially for a series with a mere 140-minute runtime, which would have been better suited as a film. Despite its flaws, the performances by Sharib Hashmi and Anupriya Goenka are the saving grace of the series, making it a tolerable one-time watch. However, the lack of originality and engaging drama keeps it from standing out. Rating: 2/5

"If you want to understand today you have to search yesterday"

— Pearl S Buck



What began as a routine inspection by district officials to check noise levels from loudspeakers and illegal electricity connections in the Muslim-dominated *Khaggu Sarai* area of Sambhal has turned into a historic archaeological discovery. On 14 December, a team led by the District Magistrate (DM) and Superintendent of Police (SP) stumbled upon a locked structure. Breaking open its doors revealed not just an abandoned Shiva temple but also a wealth of history hidden beneath layers of soil and silt. The discovery of the temple, which had been locked for 46 years, has prompted a flurry of activity, including surveys by the *Archaeological Survey of India* (ASI). Early reports suggest the temple, and other relics unearthed nearby, may date back several centuries, providing invaluable insights into Sambhal's rich cultural and religious history.

Locked Temple, Unlocked History

Dr. *Rajendra Pansiya* recalled the unexpected nature of the find. "This discovery was purely accidental. We were investigating noise and electricity issues near a mosque, but what we found behind the locked doors was remarkable," he said. The temple, which had been shut since the 1978 communal riots, housed a Shiva idol and a statue of Hanuman. Nearby, a well contained three additional statues that were uncovered during excavation. The riots of 1978, which displaced many from the local Hindu community, had led to the temple being abandoned. "Local accounts suggest the temple is over 500 years old," Dr. *Pansiya* added. To confirm its antiquity, the district administration reached out to the ASI for carbon dating and further investigation.

The ASI Steps In

Following the DM's request, a four-member ASI team from Meerut and Delhi conducted an extensive eight-hour survey of the site last week. The team examined the temple, the adjacent well, and five other pilgrimage sites, including *Bhadrak Ashram*, *Swargdeep*, and *Chakrapani*. During their survey, they documented their findings through photography and collected evidence for further analysis.



DISCOVERY IN SAMBHAL: UNEARTHING ANCIENT TEMPLES AND WELLS

A historic discovery in Sambhal reveals ancient temples, wells, and stepwells, offering valuable insights into the region's cultural heritage, say **BISWAJEET BANERJEE** and **SAJID KHAN**



In addition to the temple, the ASI team identified 19 wells, including the historically significant *Chaturmukh Koop*, *Moksha Koop*, and *Dharma Koop*. The ASI's investigation aims to establish the historical and cultural significance of these sites. Dr. *Pansiya* expressed optimism about the findings. "Once we have the ASI's report, we will have a clearer picture of the historical importance of these sites. Based on their recommendations, we will prepare a plan for their preservation and development," he said.

The Stepwell of Laxman Ganj

Adding to the list of discoveries, a 250-foot-deep stepwell, believed to date back to the First War of Independence in

ONCE WE HAVE THE ASI'S REPORT, WE WILL HAVE A CLEARER PICTURE OF THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THESE SITES. BASED ON THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS, WE WILL PREPARE A PLAN FOR THEIR PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT — DR. PANSIYA



administration plans to address this issue promptly. The site, once a vital part of the Sahaspur State, served as a rest stop for soldiers and the royal family during their travels. *Shipra Gera*, a relative of the royal family, recounted the historical importance of the *Bawdi*. "This place was a strategic stopover for soldiers travelling from Sahaspur (Bilari) to villages under the State's control, which now fall in the Badaun district. The royal family also used the underground complex during their journeys to escape the scorching summer heat," she said. The *Bawdi*'s corridors were manned by soldiers, and the site served both functional and leisure purposes. The underground chambers provided a cool retreat for the royals, while the stepwell itself ensured a steady water supply for their needs. As restoration and research continue, the *Bawdi* and its surrounding structures are set to become a beacon of Sambhal's historical legacy, offering locals and visitors alike a chance to reconnect with the region's storied past.

A Shared History Unearthed

The discoveries in Sambhal are a poignant reminder of the region's layered history, which is often obscured by present-day tensions. The proximity of the temple to the *Shahi Jama Masjid*, where violence had erupted during a protest against a court-ordered survey, underscores the intertwined histories of communities that have lived together for centuries. Local historian and archaeologist *Dr. Arvind Sharma* highlighted the significance of the finds. "These discoveries provide a window into the past, showcasing Sambhal's role as a cultural and religious hub. The preservation of these sites is not just about protecting relics but also about understanding our shared heritage," he said. The district administration, in collaboration with the ASI, is now focused on ensuring that these historical sites are preserved and developed responsibly. Plans include creating tourist-friendly infrastructure while maintaining the integrity of the sites. The discoveries have sparked excitement and curiosity among locals. "We've always heard stories about these places, but seeing them come to light is incredible. It feels like a part of our history has been revived," said *Sunil Kumar*, a Sambhal resident. As excavation and research continue, the findings in Sambhal are expected to shed more light on the region's past, offering lessons for the present and inspiration for the future. The accidental unearthing of the Shiva temple and subsequent discoveries serve as a reminder of the hidden treasures that lie buried beneath the surface, waiting to be rediscovered and celebrated.



