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MONEY 10 INDIA'S ECONOMY PROJECTED TO GROW 6.6 PER CENT IN 2025: UN

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INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES DROP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended January 3, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

MARKETS



Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

increasing pressure on the rupee. The rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86.00-mark (provisional) for the first time against the US dollar on Friday as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds.

SC orders status quo on Sambhal Mosque

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Ordering status quo, the Supreme Court on Friday asked the Uttar Pradesh authorities, the Archaeological Survey of India and others not to take steps over a "private well" near the Mughal-era Jama Masjid mosque in Sambhal.

historically. Ahmadi said the well was partly within and partly outside the mosque premises, citing Google map imagery to buttress his claim. The mosque committee had challenged a November 19, 2024 order by the Sambhal senior division civil judge allowing the appointment of an advocate commissioner to survey the mosque.

Modi talks Godhra, US visa refusal in debutant podcast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his first-ever podcast, opened up about significant moments from his political journey, including his experiences during the 2002 Godhra riots and the United States' decision to deny him a visa in 2005.

BALLOONS TO BEHOLD



Enthusiasts at the 10th Tamil Nadu International Balloon Festival, in Mamallapuram

Delhi to begin renovation of T2, to shift operations to T1

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi airport's Terminal 2 (T2) will remain closed for about six months for refurbishment works in the next financial year. Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) has unveiled an ambitious plan to refurbish Terminal 2 or T2 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport which was built by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) four decades ago.



financial year starts from April 1, 2025. According to DIAL, the closure will not significantly impact airport operations as Terminal 1 (T1) will accommodate the additional load of passengers. T2, which was constructed 40 years ago by the AAI, will undergo extensive renovations to improve the passenger experience and increase capacity for future growth.

Delhi student held for bomb threats at 23 schools

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With fear looming over the national Capital since May last year due to a spate of bomb threats, the Delhi Police on Friday revealed that they have detained a Class 12 student for allegedly sending bomb threats to more than 23 schools in the city over the past few weeks as he did not want to write his exams.

AAP promises funds for RWAs to hire guards

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The political discourse in Delhi is currently being dominated by conversations around "freebies" ahead of the Assembly polls overshadowing other major issues including pollution, law and order, crimes against women and infrastructure.



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses a press conference

"false" promises on the RWAs again. Kejriwal's BJP rival from the New Delhi constituency, Parvesh Verma, in a post on X, asked the AAP supremo if he remembered his previous promises to the RWAs in 2018 and 2022.



Water cannons being used to disperse agitators during a protest by BJP members against AAP for allegedly making "fake" claims regarding registration of voters from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in Delhi's electoral rolls ahead of Assembly polls in the Capital.

assembly. Kejriwal said the private security guard proposal would enhance public security which has been a priority for the ruling party that had earlier installed CCTV cameras and colony gates.

Ayodhya readies for first Pran Pratishtha anniversary

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA



The highlight of the celebrations will be Ram Lalla's Maha Aarti at 12:20 PM on January 11. Cultural performances, devotional rituals, and Ram Katha discourses will follow.

and devotees from across India. The public is invited to be part of these historic celebrations," he said.

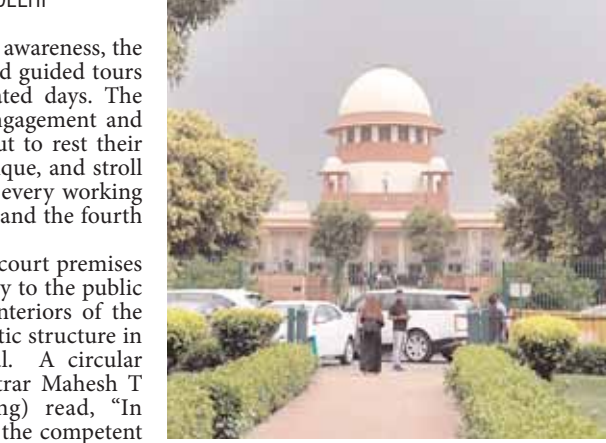
WHY THE ANNIVERSARY IS ON JANUARY 11

While the original Pran Pratishtha ceremony took place on January 22, 2024, this year's anniversary is being observed on January 11, 2025. The shift aligns with Hindu Vedic traditions, which follow the lunar calendar.

Explore Supreme Court of India with guided tours every Saturday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opening its doors for public awareness, the Supreme Court has allowed guided tours for general public on designated days. The drive aimed at augmenting engagement and awareness, allows people to put to rest their curiosities on the court's mystique, and stroll through its majestic corridors every working Saturday — except the second and the fourth and declared holidays.



the guided tour smoothly, a pre-online booking would be mandatory. "A visitor can arrange pre-planned escorted visits with online booking made in advance," the official said, "and will be accompanied throughout the premises and introduced to parts of historical importance and they will also get a chance to see the courtrooms."

LA wildfires: 10 dead, thousands of buildings destroyed

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES

The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area have killed 10 people so far and burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures, officials said Thursday.



Warning- thunderstorms with hail and lightning likely in six districts today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN The State Meteorological Centre has issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied with hail and lightning in various parts of the State today.

Anganwadi workers ask WECD Dept to provide Rs 5,000 pension

PNS ■ DEHRADUN Anganwadi workers have submitted a letter to the Women Empowerment and Child Development (WECD) department, requesting that they should be provided with a pension of at least Rs 5,000 after retirement.

IN BRIEF

UPES wins Shaheed Memorial Cup for 5th consecutive year

DEHRADUN: The 11th edition of the Shaheed Memorial Cricket Tournament concluded on Friday with UPES Blue securing the championship title for the fifth consecutive year.

Man scales mobile tower demanding reopening of his shop

RISHIKESH: A man climbed atop a mobile phone tower near a petrol pump in Shyampur area along the Haridwar-Rishikesh highway with a bottle of petrol on Friday, insisting that the shop be used to run inside the petrol pump premises be allowed to reopen and remained there for about two and half hours on Friday.

BHEL signs MOU with ONGC for projects in renewable energy

HARIDWAR: Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for exploring joint projects and collaboration in the area of new and renewable energy business, including Fuel Cell, Electrolyser and Battery Energy Storage System-based Projects.

KU student to receive Princeton Foundation fellowship

NAINITAL: The vice-chancellor of Kumaun University, Diwan Singh Rawat congratulated the BSc student of Agriculture (3rd Semester) Harshita Sharma on receiving the Princeton Foundation National Fellowship for Peace and Learning India 2024-25.

PM Modi likely to attend agricultural science congress at GBPUAT

PNS ■ PANTNAGAR Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to attend the 17th Agricultural Science Conference of GBPUAT to be held from February 20 to 22 by the GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology (GBPUAT).



conference is a matter of prestige for the university. Out of the 65 agriculture universities in the nation, GBPUAT is the first to get the opportunity to hold this conference," Chauhan said.

various activities held by the university last year, the university's director (Extension) JP Jaiswal expressed hope that the media will continue its positive efforts in the future too.

Pithoragarh to become a boxing hub: Arya

PNS ■ DEHRADUN Sports minister Rekha Arya said that Pithoragarh will become a hub for boxing, Speaking after inaugurating the multipurpose sports hall at the Hari Singh Thapa Sports College campus in Lelu on Friday, she emphasised that the State is entering a new era for sports and athletes.



concerns about their careers. Arya added that, under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is preparing to host the Olympics soon.

preparing to host the Olympics soon. She expressed pride in Pithoragarh hosting a boxing event as part of the National Games, stating that it will inspire new boxing talent to emerge in the area.

National Games volunteers to be briefed on their tasks during Youth Day programme

PNS ■ DEHRADUN Volunteers registered for the upcoming 38th National Games will be briefed about their responsibilities during the Youth Day programme at Gaulpar Sports Complex in Haldwani on January 12, 2025, in Haldwani.

coaches, support staff and spectators during the upcoming National Games will be collected and recycled. The recycled plastic will then be used to make chairs and benches for parks and other public areas.

Two including ONGC worker arrested with smack worth Rs 10 lakh

PNS ■ DEHRADUN An ONGC worker and another man were arrested in Dehradun for possession of smack worth Rs10 lakh. The accused, identified as Neeraj Singh (30), a contractual worker at ONGC and Pushpit Shukla (24) were intercepted near IT Park Gate on Dhoran Road on Friday.

electronic weighing scale, 40 small packets of smack and Rs 10,620 in cash. During interrogation, it was revealed that both men had been involved in drug trafficking for a considerable period, lured by the prospect of high profits.

also disclosed that their supplier was a man named Arun, from whom they regularly procured the narcotics. The drugs were repackaged into smaller packets to be sold at higher prices, as per the officials.

उत्तराखण्ड पेयजल संसाधन विकास एवं निर्माण निगम... नविदा सूचना... दिनांक: 09/01/2025

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POSSESSION NOTICE (FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTY) (As per Exemption IV read with Rule 8(1) of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002)

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-AUCTION NOTICE The Bids were invited through e-auction scheduled on 27.01.25 for leasing of parcel space of 32 SLRs in Train Nos.:

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE Sr. DEN/III/MB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following tender. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only.

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE-TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET [See proviso to rule 8(6)] Notice for sale of immovable assets

F. No. 2(11)/2020-PL-Part (2) Government of India Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change [Policy & Law Division]

Level-1, Jal Wing, Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, Jor Bagh Road, New Delhi - 03 Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change invites applications for filling up of twenty-two (22) posts of Associates (Legal) on contractual basis in the Policy & Law Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC) on payment of a consolidated monthly remuneration ranging from ₹40,000/- to ₹1,00,000/-.