1857, was unearthed in Sambhal's *Laxman Ganj* area last week. Named *Rani ki Bawdi*, the stepwell came to light after the ruins of an ancient *Banke Bihari temple* were discovered earlier this month. *Kaushal Kishore*, the state publicity chief of the *Sanatan Sevak Sangh*, had written to the DM, pointing out the historical significance of the site. "The stepwell and the ruins are remnants of the royal family of Sahaspur. These finds are a testament to our history," Kishore said. The excavation, which involved two bulldozers, also revealed a two-storey structure near the stepwell. Work at the site is ongoing, with authorities halting operations at night due to visibility issues. "Encroachments on the site have been identified, and notices will be issued to families occupying the land illegally," Dr. *Pansiya* said, adding that the administration is committed to restoring and beautifying the area. The discovery of the ancient stepwell, or *Bawdi*, in Sambhal has brought to light the rich history of the region, linked to the erstwhile royal family of *Sahaspur State in Bilari*. Official records list the *Bawdi* as a pond spanning 400 square metres. However, recent excavations have revealed much more—a well-preserved three-storey structure featuring intricate architecture and significant historical relevance. "The *Bawdi* was constructed during the reign of the king of Bilari and is believed to be approximately 150 years old," Dr. *Pansiya* said. The structure includes two marble floors and one brick floor, along with a well and four rooms, all part of an elaborate underground complex. Signs of encroachment on the site have also been identified, and the

"IF YOU REALLY WANT TO MAKE A FRIEND, GO TO SOMEONE'S HOUSE AND EAT WITH HIM... THE PEOPLE WHO GIVE YOU THEIR FOOD GIVE YOU THEIR HEART"
—CESAR CHAVEZ

EXQUISITE DINING WITH A VIEW

When it comes to food that excites the senses, *Resaca* in the heart of Central Delhi offers an experience that perfectly balances sophistication with flavour. This newly opened 12,000 square-foot space is a culinary palace where every dish is designed to captivate both the eyes and the taste buds. Whether you're craving an intimate dinner or a lively gathering with friends, *Resaca* has it all.

The indoor dining area, affectionately known as the "Resaca Playground," is a chic and stylish setting, offering sleek, modern furniture that's both practical and comfortable. With spacious tables thoughtfully arranged to cater to different dining styles, guests can enjoy private, intimate meals or social gatherings with equal ease. Each corner of the restaurant is designed to create a relaxed yet refined ambiance, perfect for any occasion.

However, what truly sets *Resaca* apart is its stunning rooftop - 'Resaca Aero.' This rooftop has quickly become the talk of the town, offering guests panoramic views of the Delhi skyline. Whether you're dining in the golden light of day or under the twinkling stars at night, the experience is nothing short of magical. The breathtaking views and elegant atmosphere create the perfect setting for a memorable dining experience.

Behind this visionary space is *Mayank Sehgal*, a renowned menswear designer who has brought his creative flair to the world of fine dining. As the creative director, *Mayank's* attention to detail and aesthetic sensibilities are

A sophisticated dining experience with flavours, stunning views and elegant ambiance for every occasion, says **TEAM AGENDA**

reflected in every aspect of *Resaca*, from the décor to the curated dining experience. *Resaca* is a destination where food lovers can indulge in both culinary delights and a beautiful atmosphere.

When it comes to the food, *Resaca* excels in offering an array of innovative and mouthwatering options. For those who enjoy small plates, the *Kataifi Dahi Kebab* (spiced yoghurt and crispy kataifi kebab) is a must-try. The *Magnum Kebab*, featuring panko crumbed assorted veggies with warm tomato chutney, promises a delightful burst of flavours. If you're a fan of rich and smoky flavours, try the *Lababdar Paneer Tikka*, silky chunks of cottage cheese served with house-special gravy and fried shallots. For a lighter yet equally satisfying option, the *Stuffed Mushrooms*, served with roasted red pepper coulis, are divine.

The menu also includes delectable platters for sharing. The *Arabic Mezze* is a fantastic choice for anyone who loves Mediterranean flavours, with an assortment of *falafel*, *hummus*, *baba ganoush* and warm *pita bread*. For a meatier version, the *Arabic Platter* with *chicken shish tawook* and *lamb fatayer* is equally tempting.

No meal at *Resaca* is complete without indulging in their sweet offerings. The *Rum-Based Tiramisu*, a no-bake dessert soaked in rum, offers a rich, indulgent finish to your meal. Other fan favourites include the *Mango Cheesecake*, *Banoffee Pie* and the innovative *Kunafa Cheesecake*, which combines the best of both worlds.

Of course, no visit to *Resaca* is complete without sampling their signature cocktails, such as the *Katana*, made with vodka, coconut and matcha or the refreshing *Green Park*, which features Hendricks Gin, celery infusion, and elderflower syrup. *Resaca* offers an experience that goes beyond a meal. From its stunning interiors to its carefully crafted cocktails and mouthwatering dishes, this restaurant has quickly become a go-to destination for those looking to indulge in style.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



FROM THE ITALIAN FEASTS

At *Toscano*, traditional flavours and premium ingredients transport you to Tuscany, writes **TEAM AGENDA**



With its gates in the centre of Saket's Select City Walk Mall, *Toscano* welcomes you on a Tuscan food adventure. *Toscano* offers a genuine dining experience that satisfies the sophisticated palates of its esteemed patrons by fusing traditional culinary methods with premium, fresh ingredients and unusual cheeses.

Toscano offers a warm and inviting atmosphere, where handcrafted pastas, carefully selected wines, and dishes inspired by Italy's heritage take the centre tables. The cosy setting is uplifted by soft yellow lighting, a striking wine wall, and painted patterned walls, creating the perfect backdrop to savour delightful moments with your loved ones.

You can initiate the tasty food by starting with the *Antipasti*, the small plates menu offering you *Arancini e Mozzarella Fritta* (Arborio rice balls & fried mozzarella) that has golden fried cheesy Italian rice balls, crumb fried fresh mozzarella, carrots, zucchini, broccoli and haricot verts served with arrabiata sauce as they melt in your mouth, enticing you to consume an increasing amount. Also, in *Bruschetta* you can go forward with *Pomodoro Classico* made out of fresh tomatoes, olive oil, basil & parmesan cheese.

From the *Insalata*, the salad menu, *Insalata di Quattro Fagioli con Cereali* (four bean salad with mixed grains) with selection of four beans, mixed grains, roasted pumpkin, cherry tomatoes, red onion, romaine lettuce, roasted

pumpkin seeds, feta cheese & sweet balsamic dressing to keep up with your fitness and taste. In the *Pane all'aglio*, the garlic breads menu you can go for *Classic Baguette Garlic Bread* with melting mozzarella cheese and *Rosemary Bread* with rosemary, pesto, olive oil made with rock salt pizza bread.

For pasta lovers, the *Artisan & Signature Special Pasta* menu is a feast of flavours that will leave you craving more. A recommendation is the *Ravioli di Spinaci e Ricotta*, featuring handmade spinach and ricotta ravioli, served in a fragrant basil-flavoured tomato sauce with olives, melting deliciously in every bite.

The *Dolce* (Dessert) menu at *Toscano* is a paradise for dessert lovers. The highlights include the *Classic Tiramisu*, perfectly paired with coffee ice cream, and the indulgent 55% *Couverture Chocolate Hazelnut Brownie*, served warm with creamy vanilla ice cream. Saving the best for last, the *Signature Chocolate Kahlua Mousse*, complemented by a delicate almond tuile and velvety *crème anglaise*, promises to be an unforgettable treat for your taste buds.

FACT SHEET

Restaurant Name: Toscano
Address: S-44, 2nd Floor, Nexus Select City Walk, MGF Saket Driveaway, Saket, New Delhi.
Price for 2: Approx. ₹1800

FACT SHEET

Restaurant Name: Resaca
Address: No. 7, 3rd Floor, Building, Pusa Rd, Block 11, WEA, Karol Bagh, Delhi, 110005
Price for 2: Approx. ₹2000
Cuisine: Multi-cuisine (Indian, Mediterranean, International)
Dining Experience: Indoor and Rooftop seating



SMALL PLATES LEAD THE WAY

Small eateries deliver bigger and tastier joys than mega restaurants

FOODFREAK



Pawan Soni
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards



When it comes to dining out, bigger isn't always better. In a world where restaurants compete to offer a vast array of dishes, there's something uniquely charming and rewarding about *small eateries* that focus on just one or two specialties. They may lack the glitz of fine dining or the variety of a multi-page menu, but what they offer goes far deeper. Here's why these unassuming establishments are not only worth visiting but may also offer a far superior dining experience.