मेरे पति के सैन्य रिपोर्ट में, मेरा गलत नाम अलका मिश्रा दर्ज है, सही नाम अलका शेषाद्री आधार नं. -514415668735 W/o आर्मी नं. 15590340W नायक प्रदीप कुमार मिश्रा, म.नं.-427 एमआईजी 2, आमदी नगर, हुडको कॉलोनी दर्ज मिलाई परिचय, पोस्ट-भिलाई पश्चिम, जिला-दुर्ग, छत्तीसगढ़-490009 है।



# Rajnath calls for enhanced cohesiveness of global community

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday here called for enhanced cohesiveness of the global community in view of the current security environment which, he said, is in a state of flux with multiple conflicts and challenges. Addressing Ambassadors' Round-Table, organised as a prelude to Aero India 2025, he stressed on the need to overcome the present geopolitical tensions for ensuring mutual prosperity and global peace. This 15th edition of Aero India is scheduled to be held at the Air Force Station, Yelahanka in Bengaluru, Karnataka from February 10 to 14. "It is of paramount importance that the like-minded countries should strive together for collective actions for peace and prosperity. Without these, our future generations will not be able to take advantage of economic growth or technological innovations that we are experiencing in today's

era," the defence minister told the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of various countries attending the event. He pointed out that India is emerging as a leading voice for the Global South, and it advocates for a multi-aligned policy approach, which ensures that diverse views are considered in the collective pursuit of prosperity. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has articulated India's commitment to addressing global challenges through five guiding principles: Respect, Dialogue, Cooperation, Peace and Prosperity. In today's geopolitical landscape, fostering unity among like-minded nations is essential for ensuring mutual prosperity and peace, while addressing contemporary challenges. India has always championed shared prosperity and shared responsibility based on the fundamental principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, 'One Earth, One Family', which was also the theme for G-20 Summit in 2023," he added.



Rajnath Singh described Aero India, Asia's largest aeroshow, as one such event, where nations come together and form bonds beyond boundaries. Elaborating on the vision behind the biennial event, he stated that it has proven itself to be the meeting ground for the aerospace and defence sectors to showcase their products/technologies. He defined it as a forum to forge strategic partnerships towards increasing opportunities for business, Transfer of Technology, joint development and co-production between various industries. The defence minister emphasised that, today, India possesses one of the largest defence industrial ecosystems in Asia and the government is committed to further enhancing the capabilities. He added that the Indian aerospace and defence sector represents an attractive opportunity for foreign companies seeking to establish new ventures and partnerships. He cited the significant milestone of setting-up of the man-

ufacturing facility of C-295 transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force through collaboration between Tata Advanced Systems Limited and Airbus Defence & Space. Rajnath Singh asserted that India has emerged as an attractive destination for investment, and Aero India 2025 presents an opportunity for friendly nations to jointly explore strengths and capabilities in the defence sector, addressing both strategic needs as well as tactical requirements. He added that the event will facilitate industry captains, technology leaders, intellectuals and entrepreneurs with new avenues for collaboration in defence industrial enterprises. "Aero India 2025 will serve as a vital forum for exploring partnerships that will form the base for future challenges. Together, we can create pathways for growth that are inclusive and sustainable," he said. The defence minister emphasised that air and space power have become pivotal elements in shaping strategies as such assets,

incorporated with Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning systems, provide an unprecedented advantage in battle-field scenarios. He described Aero Space Power as the new frontier of military dominance which acts as strategic deterrence. During the Round-Table, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of various countries were briefed on the major events of Aero India 2025, and extended a personal invite from defence minister for their senior most leadership. Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary (Defence Production) Sanjeev Kumar and other senior officials of the Ministry of Defence as well as the Government of Karnataka attended the Round-Table.

# No tree felling in Mumbai's Aarey without our nod: SC

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the tree authority of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation not to allow any further tree felling in Mumbai's Aarey colony without its permission. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Aravind Kumar said the authority could process the applications and then seek orders from the court. The order came after the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) informed the bench there was no pending propos-

al to cut of more trees in the area. The top court posted the hearing on March 5. The apex court had directed the Maharashtra government to inform if there was any proposal to fell more trees in Aarey forest. The court in 2023 permitted some forest-dwelling communities to move the Bombay High Court with their grievances over felling of trees in the forest for the metro rail project. On April 17, 2023, the apex court came down heavily on Mumbai Metro for trying to "overreach" its order permitting the felling of only 84 trees in the



forest for a car shed project and directed it to pay Rs 10 lakh as penalty. The court said it was improper on the part of the MMRCL to move the tree authority for felling of any trees in excess of 84. The top court, however, permitted the company to remove 177 trees from Aarey forest, saying a stay on tree felling would bring the public project to a standstill which was not desirable. The apex court in 2019 took suo motu cognisance of a letter petition addressed to the chief justice of India by law student Rishav Ranjan seeking a stay on the felling of trees in the

colony. On November 29, 2022, the apex court permitted Mumbai Metro to raise its plea to fell 84 trees at Mumbai's Aarey Colony with the authority concerned. The top court had directed MMRCL to strictly abide by its undertaking on no tree felling and warned of strict action in case of violation. The apex court had restrained the authorities from felling any more trees after the solicitor general submitted on behalf of Maharashtra government no more trees would be cut. The felling of trees in the colony was opposed by green activists and Aarey residents.

# Project 'Veer Gatha 4.0' as part of R-Day celebrations garners incredible nationwide response

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The fourth edition of Project 'Veer Gatha 4.0', a joint initiative by Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education as part of Republic Day celebrations, has garnered an incredible nationwide response. This year, approximately 1.76 crore students from around 2.31 lakh schools participated in the competition, defence ministry said here on Friday. One hundred (100) winners are selected at the national level. The winners are divided into four categories, with 25 winners from each: Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8), Secondary Stage (Grades 9-10) and Secondary Stage (Grades 11-12). The first 100 winners will witness the traditional parade at Kartavya Path as Special Guests. Launched on September 05, 2024, Project Veer Gatha 4.0 presented a variety of thought-provoking topics for essay and paragraph writing. Students had the opportunity to write about their chosen role models, particularly focusing on Gallantry Award recipients. They were also encouraged to explore the inspiring lives of freedom fighters such as Rani Laxmibai, the 1857 First War of Independence, and the significant role of Tribal Uprisings in India's Freedom Struggle. This diverse array of topics not only enhanced the quality of the entries, but also deepened participants' understanding of India's historical and cultural legacy. The project involved schools conducting activities at the local level, nationwide interaction programmes by Gallantry awardees (both offline and online), and the submission of top entries via MyGov portal. The school-level activities concluded on October 31, 2024. Following evaluations at the State and District levels, nearly 4,029 entries were submitted



for national-level evaluation, where top 100 entries were selected as SUPER-100 winners. These winners will be felicitated jointly by the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education in New Delhi. Each winner will receive a cash prize of Rs 10,000. In addition to the 100 national-level winners, eight winners at the State/UT level (two from each category) and four winners at the district level (one from each category) will be selected and honoured by State/UT/District authorities. Project Veer Gatha was launched in 2021 as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate India's 75th year of Independence. The project aims to raise awareness of Gallantry awardees' acts of bravery and the life stories of these heroes. The initiative helps instill patriotism and civic values in students. The journey of Project Veer Gatha from Edition 1 to Edition 4 has been inspiring, expanding the reach of the competition across the length and breadth of the country. In the first two editions of Project Veer Gatha, 25 winners were selected at the national level, with around eight lakh students participating in the first edition and 19 lakh in the second edition. The third edition marked a significant milestone, with the selection of 100 national winners for the first time and an increased participation of 1.36 crore students. The momentum continued to grow in Veer Gatha 4.0, reinforcing the widespread impact of this initiative.

# Shah to chair regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah on Saturday here will chair a regional conference on "Drug Trafficking and National Security". The conference, organized by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), aims to address the growing concern of drug trafficking and its impact on national security, with a special focus on eight states and Union Territories of northern India, home ministry said here on Friday. During the event, Shah will launch the Drug Disposal Fortnight, inaugurate the new office complex of the NCB's Bhopal zonal unit and extension of the MANAS-2 helpline to all 36 states and Union Territories. The conference will focus on the sharing of real-time information from the National Narcotics Helpline 'MANAS' portal with the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of States and Union Territories, evaluating the progress of States in combating drug trafficking, and assessing the effectiveness of the Narcotics Coordination



Mechanism (NCORD). It will also address strengthening and enhancing the functionality of State Forensic Science Laboratories (SFLs), utilizing the NIDAAN database to bolster efforts against drug trafficking, implementing provisions of the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act, establishing special NDPS courts for the speedy trial of drug-related cases, and fostering a Whole-of-Government approach to ensure comprehensive collaboration among all agencies to combat drug trafficking and abuse effectively. During the drug disposal fort-

night starting from January 11-25, a total of 44,792 kilograms of seized narcotics, whose international market value is Rs 2,411 crore, will be disposed of. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has adopted a Zero Tolerance Policy against drug trafficking. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is implementing a three-pronged strategy to achieve a drug-free India by 2047. This includes strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing coordination among narcotics agencies, and launching a massive public awareness campaign.

# DG NCC inaugurates 'Idea and Innovation Competition' for cadets

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Director General National Cadet Corps (DG NCC) Lt General Gurbirpal Singh here on Friday inaugurated 'Idea and Innovation Competition', to provide cadets with tools and guidance to develop solutions to real-world challenges. This unique initiative which was taken up for the first time in NCC Republic Day Camp (RDC) provided cadets with the tools and guidance to think critically and develop solutions to real-world challenges, defence ministry said. Before the competition, the NCC organised a series of workshops and contests pan India under the aegis of all 17 NCC State Directorates, with the aim to inspire and meet the aspirations of cadets. The initiative yielded remarkable results, with cadets generating an impressive 256 innovative ideas and solutions. Out of these, 56 top innovations were shortlisted and showcased during the Republic Day Camp 2025. The innovations highlighted



the cadets' ability to think outside the box, demonstrated creativity, teamwork, and a commitment to nation-building. The Idea and Innovation competition resonated deeply with the cadets, emphasised entrepreneurship, problem-solving, and the spirit of innovation in the cadets. These initiatives not only underlined the NCC's dedication to nurture future leaders but also boost the potential of young minds in addressing pressing societal challenges. The aim of the initiative was to align NCC training with contemporary aspects and give exposure & opportunities to cadets towards 'Yuva Setu' and prepare them for 'Viksit Bharat'.

# Former UP Police DG appointed president of IPF

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Former Uttar Pradesh Police director general O P Singh has been appointed the new president of the Indian Police Foundation (IPF), an independent think tank on policing subjects. A message shared by outgoing President N Ramachandran with other members of the organisation said Singh's skills and "team building" abilities apart from "remarkable contributions and visionary leadership make him the ideal choice to further the vision and mission of the Foundation." According to the message, Singh was "unanimously" elected as the IPF president and CEO during a meeting of the executive council held here on Friday. The 1983-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer retired from service in January 2020. Apart from heading the Uttar Pradesh Police, he served as the director general of two central forces -- the Central Industrial Security Force and the National Disaster Response Force.