MASTERY OVER MEDIOCRITY: The biggest problem with an expansive menu is that it's almost impossible to do every dish justice. When a kitchen has to juggle diverse cuisines or multiple complex recipes, something inevitably gets lost in translation. Food often becomes standardised, stripped of any distinct personality, and made to cater to the average palate. Conversely, small eateries that specialise in a single dish or a couple of items have the luxury of focusing all their energy and skill on perfecting those few offerings. Each plate becomes a labor of love, honed through years of repetition and refinement.

THE ART OF FRESHNESS: *Small menus* often mean fresher ingredients. When a kitchen isn't overwhelmed with a long list of ingredients for a sprawling menu, there's

more attention on the quality and less temptation to rely on pre-made or frozen components. *Small eateries* usually shop locally and in small quantities, ensuring that what you eat was likely bought that very morning.

It's not uncommon to see these modest eateries sourcing their produce from the local market, even chatting with their vendors to get the best pick. This personal touch translates directly to the plate, where each ingredient retains its flavour, offering a sensory experience.

THE PRICE OF CONVENIENCE: QUALITY VS. QUICK FIXES: In large eateries, the pressure to churn out diverse dishes at a rapid pace often means sacrificing freshness and authenticity. Many big restaurants, in an effort to streamline operations and manage



such extensive menus, have begun to rely on pre-made sauces and packaged ingredients laced with preservatives. These shortcuts may save time, but they take a serious toll on both flavour and nutritional value. A *small eatery*, with its focus on fresh, daily-prepared dishes, naturally provides a far more nourishing experience than the one that supports both health and taste without compromising quality.

A PERSONAL TOUCH THAT'S HARD TO FIND: Eating at a *small eatery* often means connecting with the person behind the food. They take pride in their craft, in the stories that accompany each dish, and in the relationships they build with regular customers. The proprietor might greet you by name, share the origins of a recipe, or remember just how spicy you like your curry. This connection adds a personal dimension to dining that large restaurants struggle to offer.

When you order from a restaurant with a lengthy menu, there's a transactional air to it. You're just another customer, another order to be fulfilled. But at a small, specialised eatery, you're part of a community, one of the lucky few who get to experience the authenticity that food can bring.

A UNIQUE DINING ADVENTURE: In an age where everyone seems to crave variety, the idea of returning to a place for the same

dish can seem limiting. But there's joy in simplicity. Knowing you're about to eat a dish that's the pride and focus of an establishment, there's an unspoken promise of quality.

SMALL IS THE NEW BIG: As the trend toward slow, intentional dining gains momentum, small eateries with limited menus are emerging as champions of true culinary craftsmanship. These spots may lack the expansive spaces and curated ambiance, but they don't need it. They deliver exactly what matters: real, unforgettable food, born from expertise and commitment, served with the kind of warmth you can't find on any restaurant's oversized menu.

In the end, it's about quality over quantity, simplicity over spectacle. And maybe, just maybe, finding the heart in what's on the plate over the number of options in a menu.



MEDIEVAL MARVEL IN BARCELONA



don't let that deter you—this serene sanctuary is worth the extra steps. Inside, the décor has evolved from vibrant, bold palettes and plush velvets to a soothing symphony of creams and greys adorned with elegant black and white photos. My lucky pick was an Apartment with a breath-taking medieval ambience and charming views of the cobbled street buzzing with tapas bars. Talk about living the fairy tale! The room's ambience, a mix of sophisticated neutrals and delicate fabrics, made the stay luxuriously cosy. The sleep preferences menu—offering sheets in cotton, satin, or linen, and a variety of pillows—felt like a dreamy personal touch. And the bathroom! A peaceful oasis with both a bathtub and rain shower, mood lighting, and Molton Brown products.

HISTORICAL CHARM AWAITS
Strolling through the Gothic Quarter, where the Romans once settled, feels like stepping into a storybook. Winding cobblestone streets lined with cosy shops, cafes, and residences lead to hidden plazas, each more picturesque than the last. Hotel Neri's central location is a dream for explorers. Just around the corner, the bells of the Barcelona Cathedral serenaded us from our room. Within a 5–10-minute stroll, we reached Placa de Sant Jaume and the iconic churches of Santa Maria Del Mar and Santa Maria Del Pi, famously featured in Tom Holland's 'Uncharted.' The waterfront and the bustling Las Ramblas were also close by, ensuring we never missed a beat of the city's vibrant life.

Hop on the metro, only five minutes away, and the rest of Barcelona unfolds at your feet. And for those with a sweet tooth, a quick five-minute amble took us to Calle Petritxol, a pedestrian haven brimming with chocolate and churro shops, including the famed La Granja Dulcinea. It is not just a place to stay; it's a historical adventure waiting to be experienced.