# India marks significant milestone in journey towards achieving climate goals with launch of Bharat Climate Forum

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

India marked a significant milestone in its journey toward achieving climate goals and economic self-reliance with the launch of the Bharat Climate Forum on Friday. A national platform dedicated to unifying stakeholders from policy, industry, finance, and research to accelerate cleantech manufacturing in India, the Bharat Climate Forum aims to drive sustainable economic growth and innovation. Hosted by the Centre for Indigenous Economic Understanding (CIEU) and Dalberg Advisors, the Bharat Climate Forum is supported by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), NITI Aayog, and International Solar Alliance (ISA). Addressing the launch, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Atmanirbhar Bharat embodies India's drive for eco-



economic sovereignty and technological leadership through innovation and collaboration. "Our 4G-5G telecom stack showcases this spirit which the cleantech sector can imbibe, with public-private partnerships enabling world-class, competitive solutions. I think the Bharat Climate Forum organizers for highlighting India's commitment to cleantech innovation for a sustain-

able future," he said in a statement. The forum comes at a time when India is pursuing ambitious climate targets, including achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and scaling up non-fossil fuel capacity to 500 GW by 2030. Despite progress in renewables, challenges such as reliance on imports for solar and wind infrastructure persist. Ashwani Mahajan, National

Co-Convener of Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Member-Secretary of the Bharat Climate Forum, emphasized the need for a comprehensive manufacturing policy to address these challenges. The forum also spotlighted the economic opportunities in cleantech. By 2030, Dalberg estimates suggest that cleantech manufacturing could create a domestic market worth \$120-150 billion annually and generate export opportunities of \$40-45 billion while generating 50 million new jobs by 2070. Jagjeet Singh Sareen, Partner, Global Climate Practice at Dalberg Advisors and Member-Secretary of the Bharat Climate Forum mentioned, achieving the 1.5-degree target requires urgent acceleration in our efforts. The inaugural event witnessed the launch of Bharat Cleantech Manufacturing Platform by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal an initiative to strength-

en India's clean tech value chains—spanning solar, wind, hydrogen, and battery storage. The Forum launch was also addressed by several distinguished attendees including Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa who provided insights into delivering cost-competitive clean tech solutions. Bharat Climate Forum 2025 is an influential platform that brings together key stakeholders from the government, industry, and global community to accelerate India's clean energy transition. CIEU is committed to fostering comprehensive research, facilitating dialogues, and curating innovative ideas that address the needs of diverse communities. Dalberg Advisors is a strategic advisory firm that combines the best private sector strategy skills and rigorous analytical capabilities with deep knowledge and networks across emerging and frontier markets.

# New FIR against Karti Chidambaram

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

CBI has registered a fresh case against Congress MP Karti Chidambaram, accusing accepting bribes for lifting the ban on liquor manufacturer Diageo and FDI clearance for Sequoia Capital and routing bribe money through Vasan Eye Care and his own firm Advantage Capital. As per the CBI FIR, Karti got around Rs.87 crore on these deals by misusing father and former Finance Minister P Chidambaram's office. Apart from Karti, other accused are Chidambaram family's Chartered Accountant S Bhaskararaman, Vasan Eye Care promoter (late) Dwarakanathan, bribe gives liquor company Diageo Scotland and venture capital firm Sequoia Capital and Karti controlled firms Advantage Strategic Consulting, Vasan Eye Care, which is now defunct. CBI FIR charges Karti and his firm Advantage for accepting



bribe of 15,000 Dollars for lifting ban on liquor company Diageo Scotland which supplies famous brand Johnnie Walker Whiskey. CBI FIR says more than 86 crore was routed by Karti controlled firms Vasan Eye Care and Advantage Strategic Consulting in providing Foreign Direct Investment clearance for Mauritius based venture capital firm Sequoia Capital's proposals from Finance Ministry then headed by P Chidambaram. Detailing the money trail, CBI FIR says these

transactions happened between 2008 to 2010. Karti is currently facing three CBI cases - Aircel Maxis deal, INX Media bribery and Chinese Visa case. This is his fourth case, facing corruption, misusing his father former Finance Minister P Chidambaram. He is also facing Enforcement Directorate's case in Aircel Maxis and INX Media bribery case. In Aircel Maxis deal and INX Media bribery case, Karti is a Co-Accused with his father P Chidambaram.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Transforming defence

The 'Year of Transformation' can give necessary momentum for defence manufacturing and innovation

India's defence landscape is set to undergo a transformative shift in 2025, as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) embarks on an ambitious overhaul aimed at modernising procurement processes, expanding indigenous manufacturing capabilities and boosting research and development (R&D). The year has been declared as the 'Year of Transformation,' with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other top officials outlining a vision to address long-standing challenges while positioning the country for greater self-reliance and competitiveness in defence. One of the key focus areas for the government is to revamp the Defence Acquisition Procedures (DAP). These procedures, which have been criticised for their complexity and inefficiency, are set to be replaced with a more streamlined, lighter, and faster version. The aim is to cut down delays in procurement timelines and eliminate bureaucratic hurdles that have long impeded defence modernisation. The new framework will not only make the system more efficient but will also create a level playing field for both established players and newcomers in the defence sector. In addition to reforming procurement, the government has placed a strong emphasis on boosting indigenous manufacturing and R&D.



While India is the world's fifth-largest manufacturing economy, its defence manufacturing capacity remains relatively small in comparison to its overall economic standing. To address this gap, the government plans to allocate more resources to defence R&D, with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) targeting an increase in R&D spending from 5 per cent to 15 per cent of the defence budget in the coming years. One area that has garnered particular attention is the development of aero engines. India has faced challenges in developing these critical technologies domestically, and the government has signaled that joint ventures with foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) will be essential for progress. With significant investments required—potentially as high as Rs 50,000 crore—the government is determined to make the necessary commitments to build the infrastructure and expertise required for successful co-development of aero engines and related technologies. Another significant initiative is the creation of a more competitive defence industry ecosystem. Currently, India's defence sector is largely dominated by Public Sector Undertakings. The government aims to level the playing field by encouraging the participation of startups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises through policy changes. Despite these ambitious plans, India's defence ecosystem still faces several challenges. One of the most significant hurdles is the relatively small manufacturing base in sectors like aerospace, where India's ability to scale production and develop cutting-edge technologies has been limited. Besides, archaic policies, delays in preparing Requests for Proposals and overly complicated procedures have often led to extended timelines. This must change if defence sector is to become competitive and innovative.

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### PICTALK



Devotees carry 'kalash' during 'Hindu Rashtra Seva Mela' at Goregaon

# The trust factor in human interaction



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The temperament and conviction of individuals play a pivotal role in shaping trust, whether in personal relationships or organisational dynamics

There is a general feeling that if something is committed on paper, with other things being equal, it is reliable evidence that it will be carried out. If it is on a legal document, the credibility quotient is still higher, and if there are clauses that recognise the punitive element of violation, the feeling of reliability further goes on. This, like many truths, goes a certain distance.

This cannot be the place to explore the veracity of such belief, but there is an occasion to look at certain other aspects of reliability, especially the temperament of the people involved. Some people take their words seriously, and others casually. This attitude permeates their entire behaviour, and in certain matters, it becomes even more evident that they take their words seriously. Other types of people are quite figuratively the opposite, and they take their own words so lightly that when they utter them, they are not sure what conviction they carry. Between these two extremes, the larger part of the population rests with varying degrees of reliability and different levels of conviction.

This simple truth makes the entire range of human conviction open to many shades of possibilities and makes dealing with each other either at a direct level or at a group level, an extremely dubious proposition wherein liability is concerned. This even affects official interaction as indeed it does personal interaction. It is therefore necessary in a group culture to inculcate the correct values of interpersonal dynamics. People cannot be 'taught' to be reliable. This is because the fundamental principles of values, like eternal values, remain the same. Every domain of human life talks about what is right, what is beautiful, and what is essential to keep groups sustainable and harmoniously together. In such circumstances where it is recognised that observing pristine standards



may be difficult, many people practice silence. They simply do not talk about values at all. This may or may not work because silence and lack of communication would allow each one to create his norm and use his interpretation. What matters most then is how the leader of the group behaves as an exemplar and what other members of the group see as the essence of acceptable behaviour. Positive or negative recognition then follows. For this, the informal and formal leaders of the group must agree on certain examples and set an example collectively. It is difficult, especially when there is no clear reference point and no way of verifying what rules the roost. If the group has a powerful man, his behaviour is noticed and others try to imitate him. If the powerful man acquires power by formal position, it is one story. If, however, he acquires power through organising cliques and factions and through manipulations, there are always dangers of somebody calling the bluff or indeed power slipping out of his



IF THE POWERFUL MAN ACQUIRES POWER BY FORMAL POSITION, IT IS ONE STORY. IF, HOWEVER, HE ACQUIRES POWER THROUGH ORGANIZING CLIQUES AND FACTIONS AND THROUGH MANIPULATIONS, THERE ARE ALWAYS DANGERS OF SOMEBODY CALLING THE BLUFF

hand. All this is not conducive to organisational stability or, for that matter, even clarity. It makes the job of a new entrant particularly complex. The complexity would be enhanced if the new entrant could not navigate his way intelligently with perspicacity and shrewdness. If the group has a large number of turnovers, then the complexity is further compounded. Under the circumstances, it's perhaps best to recognise that, like all truths, simplicity is the best approach. Being truthful, simple, and straightforward is the foundation of sound behaviour, stable relationships, and the achievement of goals constructively and dependably. Like all foundations of a sound civil society, positive thinking, straightforward action, and dependable follow-up is the way to go forward. It is the human mind that creates complications. Legality and other elements that try to substitute the basic character of dependability, without the right ambience, will remain halfway houses. It can lead to

quibbling, litigation, and, at times, disappointment. However, stability will remain a matter of character, and that is where civil societies need to pitch. Whether this is in a formal organisation or an informal civil setup, it would hardly make a difference. Truth remains the truth and for the best way, it is important to follow it up relentlessly with simplicity and dignity. Like many tales, this too has a tailpiece. There is a Sanskrit dictum, "Satyam bruyat, priyam apriyam". A free translation of this shall be "Speak the truth, speak the pleasant; do not speak the truth which is unpleasant". There can be many views on this, and each will have its assumptions and derivations. If assumptions vary, as do the derivations, conclusions would be also varied. That is the nature of truth: multifaceted, each appearing right in its way. One has to navigate one's way. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TWO TIER SYSTEM IN TEST CRICKET

Madam — There are talks between Australia, England, and India and the International Cricket Council's (ICC) new chair, Jay Shah to split Test (cricket) playing nations into two tier, with Australia, England and India in one tier and the rest in a different tier. The concept has gained impetus post the BGT series, where the attendance and TV viewership touched new records. If agreed upon by the ICC council, this will come into effect post-2027 after the present commitments are met by these nations. The objective is that these three nations will play against each other twice in three years as against the present four-year schedule. While the idea may have sprung up from the revenue point of view, ICC must focus on its unwritten objective of improving the quality and skill level of the weaker member nations and making all the members play competitive cricket. The choice of three nations—India, Australia, and England—also in the upper tier, is arbitrary if it is on the basis of the quality of cricket displayed. If it is so, India has not displayed quality cricket, both in the home series against the Kiwis and down under in the BGT series recently. Also, the Windies have stunned the Aussies in Gabba in a pink ball test in 2024. The recent entrants to the test-playing nations, like Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan have also displayed talents and enthusiasm. Hence such an idea of an arbitrary split must be shunned. If the ICC is serious about splitting, it must be based on the performance in a given time period, say between 2025-28, on the number of points scored by each nation on the number of test wins/losses and can consider having two or three divisions amongst the twelve member countries. Having done that on the basis of points scored, one can consider promotion or demotion of the first and last two, respectively, which will also instill a sense of competitiveness and thereby sustain interest in the test cricket.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

### A policy shift for Afghanistan



In a major and surprising development, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai on Wednesday. Though its relations with Afghanistan had nosedived after the Taliban seized power in the mountainous, landlocked republic in 2021, New Delhi, in a smart move, kept providing humanitarian and economic assistance to Afghanistan. The Taliban also requested the Indian delegation to reopen its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan. Now, Misri's meeting marks a major shift in New

Delhi's policy towards the Taliban. This meeting has taken place at a time when Afghanistan is witnessing heightened tensions with Pakistan concerning the Durand Line—the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan—as well as regarding the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). By condemning Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan, New Delhi has played a well-calculated diplomatic move. Besides the Pakistan factor, Iran's Chabahar Port is also going to play a major role in India-Taliban relations as Kabul is looking to leverage its ties with India by using the Chabahar Port. Thus, both the Taliban and New Delhi have realised that bilateral ties are mutually beneficial for both countries. By playing a vital role in restoring peace, stability, and development in Afghanistan, New Delhi can secure geopolitical leverage over Pakistan at the crossroads of South and Central Asia.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

### HONOURING INDIAN DIASPORA

Madam—The city of Odisha turned out to be the venue for the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas this year. In order to honour the immense contribution of the Indian diaspora, it is particularly required to appreciate the exceptional contribution of Indians overseas. For many decades, millions of Indians have paid visits to foreign countries to grab vibrant opportunities in different spectrums of life. Indians made exceptional contributions to the economic success of the different nations, assisting India to create its own niche soft power on the basis of its people settled overseas. Indians are globally renowned for contributing the world's highest remittance back to India with 129 billion USD in 2024. The spirit of the Indian diaspora is ever vibrant and zealous, and this celebration at Odisha's Bhubaneswar for appreciating Pravasi Bhartiya is a welcoming initiative. Let's take a moment to thank & appreciate the Indian diaspora, who are continuously extending the legacy of India all around the world.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

### MAHAKUMBH MELA IN PRAYAGRAJ

Madam — The Great Mahakumbh Mela 2025, set to take place in Prayagraj, which is held only once in a period of 144 years, which is beginning from January 13 to February 26, is much more than a religious gathering—it is a profound celebration of spirituality, culture, and cosmic alignment. This ancient festival, rooted in the Sanatan tradition, is believed to influence not only human affairs but also cosmic and terrestrial energies. The event is centred on the holy confluence of three rivers—the Ganga, Yamuna and the Saraswati. The Mahakumbh exemplifies India's rich cultural diversity, drawing millions of devotees, ascetics, and pilgrims from all walks of life. Through practices like ritual bathing, chanting, meditation, and spiritual discourses, it becomes a unifying force, blending traditions and beliefs into a harmonious whole.

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Breaking barriers: The rise of women investors in India's equity markets

Among the most notable trends in the equity market is the surge in women investors, whose participation has grown 6.8 times since 2015

The Indian equity market has radically transformed over the past two decades. The advent of smartphones, digital trading platforms, and increased financial literacy has ushered in a new era of investors — young, financially aware, and open to taking calculated risks. Recent data from the National Stock Exchange (NSE) reveals that women now constitute over 22 per cent of equity market investors in India, a 6.8X growth since 2015. This surge in female participation is particularly noteworthy given the tepid adoption of demat trading in its early days. It could be attributed to women enjoying greater financial independence, a growing interest in equities, and a disciplined approach to sustainable wealth creation. The rise in women's financial awareness has also been a critical driver of this growth. A study by CRISIL and DBS found that 47 per cent of women now make independent financial decisions. This newfound autonomy is reflected in the increasing number of women investing



in mutual funds. According to AMFI data, women's share in industry AUM rose to nearly 21 per cent by the end of December 2023, against 15.2 per cent in March 2017. Importantly, this trend is not limited to major cities; women in smaller towns show equal enthusiasm for capital market investments. However, the same CRISIL and DBS study revealed that women still allocate 51 per cent of their investable assets to fixed deposits and savings bank accounts, 16 per cent to gold, 15 per cent to mutual funds, 10 per cent to real estate, and just 7 per cent of their investable corpus—being the least preferred option. Given the proven potential for substantial market returns, women's risk-averse attitude towards equities is particularly perplexing.

Over the past five years, benchmark indices have delivered over 100 per cent returns. For instance, based on a daily rolling return analysis, the Nifty 50 Total Returns Index has shown positive returns of approximately 93 per cent over three years. These double-digit returns from long-term equity investments have far outpaced the single-digit interest rates offered by traditional savings accounts and fixed deposits. However, women tend to be cautious when it comes to equities. The potential impact of increased women's participation in equity markets is substantial. A BCG study found that women contribute \$5 trillion annually to the global wealth pool. Encouraging more significant equity investment among women and prudent risk management practices is crucial for building a stronger financial future for individuals and the nation. Regulators are already implementing measures to create a safe and transparent market environment for women investors. For instance, initiatives like the Women's

Investor Awareness Programme actively educate and empower women by simplifying stock market concepts and encouraging them to take control of their financial futures. Simultaneously, the industry complements these efforts by developing accessible and informative content in regional languages and diverse formats, such as podcasts and video tutorials, to make complex financial concepts easier to understand. Women themselves must actively participate in the stock market by engaging in discussions, seeking knowledge, and taking the initiative to invest. Starting with a systematic investment plan is a smart approach to building wealth over time. Additionally, consulting financial experts can help women navigate the market with confidence. It is time for women to seize this opportunity, take control, invest wisely, and contribute to rebuilding a more equitable and financially robust India.

(The writer is Director & Chief Business Officer at m.Stock by Mirae Asset Capital Markets; views are personal)



ARUN CHAUDHARY



## FIRST COLUMN

### HOMESCHOOLING: AN OPTION WORTH EXPLORING

While it comes with challenges, its benefits make it an increasingly compelling choice



SAKSHI SETHI

Childhood is a short season, and homeschooling gives a child more time to truly enjoy it. In recent years, homeschooling has seen a significant rise in popularity as parents increasingly opt to educate their children at home rather than through traditional schooling systems. This shift reflects a combination of concerns about conventional education and the desire for more tailored learning experiences. One of the primary reasons parents choose homeschooling is the ability to customise education to suit their child's unique needs.

There is no denying that curriculum is a valuable tool but at the same time a terrible master. Traditional classrooms often struggle to accommodate different learning paces and styles, whereas homeschooling allows parents to tailor lessons, fostering deeper understanding and engagement. Many parents cite dissatisfaction with public or private school systems as a motivator for homeschooling. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms, underfunding, and lack of individual attention can negatively impact the quality of education. Additionally, concerns over bullying, peer pressure, and exposure to harmful influences prompt parents to seek alternatives.

Homeschooling allows families to integrate their cultural, ethical, or religious values into the curriculum. Parents can teach their children in alignment with their personal beliefs, creating an educational experience that reflects their family's principles. Unlike traditional schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility in schedules and teaching methods. Families incor-



porate travel, extracurricular activities, or non-traditional subjects into their routine, enhancing the learning experience. This adaptability appeals to families seeking a more balanced lifestyle.

Unlike traditional schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility in schedules and teaching methods. Families can incorporate travel, extracurricular activities, or non-traditional subjects into their routine, enhancing the learning experience. This adaptability appeals to families seeking a more balanced lifestyle. While homeschooling offers many benefits, it is not without its challenges. Parents often need to dedicate significant time and effort to planning and teaching. Additionally, concerns about socialisation can arise, as homeschooled children may have fewer opportunities for peer interaction. However, many families address this by participating in extracurricular activities, and community events.

Homeschooling is not a new phenomenon. In olden times, education often took place at home, with parents or private tutors guiding the learning of their child. The rise of formalised schooling in the 19th and 20th centuries shifted education to institutions, but homeschooling remained a choice for families who sought alternatives. Modern homeschooling driven by educational reformers and parents seeking greater control over their children's education began gaining traction in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it continues to evolve, integrating technology and innovative teaching practices. Technology undoubtedly has played a pivotal role in making homeschooling more accessible and effective. It has also enabled collaboration and connection among homeschooling communities. Online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and educational applications such as Scholastic Kids, Udemy, Duolingo, Funbrain and many more provide parents with resources to create comprehensive curricula. The shift to homeschooling reflects a broader desire among parents to take control of their children's education and provide a more personalised, values-driven learning environment. While homeschooling comes with its challenges, the benefits of flexibility, individualised attention and alignment with family priorities make homeschooling an increasingly appealing choice for families worldwide.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

# Junta faces collapse amid escalating defeats



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Losses across key regions, coupled with mass defections and severe military setbacks, suggest a crumbling grip of Military on power in Myanmar



By all indications, 2025 is going to be, militarily, a dismal year for Myanmar's ruling junta. It is clearly losing its war against the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and its armed wing, the People's Defence Force (PDF), ethnic armed organisations (EROs), and the Three Brotherhood Alliance (Henceforth the Alliance). Comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), active in the Kokang Special Region of northern Shan State, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in the Shan State and the Arakan Army (AA), based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part, the alliance has been acting in close cooperation with the PDF and other ethnic armies.