THE LITTLE LUXURIES
Dining at the A Restaurant was a gastronomic delight. The menu, brimming with Catalan dishes and global influences, featured gems like the 'fougasse and Rum Baba.' It was a true feast for the senses. The rooftop, Roba Estesa, transformed into a romantically lit, lush retreat, was the perfect spot to unwind under the stars. Living in a medieval castle, even for a short while, feels like a vibrant, whimsical dream. Relais & Chateaux boasts nearly 600 luxury hotels and fine dining restaurants worldwide, renowned for unique accommodations, exquisite cuisine, and impeccable service. President Laurent Gardinier aptly described them as paragons of 'excellence, food, experience, and culture.' After the delight of staying in Hotel Neri, I can confirm this commitment is nothing short of remarkable. If you crave a unique and romantic historical refuge in the lively heart of Barcelona, Hotel Neri is your match. Though it comes with a boutique five-star price tag, the magical experience it offers is simply priceless. It's the little things that elevate

a hotel stay from pleasant to unforgettable. At Hotel Neri, these thoughtful touches were on par with the world's finest hotels, such as the Ritz Carlton, Four Seasons, and Six Senses. From the cosy throw blanket on the bed—so handy when we left the heat off—to the fresh clementines awaiting us upon check-in, each detail made our stay special. Turn-down service with chocolates, and our stylish glass water pitcher refilled twice daily, all contributed to a feeling of home away from home. Though our next visit to

Barcelona might be a few years away, Hotel Neri will be my go-to choice. I wholeheartedly recommend this gem—and any Relais & Chateaux property—to fellow travellers seeking a truly memorable experience.
— She is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category

By AKANKSHA DEAN

Imagine stepping back in time without sacrificing an ounce of modern comfort. At Hotel Neri, nestled in a 17th-century mansion and the only Relais and Chateaux property in Barcelona, my stay was a delightful blend of history and luxury. Picture this: a 17th-century mansion turned chic boutique hotel with just 22 rooms. This is Hotel Neri, where each corner oozes charm and every stay feels

like a time-travelling adventure. This enchanting 12th-century palace-turned-hotel, located beside the quaint Placa de Sant Felipe Neri, retains its historical charm with stone walls and archways that whisk you back in time. Though it lacks a gym, its distinct style and unbeatable location make up for it tenfold. The terrace overlooking a quaint, atmospheric square and the lush rooftop bar are just a couple of quirky touches you'll love. Given its quiet pedestrian street setting, you might have a slight hassle with heavy luggage, but

WINTER WONDERS OF DARJEELING



Darjeeling's misty mountains, scenic bus ride, and cosy Radhakunj Homestay offered the perfect winter escape amidst nature's charm, writes VISHESH SHUKLA



In winter, the mountains are always beautiful, and hill stations are also enjoyable. So, I decided to visit one of the most beautiful hill stations in India, Darjeeling, West Bengal. I boarded the Falaknuma Express from Cuttack to Howrah, and then I changed trains to the Paharia Express, heading to New Jalpaiguri (NJP). The weather was very humid in nature, and for a moment, I thought I had chosen the wrong time to come to Darjeeling. But Darjeeling proved me wrong—cold waves and fog made me feel at ease. I took an auto to the Siliguri bus stand for ₹50, then boarded a bus to Darjeeling for ₹105. The 4-hour bus journey, with its beautiful views and

winding turns, made my heart swell with excitement. Finally, I deboarded and headed to my homestay, which was near Batasia Loop. I checked in at Radha Kunj Homestay, which offered very cheap accommodation, ₹4500 for three nights. The rooms were beautiful, and the window view in the morning, with Kanchenjunga in the distance, was nothing short of breathtaking. It was around 5 PM, so I decided to visit Mall Road. I took a taxi for ₹50 and went to explore the beautiful area. First, I roamed around the market, soaking in the lively atmosphere. Then, I visited the very famous Glenary's Bakery and enjoyed some delicious snacks



there. Coincidentally, the Darjeeling Melotea Fest 2024 was happening nearby. I got to enjoy some amazing music by the famous singer Girish Chand. After that, I had dinner at a local restaurant near Mall Road. The meal was simple and tasty, costing me around ₹200. Feeling satisfied, I took a taxi back to my homestay for ₹100. Once I reached, I had a good sleep, ready and excited for the adventures the next day would bring.

MIRIK'S SERENE SHORES
On Day 2, I woke up early in the morning and rented a scooty from 'Bike Wale Bhaiya' for ₹1500 for two days. I planned to visit Mirik, 34 km away,

to see the famous Sumendu Lake. However, I missed the main route and ended up taking a secondary road, which stretched the distance to 50 km and took me around 4 hours to reach. The ride was not wasted, though, as I passed through beautiful tea gardens and stopped at a viewpoint called Lepchajagat. Finally, I reached Mirik Lake, spent some peaceful time there, and then started my journey back to Darjeeling. On the way, I also visited the Nepal border at Pashupati Nagar and enjoyed a quiet dinner before returning to my homestay.

DARJEELING'S ICONIC LANDMARKS

Day 3 was all about sightseeing in Darjeeling. I started my day at Tiger Hill to witness the stunning view of Kanchenjunga. Next, I visited the serene Ghoom Monastery and felt the peaceful vibes of Buddhism. After that, I stopped by the Peace Pagoda, built to promote harmony, and had my lunch. My next destination was the Rock Garden, located 3000 ft below the main road, which had some dangerous turns but was worth the experience. Finally, I ended my sightseeing with a visit to Batasia Loop to watch the toy train and the Zoological Park, which had some unique animals. In the evening, I did some shopping at Mall Road, treated myself to ice cream at Keventer's, and enjoyed delicious momos. I returned the scooty to the shop and headed back to my homestay to pack my bags because it was time to leave for home. On the last day, I took a shared taxi for ₹400 to NJP. From there, I boarded the New Delhi Poorvottar Sampark Kranti Express to Kanpur. The 17-hour journey brought me back home, and I ended my vacation with empty pockets but a heart full of beautiful and tremendous memories.

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19
This week presents numerous opportunities for joy, with financial gains expected from various endeavors. You may find yourself busy, perhaps with work-related travel, which could lead to some stress. Midweek brings sudden shifts that might challenge your current plans or expectations. It's a crucial time to release any unproductive bonds, clearing the path for a more meaningful existence. As the week progresses, you may feel a strong pull towards acquiring material possessions, which could lead to unrealistic expectations. Caution is advised against starting new projects or making impulsive decisions, as these could lead to setbacks. Maintaining a positive outlook will be challenging, yet essential to navigate this period effectively.
Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Tuesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22
This period promises to be exceptionally favorable, marked by a profound sense of blessing and personal achievement. You'll find yourself at the center of your universe, reveling in a phase rich with joy, amazement, and rejuvenation. A harmonious alignment of mind, spirit, and body will emerge, enhancing your social standing. This time will usher in newfound bravery and inspiration, leaving you relieved as certain challenges conclude. Expect transformative shifts in your perspectives and plans, paving the way for a brighter future. Changes may include adopting a new routine, dietary adjustments, or exciting career opportunities. Fresh beginnings are indicated, perhaps in personal commitments or professional partnerships, bringing a refreshing change to your life's narrative. As the week closes, familial happiness will increase, and a feeling of complete fulfillment will envelop you emotionally and spiritually.
Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Sky Blue
Lucky day Thursday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21
This week centers on inner resilience rather than physical prowess. Your strength will stem from a disciplined approach to your emotions and desires, grounded in a firm moral backbone. This foundational inner strength will navigate you through deceptive circumstances to clarity. You may find inspiration and guidance from a notable woman known for her deep understanding and intuition. Considering her advice or emulating her approach could be pivotal in shaping your life's direction. An urgent call to action encourages you to embrace spirituality—engage in meditation, practice yoga, and connect with your spiritual beliefs. It's a time to move away from idle fantasies and ground yourself in reality, letting go of unproductive daydreams to focus on what truly matters.
Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Monday



TAURUS April 20-May 20
This week, those who are naturally resourceful will find themselves thriving financially through their inventive abilities. You possess the strength to transform your visions into reality. Choices made during this time are likely to lead to beneficial outcomes. Gifted with a flair for articulation, your words will captivate and persuade those around you, marking an exceptionally successful week. However, midweek may present some challenges with potential delays. Despite these obstacles, your perseverance and resolve will guide you through, ensuring you meet your objectives. Expect communication from afar that could influence your financial and emotional stability positively. This period promises both security and satisfaction as you navigate through the highs and lows with grace.
Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Saturday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22
This week begins with decisive actions on both personal and work-related fronts, reflecting your resilient nature as you navigate life's challenges with courage. Expect some confrontations and issues arising from stubborn attitudes, necessitating a thoughtful and tactful approach. Embracing new perspectives and letting go of outdated beliefs will be crucial. Changes could unfold in various areas, such as your job, living situation, and close relationships, and you might encounter health challenges that could lead to feeling overwhelmed. Despite these struggles, the latter part of the week heralds a shift toward positivity, bringing a sense of relaxation, improved well-being, and financial satisfaction. You will find yourself in a position to indulge in life's comforts and will likely extend your support to those in need due to your compassionate nature.
Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Orange
Lucky day Wednesday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19
This week promises to be a whirlwind, touching every facet of your life—from personal finance and home life to social and professional engagements. It begins with a focus on household matters, and for those not currently in a partnership, significant life changes such as marriage may be on the horizon. Midweek, travel could play a role, adding variety to your routine. Professionally, expect to dive deep, as a drive for excellence pushes you to refine your abilities and commit fully to your projects, often extending your work into the night. Joyful family news, such as the arrival of a new member, may also grace the week. As the days progress, the fruits of your labor will become apparent, notably through substantial financial gains. Opportunities for career advancement are likely to emerge, featuring appealing terms.
Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Rose
Lucky day Tuesday