Crystal-gazing is a hazardous business. Nevertheless, a fling at it is warranted by the unfolding events in that star-crossed country. A report under the headline, 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG,' (datelined January 6, 2025), in the news website The Irrawaddy, cited the NUG as stating that the military regime controlled only 107 of the country's 330 townships. The PDF and EROs fully or partly controlled 144 townships or 44 per cent of the country. The website, which enjoys a high-measure of credibility, carried an article by Maung Kavi (datelined January 8, 2025) under the headline, 'Myanmar Junta Boss warns resistance as Regime Loses Ground Nationwide,' saying that the NUG had further claimed that nearly 1,500 of the junta's soldiers and police personnel had defected to the civil disobedience movement and 480 of them had taken up 'revolutionary duties.'

The report titled 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG,' further states that 315 officers were killed and 127 injured in course of the last year. In the same period, 53 senior officers ranging in rank from colonel to major general, were either killed, injured, or taken prisoner. Among the rank and file, 14,093 soldiers and border guard policemen were killed and 7,363 injured. Anti-regime groups seized 741 junta



THE ODDS ARE NOW RAPIDLY STACKING UP AGAINST THE JUNTA. NO DOUBT, THE LATTER HAS TANKS AND OTHER ARMoured VEHICLES, ARTILLERY AND AIR FORCE. TANKS AND ARMoured VEHICLES ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO DEPLOY IN THE AREAS DOMINATED BY THE ETHNIC FORCES

positions. They were mostly captured by ethnic armies, but 162 were taken by PDF and People's Defence Teams in Sagaing, Magwe, Mandalay, Bago and Tanintharyi regions.

The military lost in 2024 some 140 battalions and two regional commands - Northern Shan State Command in northern Shan State and Western Command in Rakhine-plus one regional operations command, five military operations commands, six operational bases, two airbases, 17 border guard police bases, as well as many infantry and light infantry battalions, and artillery, logistics, signal, and military engineering units.

While one should not take the NUG's claims at face value reports from the ground indicate that the Sit-Tat (as the junta's army is called) has suffered severe body blows during the last year. The Three Brotherhood Alliance has gained significant ground since launching its offensive, code-named Operation 1027, on October 27, 2023. The AA had established control over almost the entire Rakhine State by April, 2024. In a major development, the MNDAA claimed on July 31, 2024, that it had captured Sit-Tat's military base in Lashio, a city in Shan State close to the border with China, and its airport. This was a major loss for the junta.

As Vivek Shankar has pointed out in a piece in The New York Times datelined August 5, 2024, the 'city of Lashio and its airport lie on a crucial trade corridor to Yunnan Province in China, which is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a high-speed rail link and other infrastructure projects on both sides of the border.'

Besides gains in the north, the anti-junta forces had captured four towns in northern Mandalay.

According to a report by Andrew Nagemson published in Al Jazeera dated September 23, 2024, their capture had placed them within striking distance of the city of Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest urban centre, with a population of nearly two million.

On October 8, 2024, the Sit-Tat suffered a serious reverse with the fall of the township of Pinlebu to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an important part of the coalition of forces fighting the junta, and its allies. Located on the border of the Sagaing Region and Kachin State, its capture opened up to the opposition forces the routes leading to the Kawlin township and the surrounding areas.

Besides its geo-strategic significance, the township's fall is important for what it revealed of the Sit-Tat's state. A report by Saw Lin, published in the news website, The Irrawaddy, on October 14, 2024, cites the NUG as claiming that the junta's troops, numbering 800, were defeated despite 670 airstrikes and the dropping of over 5,000 bombs, that around 70 junta soldiers were killed, 275 were missing, 225 were wounded, 48 surrendered and 102 captured during the fighting. Around 400 firearms and other military equipment were seized.

In keeping with the trend, the Junta had ceded three townships and the Western Command headquarters in Rakhine State in December, 2024, as the ethnic Arakan Army gained control over 14 of the 17 townships in the westernmost state. On January 1, 2025, the Sit-Tat retreated from a heavily-fortified police station in Sagaing Region's Budalin Township after a yearlong siege by regional resistance forces, making it easier for the latter to operate in the region.

According to Maung Kavi's report

cited earlier, the junta, which has been losing towns and bases to EROs in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Karen states, has not been able to launch any military operation to retake the northern Shan State, almost the whole of which it had lost in 2024. The Sit-Tat is in a bad way.

Its morale is low. There is internal discord. Several three-stars generals have been removed. Many younger officers are unhappy as they recognise that almost the entire country is against them. According to a piece by Ye Myo Hein (datelined May 4, 2023) featured by the United States Institute of Peace, it was found the Sit-Tat, whose "headcount," showed a "strength of a total 300,000-400,000 before the coup," showed that it currently "had a strength of about 150,000 personnel.

Roughly 70,000 are combat soldiers. At least 21,000 service members have been lost through casualties, desertion and defection since the coup. At this troop level, the Sit-Tat is barely able to sustain itself as a fighting force, much less a government."

The odds are now rapidly stacking up against the Junta. No doubt, the latter has tanks and other armoured vehicles, artillery and air force. Tanks and armoured vehicles are very difficult to deploy in the areas dominated by the ethnic forces. With densely forested mountainous terrains, deep gorges and steep climbs, these are ideal for staging ambushes. Moreover, air-strikes and artillery do not win wars, even when backed by heavily armed and trained infantry. Otherwise, the United States would have swept to a victory in Vietnam.

*(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)*

# Real-time travel assistance: Transforming the Indian travel experience

From the integration of cutting-edge technology to the emergence of unique destinations, the way we explore has been redefined

The travel industry in India has undergone a significant transformation in the past decade. The advent of technology, the emergence of unique destinations, and travellers' shifting preferences have reshaped the way we experience travel. While convenience and connectivity have expanded exponentially, so have the challenges that come with travelling through this vast and diverse country.

In such a scenario, the idea of real-time travel assistance is much more than a luxury, gradually becoming a necessity. India is a land of incredible diversity, which often presents challenges for travellers, both domestic and international. With 28 states and countless languages, customs, and tradi-

tions, exploring India can be as overwhelming as it is enriching. A misplaced document, a language barrier, or a medical emergency in an unfamiliar city can turn a dream vacation or a crucial business trip into an overwhelming ordeal. This is where the concept of real-time assistance steps in, bridging the gap between exploration and ease.

**The Need for Immediate Support:** Travelers today demand solutions that are immediate, efficient, and humanised. The expectations from travel experiences are no longer confined to curated itineraries and luxury stays. Safety, comfort, and resolution to unexpected issues are just as critical to creating memorable journeys. Whether it's assis-



HARISH KHATRI

tance in locating a nearby pharmacy late at night, navigating bureaucratic hurdles in a foreign environment, or finding reliable medical aid during emergencies, travellers increasingly rely on services that ensure a smooth journey. Real-time assistance goes beyond static travel guides or pre-recorded helplines. It operates as a different system where timely, empathetic, and

accurate support becomes a part of the travel experience. It is this proactive approach that helps mitigate common traveller challenges and allows for a seamless journey, irrespective of the destination.

**Empathy in Travel Assistance:** A game-changer at its core, real-time travel assistance is about offering humanised solutions. Travellers often find themselves in vulnerable situations where a touch of empathy can go a long way. Imagine being stuck at a remote train station with no one to guide you to your next stop or dealing with a sudden health scare in a busy urban centre where you don't know the language. These are moments when an empathetic, knowledgeable professional on the other end



of a call or chat can provide not just solutions, but also reassurance. It is this empathy paired with technology that is revolutionising travel assistance in India. Real-time support services aim to address the emotional and logistical needs of travellers in equal measure.

**Utilising Technology to Enable Seamless Experiences:** The amalgamation of technology and travel assistance has unlocked possibilities previously deemed unattainable. Advanced algorithms, live

tracking, and geo-location services now enable assistance providers like India Assist to respond with precision and speed. Right from helping a traveller recover a lost wallet, guiding them to the best transport options, or facilitating emergency care, technology serves as the backbone of real-time assistance.

Moreover, AI-powered systems can predict and preempt potential challenges, ensuring that travellers are equipped with solutions even before they face a problem. Combined with human expertise, such systems provide an unprecedented level of service that adapts to the ever-changing needs of travellers.

**A Vision for the Future of Indian Travel**

As India continues to grow as

a preferred travel destination for global tourists and a thriving market for domestic explorers, the need for reliable, real-time support systems will only increase. From first-time solo travellers to seasoned professionals on the move, everyone stands to benefit from a travel arena where assistance is no longer a reactive measure but an integral part of the journey.

The impact of such assistance goes beyond individual convenience. It enhances the overall travel ecosystem, fostering trust and confidence among travellers. When individuals feel supported, they are more likely to venture into less-explored destinations, bolstering local economies and creating new tourism opportunities. Real-time assistance also

aligns with India's vision of creating a more inclusive and welcoming travel environment. Addressing the unique needs of every traveller, be it accessibility, safety, or cultural understanding — opens the doors to a more diverse and enriching travel experience. As we move forward, the travel industry must imbibe the ethos of real-time assistance, not as an add-on service but as a core pillar of the travel experience. After all, the most unforgettable journeys are not just about the destinations we visit — they are about the challenges we overcome and the moments of human connection that transform challenges into memories.

*(The writer is founder and MD of India Assist; views are personal)*

Over 10,000 structures lost in LA blaze

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area this week burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures, officials said Thursday as they urged more people to heed evacuation orders after a new blaze ignited and quickly grew.

announced the Eaton Fire near Pasadena that started Tuesday night has burned more than 5,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. To the west in Pacific Palisades, the largest of the fires burning in the LA area has destroyed over 5,300 structures. Between the Eaton and Palisades fires, more than 10,000 structures have burned.

synagogue, seven schools, two libraries, boutiques, bars, restaurants, banks and groceries were lost. So too were the Will Rogers' Western Ranch House and Topanga Ranch Motel, local landmarks dating to the 1920s. The government has not yet released figures on the cost of the damage or specifics about how many structures burned.