GEMINI May 21-June 20
This week, individuals born under Gemini will find numerous reasons to smile. An aura of optimism surrounds you, illuminating your path and attracting positive vibes in all your endeavors. Your ability to highlight the positive aspects of life makes you a beacon of warmth, drawing others towards you. However, midweek might bring a few challenges that could disrupt your peace temporarily. Despite this, rest assured that this phase will pass swiftly, paving the way for abundant blessings and a sense of fulfillment. Your efforts toward your goals are bearing fruit, marking significant strides towards completing your success cycle. You'll likely notice substantial improvements in ongoing projects and may find opportunities for recognition, public acclaim, or international connections.
Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour White
Lucky day Sunday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22
This week brims with opportunities and inventive energy, marking a period of great enthusiasm and readiness to embrace new challenges. An inspiring new concept may captivate your imagination, reinforcing that you're following the right path. You'll find yourself adeptly handling both personal and professional responsibilities. Midweek brings family gatherings and celebrations, possibly related to home-related milestones, children's achievements, or exciting career developments. These events will add to the joyous atmosphere around you. As the week concludes, your resolve and tenacity serve as an inspiring testament to others, showcasing the foundation of your accomplishments. Enjoy this vibrant period, as it promises both fulfillment and success and remain open to the unexpected joys it may bring.
Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Teal
Lucky day Friday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18
This week, individuals born under the Aquarius sign can expect a vibrant period filled with personal satisfaction and grandeur. There will be significant progress in business ventures, accompanied by generous expenditures that not only meet family expectations but also bring joy. This generosity extends to caring for others, demonstrating a warm and compassionate nature. Relationship dynamics, especially with a partner, may involve some heightened demands, yet responses will be heartfelt and giving. Children are likely to bring joy into the household, with possible achievements in academics or career advancements for a son. However, there's a note of caution for Aquarian women to attend to their health, as they might face some challenges related to emotional well-being or other physiological concerns, which could affect their mood during this period.
Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22
During this pivotal period, the actions you take will lay the foundation for future developments. Although progress may seem gradual, your perseverance will ensure that significant strides are made. Energize yourself to tackle necessary tasks effectively, as your hard work is likely to gain recognition and yield rewards. Utilize your diverse skills optimally this week, as your resolve and tenacity will leave a lasting impression on those around you. Your role as an inspirational figure will uplift others. Effective communication will enhance your relationships with both superiors and colleagues. As the week closes, a fresh burst of innovative thinking will illuminate your projects. Your productivity will soar in your chosen field, accompanied by vibrant energy and a zest for life. This is a time to relish and optimize the joyful moments.
Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Monday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21
Despite your significant efforts across various sectors to secure employment, the outcomes you've anticipated have not yet materialized. Your dedication and zeal are commendable; however, financial gains may be challenging to come by this week. Fortunately, as the week unfolds, promising opportunities are likely to emerge, potentially leading to substantial achievements. Supportive figures in your life, such as father figures or mentors, are keen to see you succeed and will play a crucial role in your progress. Remember, patience will be your greatest ally during this period. Building on a solid foundation will inevitably lead to favorable results. Remain steadfast, as you are on the verge of a breakthrough, where success promises to be significant and enduring.
Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Golden
Lucky day Saturday

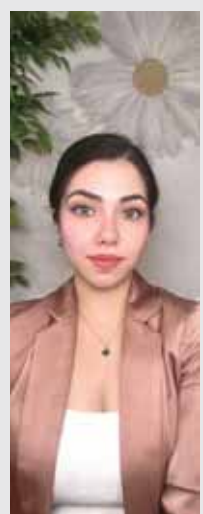


PISCES Feb 19-March 20
This week heralds a period of financial growth and satisfaction. You'll find yourself drawn towards seeking inner peace through practices like yoga, meditation, and chanting. Expect to feel compelled to arrange spiritually uplifting events at home, enhancing the serene atmosphere. However, midweek might present challenges in your personal relationships, possibly leading to misunderstandings or disagreements with a partner. Such conflicts may lead you to reflect on your deeper desires and life goals. Remember, your perspective may lean towards seeing the negative rather than appreciating what you have. This inclination could lead to a sense of being overwhelmed by negativity. It's crucial during these times to stay resilient and confront these challenges with courage rather than succumbing to despair.
Lucky number 16 | Lucky colour Mint
Lucky day Friday