(Above) President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris lead a briefing regarding the federal response to the spread of wildfires in the Los Angeles area, in the Roosevelt Room at the White House in Washington. (Right) An emergency vehicle drives through a neighborhood devastated by the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif. AP/PTI



destruction earlier in the week, hurricane-force winds blew embers, igniting the Southern California hillsides. Right now, it's impossible to quantify the extent of the destruction other than "total

devastation and loss," said Barbara Bruderlin, head of the Malibu Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce. "There are areas where everything is gone, there isn't even a stick of wood left, it's just dirt," Bruderlin said.

Officials said the Eaton Fire had killed five. Cadaver dogs and search crews are searching through rubble, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said. Anthony Mitchell, a 67-year-old amputee, and his son, Justin, who had cerebral palsy, were waiting for an ambulance to come, but they did not make it out, Mitchell's daughter, Hajime White, told The

Washington Post. Shari Shaw told KTLA that she tried to get her 66-year-old brother, Victor Shaw, to evacuate Tuesday night but he wanted to stay and fight the fire. Crews found his body with a garden hose in his hand. On Thursday, recovery crews pulled a body from rubble of what was a beachfront residence in Malibu on the scenic Pacific Coast Highway.

Imran warns of plan to impose 10-year dictatorship in Pak

PTI ■ LAHORE Pakistan's incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan has said that economic progress can never happen as long as the current "fascist system" is in place and warned that there is a plan to impose a "10-year dictatorship" in Pakistan. Khan, 72, has been lodged at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since mid-2023 in multiple cases and his party

Pakistan, of which two years have already passed. Judges or police officers who become a party to oppression are rewarded with promotions here," Khan said in a tweet on X on Thursday. "Judge Humayun Dilawar, who gave an illegal verdict against me was promoted, while judges from Rawalpindi and Sargodha, who gave fair decisions, were dismissed," he pointed out and added, "Such actions have obliterated merit and rule of law in the country."

He suggested rising above personal egos and temporary gains and focus on the decency and prosperity of the country. "Economic prosperity requires investment, which is impossible without institutions adhering to their boundaries and responsibilities as defined by the Constitution. Surging terrorism in the country is causing irreparable damage to the confidence of the investors. In an apparent reference to the military, Khan further said, "Tragically, those responsible for countering terrorism are using all their resources and energy to corner our party."

The PTI supremo reminded that many of his party men who took part in the November 26 protest in Islamabad are still missing. "These individuals disappeared from D-Chowk in Islamabad, not from some remote tribal area. The government has neither produced them in court nor taken any serious measures to recover them," he said. This clearly reflects the government's lack of seriousness regarding his party's demands and the negotiation process, he added.

He also reiterated his demand to the government to form a judicial commission to probe May 9, 2023 and November 26, 2024 incidents till the next meeting between the government but said the PTI will discontinue the negotiation process.

Biden admin succeeds in temporarily blocking plea deal for accused 9/11 mastermind

PTI ■ WASHINGTON The Biden administration succeeded Thursday in temporarily blocking a guilty plea by accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, stalling a plea deal that would spare him the risk of the death penalty for al-Qaida's September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Administration lawyers had urged a federal appeals panel to block Mohammed's guilty plea from going forward as scheduled Friday at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.



Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

The federal appeals panel agreed Thursday evening to a temporary stay. It stressed that the stay would hold only as long as it took to more fully consider arguments in the government's request, and should not be considered a final ruling. It stalls an attempt to wrap up more than two decades of military prosecution — beset by legal challenges — in one of the deadliest attacks in US history. Thursday's legal action marked a last-ditch government request to prevent Mohammed from entering a guilty plea Friday.

by the US military and successive administrations.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME

I, RAINA GUPTA W/o Dwarika Prasad Gupta R/o RZ-179, Gali No.4 Dabri Vaishali Dabri South West Delhi-110045 have changed my name to RITU GUPTA for all future purposes. PD(1225)C I, Shahzadi Khatoun W/o Imamuddin R/o A-384, New Panchwati Colony, Ghaziabad have changed my name to Shahjadi Khatoun. PD(1227)A I, Mohd Imamuddin S/o Ajjishah R/o A-384, New Panchwati Colony, Bajriya, Ghaziabad have changed my name to Imamuddin. PD(1228)A I, here to known as Buggu Jain D/o. Rahul Jain, R/o. B-8/ 224, Sector-5, Rohini, Delhi, 110085 changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Raaisha Jain for all future purposes. PD(1229)A I, No. 15437480M NK Deoraj Bishwakarma, R/o- Ord Terai Tea Garden Po- Belgachi, Psnaxalbari, Teh- Siliguri, Dist- Darjeeling, W.B.- 734423, declare that Hira Kami is my father, in my service document's his name is wrongly written as Hira Bishwakarma, whereas his correct name is Hira Kami, vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi PD(1230)C I, No. 15437480M NK Deoraj Bishwakarma, R/o- Ord Terai Tea Garden Po- Belgachi, Psnaxalbari, Teh- Siliguri, Dist- Darjeeling, W.B.- 734423, declare that Lachmi Kami is my mother, in my service document's her name is wrongly written as Laxmi Bishwakarma, whereas her correct name is Lachmi Kami, vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1231)C I, Isita Karmakar, W/o No.3200947F Hav Chanchal Kumar Betal, R/o- Vill- Rannagar PO- Rannagar Mobarakpur, PS- Arambagh, Dist- Hooghly, W.B.- 712616, have changed my name from Isita Karmakar to Isita Karmakar Betal, vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1232)C I, Mansaram Betal, Father of No.3200947F Hav Chanchal Kumar Betal, R/o- Vill- Rannagar PO- Rannagar Mobarakpur, PS- Arambagh, Dist- Hooghly, W.B.- 712616, have changed my name from Mansaram Betal to Manasharam Betal, vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1235)C I, Jagmal Singh, Father of No. 16012348K Hav Rajesh Mitharwal, R/o- A-384, -15, Kotri Loharwas, Kotri, Dist- Sikar, Rajasthan- 332709, have changed my name from Jagmal Singh to Jagmaal Singh vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1236)C Earlier, my name was BEERMATI TYAGI (बीरमति त्यागी) and BRAHAMAVATI (ब्रह्मवती) and now I have changed my name to BARMAWATTI. In the future, I want to be recognized and identified by this name. BARMAWATTI, Wife of Late Shri Prempral Tyagi, Resident of A-545, Ganeshpuri, Near Shiv Shalimar Garden, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad.. PD(1237)C I, Sudeep Punia S/o Umed Singh R/o k-2/25 Dharam Market, krishan Vihar, Nithari, North West Delhi- 86, have changed my name Sudeep Kumar to Sudeep Punia for all purposes. PD(1238)C I, Rajni Gupta W/o Sandeep Gupta R/o B-14 First Floor, Hargovind Vihar, Sector 4, Rohini, Delhi - 85, have changed my name Rajni Bala Garg to Rajni Gupta for all purposes. Rajni Bala Garg and Rajni Gupta Both are same person. PD(1239)C I, Smt Arti Betal, Mother of No.3200947F Hav Chanchal Kumar Betal, R/o- Vill- Rannagar PO- Rannagar Mobarakpur, PS- Arambagh, Dist- Hooghly, W.B.- 712616, have changed my name from Smt Arti Betal to Arati Betal, vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1234)C I, Raj Kumari, W/o Satinder Singh, R/o- RZ- 46 J, Street No. 2, Main Sagar Pur, Delhi - 110046, declare that Abhishek Singh is my son, in his educational Certificate, my name is erroneously written as Shashi Singh, whereas my correct name is Raj Kumari, both names pertain to one and same person, i.e. myself. PD(1233)C

the current "fascist system" is in place. "Economic prosperity requires investment, which is impossible without institutions adhering to their boundaries and responsibilities as defined by the Constitution. Surging terrorism in the country is causing irreparable damage to the confidence of the investors. In an apparent reference to the military, Khan further said, "Tragically, those responsible for countering terrorism are using all their resources and energy to corner our party."

He suggested rising above personal egos and temporary gains and focus on the decency and prosperity of the country.

He also reiterated his demand to the government to form a judicial commission to probe May 9, 2023 and November 26, 2024 incidents till the next meeting between the government but said the PTI will discontinue the negotiation process.

Defence lawyers described the attempts to throw out the agreement as the latest in two decades of "fitful" and "negligent" mishandling of the case

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement systems Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi - 110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items :-

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

Indian Overseas Bank Wazieabad Branch (Shyam Chowk, Near Girls, Govt. High School, Wazirabad, Gurgaon, Haryana 122003, Phone - 0124-2577240, E-mail id: lab3714@iob.in)

APPENDIX IV POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property) [Rule 8(1)] Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Indian Overseas Bank under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3] of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Bank had issued a demand notice on dated 10-10-2024, calling upon the borrower & mortgagee Smt. Mamta Dangwal, W/o. Sh. Deepak Mahindru R/o. C-104, Street No.8, West Vinod Nagar Delhi-110092 also at Smt. Mamta Dangwal W/o. Sh. Deepak Mahindru C/o. New Saraswati Wagon (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2nd Floor, MGM Tower, 19, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110002, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 8,30,584/- (Rupees Eight Lakhs Thirty Thousand Five Hundred and Eighty Four Only), together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of the notice till the date of realization together with all the costs incurred by the Bank in realizing the said amount.