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Discovering the Purpose of Life

THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

There are moments in life when the usual rhythm of existence comes to a halt—moments when a deep, unshakable question emerges from within: "Why am I here?" This question often arises not during our triumphs but in the quiet aftermath of loss, failure, or self-reflection. It is as though the universe gently nudges us to look beyond the surface of our achievements and seek a deeper truth. Ancient Vedic wisdom holds that the answer lies not in chasing fleeting goals but in understanding and aligning with our karma and dharma, our cosmic purpose and the path uniquely meant for us. Through this alignment, we embark on the sacred journey of discovering the true purpose of life. Karma, often misunderstood as mere cause and effect, is a deeper law of action and reaction. It is not just about the actions we perform but the intentions and energy behind them. Our karmic blueprint, shaped over lifetimes, serves as both a map and a mirror. It reflects the lessons we are here to learn and the experiences we must navigate to grow spiritually.

The challenges we face are whether in relationships, health, or career, are not random but karmic threads woven into the fabric of our existence. They are opportunities to confront our shadows, resolve past debts, and refine our souls. Recognising this truth transforms our perspective. Pain becomes a teacher, and every obstacle, a stepping stone to self-realisation. While karma represents the lessons we carry, dharma is the unique path we are meant to walk in this lifetime. Derived from the Sanskrit root "dhri," meaning to sustain, dharma is that which upholds the harmony of the universe. It is our duty, our responsibility, and our spiritual calling. Dharma is not a rigid set of rules but a dynamic expression of our truest self. For one, it may manifest as nurturing a family; for another, it may mean creating art that inspires the world. When we align with our dharma, life feels purposeful and fulfilling. We experience a flow where our actions serve not just personal gain but contribute to the greater good. The interplay between karma and dharma is like a dance. To align with our life's purpose, we must



first understand the karmic lessons presented to us. This requires deep introspection, self-awareness, and a willingness to confront our fears and patterns. Astrology, a profound tool rooted in Vedic wisdom, offers a roadmap to our karmic imprints. The positions of the planets at the time of our birth reveal the energies influencing our journey and the areas of life that demand growth. For instance, Saturn often points to the karmic debts we must repay, while Jupiter illuminates the areas where dharma can flourish. Once we identify our karmic lessons, the next step is to align with dharma. This alignment is not an overnight process but a

journey of gradual awakening. Meditation, gratitude journaling, and practices like EFT tapping can help clear the emotional and mental clutter that obscures our path. Aligning with dharma requires inner work. It demands peeling back the layers of societal expectations, inherited fears, and self-imposed limitations. Practices such as chakra balancing and mindfulness allow us to connect with our authentic selves. For example, the throat chakra governs communication and self-expression. If this chakra is blocked due to past wounds, one may struggle to voice their truth, hindering alignment with their dharma. Healing this energy

centre through affirmations and meditation can restore balance and clarity. Similarly, gratitude is a powerful practice in this journey. When we appreciate life's blessings, no matter how small we shift our focus from lack to abundance. This shift creates a fertile ground for dharma to emerge, as we are no longer trapped in the narrative of unworthiness or scarcity. Discovering life's purpose begins with self-reflection. Journaling about one's strengths, passions, and the activities that bring joy can provide valuable insights. Reflecting on recurring challenges and patterns often points to unresolved karma. Meditation and silence are equally crucial. Quieting the mind allows one to hear the whispers of the soul. Tools like astrology or guidance from spiritual mentors can illuminate karmic lessons and dharmic paths. Acts of service also play a vital role. Serving something larger than oneself connects one with the universal rhythm of love and abundance. Trusting the process is perhaps the most vital step. Life's purpose is not a destination but a journey. Every experience, even the challenging ones, is part of this

unfolding story. Ultimately, the purpose of life transcends personal success or happiness. It is about contributing to the greater cosmic order, uplifting others, and leaving the world better than we found it. When we align with our dharma, we become instruments of divine will, radiating love, compassion, and wisdom. Every soul's journey is unique, yet interconnected. Your alignment with your karmic path and dharma not only brings you peace but also creates ripples of positivity in the collective consciousness. In this way, the purpose of life becomes a shared endeavour that is a dance of individual and universal harmony. Discovering the purpose of life is not about seeking answers but about aligning with the divine rhythm within us. By understanding our karma and embracing our dharma, we transcend the superficial and connect with the infinite. Life, then, becomes not just a series of events but a sacred journey that is a dance of the soul with the cosmos. And in that dance, we find not only purpose but also the deepest joy of simply being. — She is a Life Coach and Founder of Soulful Wellness

Now you can write to us at agendapioneer@gmail.com