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-NOTICE INVITING TENDER For and on behalf of President of India, Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (RSO), Northern Railway, Delhi Division, New Delhi invites E-Tender in prescribed tender form for the following work:

PUBLIC NOTICE (In case there is no will) Plot / Property No-APARTMENT No. CM633A, 33RD FLOOR, BLOCK 6A, THE CAMELLIAS, DLF 5, GURUGRAM, HARYANA, ALONG WITH CAR PARKING NOS.633A-PB1-1, 633A-PB1-2, 633A-PB1-3, 633A-PB1-4 AND 633A-PB1-5 was registered in the name of Mr. RAJIV KRISHAN LUTHRA S/o Late, Mr. Anirudh Krishan Luthra, R/o 3/15 Shanti Niketan, New Delhi : 110 021, who has expired on 10th May 2023. Accordingly the name of Mrs Gayatri Luthra, Ms. Sanaa Krishan Luthra and Ms. Arshia Krishan Luthra are being noted in DLF's record in respect of the captioned Plot / Property. If anybody has any objection to this, he or she may approach M/s DLF Ltd or the undersigned within 21 days of publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE My client Virendra Kumar S/o late .Sh Chand Mohan R/o H.No 159 Gali no 2 Village Tahipur Delhi-110095 has at know to public at large debarred seravelations with his son Pramod Kumar and his wife Taruna Pal and his sons Dhanvir Pal and Vedant Pal from movable-immovable properties due to their misconduct my client will not be responsible for their illegal acts and any liabilities. MANISH KUMAR (Advocate) Ch. No. 646-A, Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-54

PUBLIC NOTICE A notice of intended marriage has been received from Mr. Abhik Deb S/o Mr. Biswajit Deb R/o B1 -2/3, Avsar Vihar, Road No-5 (Extn.), Kajnagar, Sonari, Jamshedpur- 831011 Present Address D-39, Sector-52 Noida, Gautambuddha Nagar and Ms. Asmita Nanda D/o Mr. Somnath Nandy R/o 13/2 Sri Gopal Mullick Lane, Muchipara, Kolkata, West Bengal-700012 Present Address 1905, Tower-10, Lotus Panache, Sector-104, Market Sector-110, Noida in the office of the undersigned, any person interested therein, may file objections to it on any day upto 26-01-2025 in the office of the undersigned. Deputy Collector/ I/C City Magistrate/ Marriage Officer Noida Gautam Budh Nagar

PUBLIC NOTICE AND POOJA TYAGI who are purchasing the Apartment No.D-0833n 8th Floor, Tower-D, having super area measuring 166.93 Sq. Mtrs. (1796.17 sq. ft.), project known as "RAHEJA VEDAS" situated in the scheme named "Rajeha's Vedant" Vidas & Vedant Floors, situated at Sector-108, Tehsil Kadpur, District-Surgram, Haryana, from Mr. Devendra Goswami and Mr. Armit Bhatti, vide Sale Deed dated 01.08.2024, bearing document no.5788, now ANJU TYAGI and POOJA TYAGI intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from IDBI Bank Limited. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person having any type of claim/right/interest/ creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucen Legal LLP Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Leg, New Delhi-110049, Contact # 011-40046316

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE







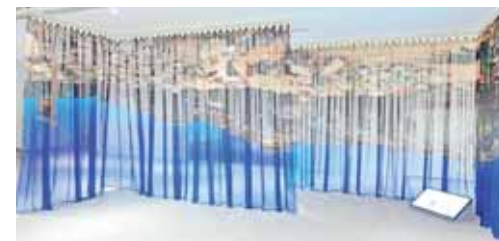
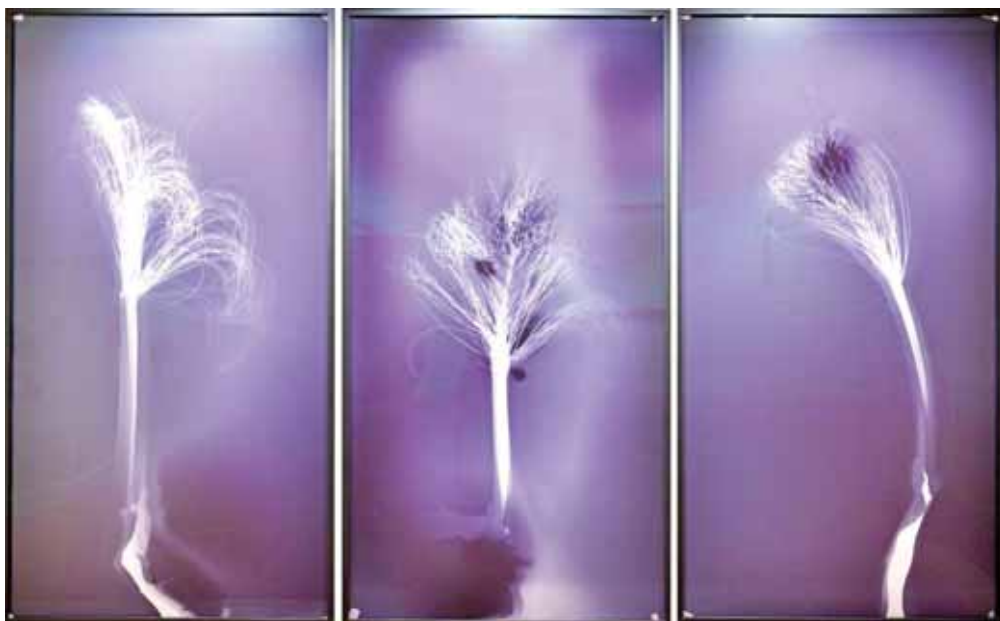


# ROOTS AND REFLECTIONS

At KNMA's *The Elemental You*, artists explored Earth's essence through works reflecting nature's intricate narratives and connections, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

*"To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wildflower..."*

These words by William Blake come alive as you enter *The Elemental You*, an exhibition at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. Curated by Akansha Rastogi, it brings together the works of Simryn Gill, Neha Choksi and Hajra Waheed, each exploring the element of "Earth" with a vision that is both timeless and urgent. The experience engages your senses on multiple levels. Neha Choksi's *Porous Earth* series draws attention to limestone cast in kiln-glass, revealing stories of geological change and human fragility. Her work highlights the delicate interplay between the permanence of Earth's materials and the fleeting nature of human life. Simryn Gill shifts focus to *Port Dickson*, an industrial port town in Malaysia. Her long-term photographic documentation captures moments of transformation and decay, inviting viewers to reflect on what persists and what fades with time. There is a quiet, poignant beauty in her images that speaks of history and memory. Hajra Waheed's



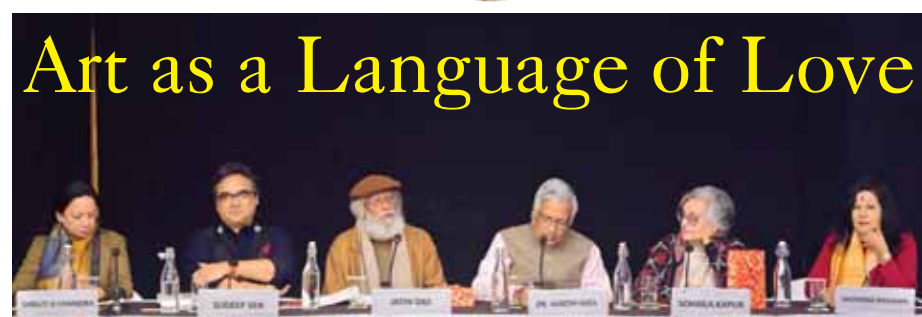
interpretation of the night sky leads you to consider boundaries, both physical and emotional. Her drawings evoke the vastness of Kashmir's starlit skies, working together with personal and collective narratives. It's as though the heavens hold untold stories, offering a sense of both wonder and loss. The exhibition is unhurried, encouraging visitors to take their time with each piece. The pathways, "To Think Like a Mountain," "Survival as Revival," and "Clearing," are designed to deepen understanding of the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world.

*Patchineelam* and *Ranjana Dave* connect themes of grounding and immersion, using tools, landscapes, and micro-stories to reveal the subtle interactions between people and their environments. The *Artists' Roundtable* becomes a dynamic space where materials and ideas evolve, creating a dialogue that is both intimate and thought-provoking. The exhibition does not shy away from hard truths. It juxtaposes beauty with unsettling realities, showing the scars left by mines alongside the resilience of mangroves or the

lifelessness of dead snakes beside the enduring strength of mountains. This contrast challenges visitors to confront the environmental challenges of today while appreciating the artistry that brings these narratives to life. The simplicity of the presentation allows the works to speak for themselves. The museum provides a space for these artists to explore their deep engagement with the natural world, leaving visitors with a sense of introspection and a renewed connection to the Earth. *The Elemental You* offers a thoughtful exploration of how we relate to our environment. It reminds us of the fragility of our planet and the enduring beauty found in its details. As you leave the exhibition, the reflections it inspires remain, offering a quiet yet powerful reminder of our place within the larger story of the Earth.

A collaborative project, *The Working Space*, extends the exploration further. Artists like Vijai M a i a

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



By TEAM VIVA

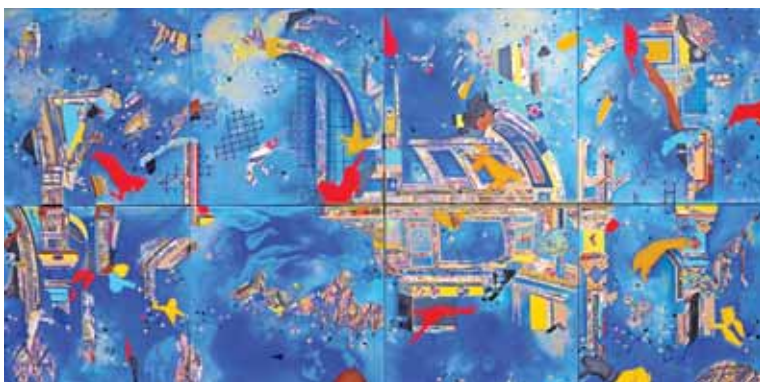
The 10th edition of *Vividh Mat: Perspectives*, presented by Devyani Jaipuria in collaboration with ASAVARI, focused on the theme *Shringara: Rang Anurang*. This edition explored *Shringara*, a concept that embodies love, beauty and the depth of the human experience. The event began with an engaging discussion led by Padmeshri Shovana Narayan, SNA awardee and Ambassador Dr Suresh Goel, former DG of ICCR. The panel also included Jatin Das, the renowned artist and sculptor, celebrated poet Sudeep Sen and actor-director Sohaila Kapur. Together, they shared their insights into *Shringara*, highlighting it as more than just an aesthetic concept, but an essential part of life. Jatin Das explained that *Shringara* is not only about visual beauty but is also the very pulse of life. He described it as a delicate balance between form and emotion, where art touches the soul. Sudeep Sen further elaborated by describing *Shringara* as "the poetry of the senses," a celebration that speaks directly to the heart, connecting art, love and life. He emphasised how *Shringara* invites us to reflect on the deepest layers of the human soul. Sohaila Kapur added to the discussion by describing *Shringara* as a means of capturing the essence of beauty through performance. She noted that it is the emotional core of art, brought to life through movement, offering an experience that connects the audience directly to the emotions conveyed. The conversation highlighted how *Shringara* is not only a visual or emotional experience but also a spiritual one, bridging cultural and philosophical perspectives. Shovana Narayan, deeply connected to classical Indian dance, shared her personal view of *Shringara*, describing it as a language that speaks directly to the heart. For her, the evening was a celebration of beauty; it was the culmination of



years of dedication, creating a space where everyone could to the rhythm of life. The event concluded with a *Baithaki Bhaav* dance performance by Madhura Phatak. The classical dance embodied *Shringara* beautifully, giving the audience an immersive experience. *Vividh Mat: Perspectives* combined intellectual discussion and artistic expression, highlighting how art connects us to humanity, bridging cultures and emotions.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

## LAYERS OF MEANING



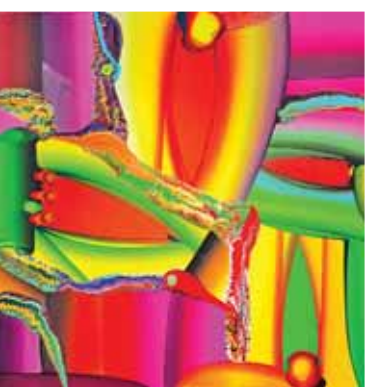
*Echoes of Elegance* presents a unique exploration of India's vibrant art scene through its diverse creators, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

that mirrors human relationships. It's a work that encourages reflection, inviting the viewer to interpret its layers of meaning. Similarly, *Keep ones end up*, another acrylic on canvas, uses bold strokes and vivid hues to explore themes of balance and stability in an ever-changing world. The fluidity of the painting offers a sense of movement, making it feel as if the artwork is alive. *Parody II*, a striking fiberglass piece, challenges the viewer's perception with its playful yet thought-provoking

commentary on modern life. The use of fiberglass in this piece gives it a dynamic quality, blurring the line between reality and illusion. It's a work that not only entertains but also encourages a deeper contemplation of society and its contradictions. Alongside these, the exhibition showcases a range of works by renowned artists such as Bose Krishnamachari, Dileep Sharma, Farhad Hussain, George Martin, Jyothiraj Moyampilly and Mukesh

Sharma. Each of their pieces brings forth unique perspectives on culture, identity and contemporary issues. Whether it's through abstract expressionism, surreal imagery or figurative forms, the diversity of styles on display ensures that there is something for everyone to connect with. The exhibition invites viewers to move beyond admiring art from a distance, encouraging them to understand the creative process and engage with the ideas behind each piece. *Echoes of Elegance* is a journey into the heart of Indian contemporary art. It's an opportunity to witness the talent, vision and passion of some of the country's finest artists, offering a deeper understanding of the dynamic and ever-evolving art scene.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



# India pacer Varun Aaron retires from 'representative cricket'

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India pacer Varun Aaron, who was once regarded as the country's fastest bowler before injuries hampered his promising career, announced retirement from "representative cricket" on Friday after his home state Jharkhand's campaign ended in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy. The 35-year-old Aaron made the announcement on social media after Jharkhand failed to go beyond the preliminary stage of the marquee domestic one-day event. After a dazzling start, Aaron struggled with erratic form, which was made worse by injury breakdowns, and he had not represented India since 2015. "For the past 20 years, I have lived, breathed, and thrived on the rush of bowling fast. Today, with immense gratitude, I officially announce my retirement from representative cricket," Aaron posted on his Instagram account At just 21, Aaron burst onto the scene during the 2010-11 Vijay Hazare Trophy, showcasing his raw pace and making a mark with a blistering 153kph delivery against Gujarat in the final. His ability to consistently bowl at speeds exceeding 150kph quickly caught the attention of the Indian cricketing fraternity and he soon made his international debut in an ODI against England in Mumbai in 2011. This was followed by a Test debut at the same venue against the West Indies, again in 2011. However, the relentless demands of bowling at high speed took a significant toll on his body. He played nine ODIs and as many Tests, taking 29 wickets across the two formats for India. Over the course of his career, he endured as many as eight back stress fractures and three foot fractures, which severely hampered his progress.



Injuries had forced him to give up red-ball cricket last year. "Over the years, I've had to push both my physical and mental limits to recover from numerous career-threatening injuries, having to come back time and again, this was only possible thanks to the relentless dedication of the physios, trainers, and coaches at the National Cricket Academy. "I'd also like to thank the BCCI, JSCA (Jharkhand State Cricket Association), Red Bull, SG Cricket, and MRF Tyres for their invaluable support during critical junctures in my career. "As I bid farewell to a pursuit that has consumed me completely, I now look forward to savouring the smaller joys in life while staying deeply connected to the game that has given me everything. "Fast Bowling has been my first love, and though I step off the field, it will always be a part of who I am," he added. Among his memorable moments in the game, he had grabbed headlines by breaking Stuart Broad's nose with a bouncer during a Test match in 2014. Broad had tried to pull the delivery but the ball took the edge and sneaked inside the grill of his helmet to hit him on the nose. Despite not making the Indian team since 2015, Aaron continued to bowl in domestic cricket. He picked 141 wickets at an average of 26.47 and an economy rate of 5.44 in 88 List A matches. He also snared 93 wickets at an economy rate of 8.53 in the 95 T20s he played. Aaron also played nine seasons of the IPL between 2011 and 2022, turning out for with Delhi Daredevils, Kings XI Punjab, Kolkata Knight Riders, Rajasthan Royals, Royal Challengers Bangalore and Gujarat Titans. In his final season, he won the title with Gujarat Titans in 2022.



## People have opinion but I'm comfortable in my own skin: Steve Smith

**PTI ■ SYDNEY**  
Australia skipper for the Sri Lankan Test series, Steve Smith is not getting unduly bothered by people's opinion over his role in the 'sandpapergate' episode, saying they are entitled to their views while he continues to be "comfortable" in his own world. Smith, who was the Australia skipper when the ball-tampering scandal broke out in the 2018 Cape Town Test against South Africa, will lead a 16-member squad to the sub-continent for the two-Test series beginning January 29 after regular skipper Pat Cummins was rested following the Border-Gavaskar Tests. The charismatic top-order batter, opener David Warner and Cameron Bancroft were found guilty of ball-tampering in 2018 and banned for varying periods. Smith also served a two-year leadership ban for his role in the scandal. He has since led Australia on four occasions in Tests -- versus England in Adelaide (2021), against the West Indies in Perth (2022) and two away Tests versus India in 2023. While Cricket Australia deems the matter as closed, some sections still feel that Smith should not be allowed to lead the country's team. "I mean, everyone's entitled to their opinion," Smith told Sydney Morning Herald. "They can say whatever they like. I'm pretty comfortable in my own skin. (The environment) around the team has been good for a long time. I get on well with everyone inside. People are entitled to their opinion. They can say what they want," he added. "Missing 10,000 Test runs hurts" While Australia finally claimed the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after four attempts, defeating India 1-3 in the five-match series recently, Smith missed the 10,000 Test-run mark by just one run. He said while it was a "cool win" in the series, missing a personal landmark by just one run was painful. "It was a cool summer to be a part of... And particularly after the way we fought back from Perth (defeat). Just as a collective, it was a really cool win. Our bowlers were unbelievable. Scotty Boland, the way he came in, was exceptional. He's unbelievable at the moment," said Smith. Smith was left stranded at 9,999 runs in the fifth Test at Sydney after being dismissed by Prasidh Krishna in both innings. "One run... It hurt a little bit at the time. It would have been nice to have ticked that off in front of all my friends and family here at my home ground, but hopefully, I can knock it off first thing in Galle (Sri Lanka, first Test). "I probably let it wander (in my mind) too much throughout the game. It's a cool milestone to tick off," he added.

## Travis Head could open in Sri Lanka Tests, says chief selector George Bailey

**PTI ■ SYDNEY**  
Australian big-hitter Travis Head could open in the two-Test series against Sri Lanka where "quick learner" Sam Konstas is also likely to get more opportunities to showcase his audacious skills, chairman of selectors George Bailey has said. Head, who wreaked havoc with the bat during the recently-concluded Border-Gavaskar series against India in the middle order, has been tested in the opener's role in the sub-continent. He had come in for an injured David Warner during the 2023 tour of India and scored 223 runs at 55.75 in five innings at the top of the order. "Travis is an option (to open). We've got a number of options and there's been a few preliminary discussions around where that may land, and that may depend on the makeup of that first XI," Bailey told cricket.Com.Au. "I think (head coach) Andrew (McDonald), and (stand-in captain) Steve (Smith) will settle on that in due course, once we hit Sri Lanka," he added. Australia announced a 16-member squad on Thursday with several fresh faces added to the group that played India in the fifth and final Test at Sydney last week. Australia won the marquee series 3-1. Smith is leading the squad as regular captain Pat Cummins is on leave for the birth of his couple's second child. With 19-year-old Konstas turning heads with his refreshing style of batting during the Border-Gavaskar Tests, Bailey said the youngster's ability to read match situations quickly would help him excel in Sri Lanka, his maiden international tour. "What we have seen is he's (Konstas) a quick learner. (He) absorbs a lot of information," Bailey said.



"So (we're) expecting him to get to a lot out of it. I know from his spin play in Australia, and the opportunities he's (had) in different parts of the world, we think he's got a game that's well suited, and a technique that can stand up. "But that's one of the exciting things about this tour -- we will learn a bit more about his game in different conditions to what he's just faced in Australia," he added. Bailey feels that Nathan McSweeney, who is there in the Sri Lanka-bound squad, handled his exclusion from the last two BGT Tests quite well and he will remain in the scheme of things despite the unimpressive show as an opener. The debutant had a trial by fire against Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, failing to put up a decent score in the first three games. "We still view (McSweeney) as a great Test prospect, and a long-term Test prospect. "I think at times when someone is left out of a team or squad, there's a view that they fall out of favour, or down the pecking order, but that wasn't the case with Nathan," said Bailey. "I think it shows the character... And the sort of person he is, the way he responded and spoke so well about (being dropped) publicly pretty soon after it happened."

## ICC chairman Jay Shah to be felicitated by BCCI at its SGM

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Newly-elected International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman Jay Shah will be felicitated by the BCCI's state units on the sidelines of the Special General Meeting, scheduled here on Sunday. Shah, a former BCCI secretary, became the youngest ICC chairman after he was elected unopposed in August last year and took over the prestigious post on December 1. He replaced Greg Barclay who decided not to seek a third term. Shah was the BCCI secretary since October 2019 and chairman of the Asian Cricket Council since January 2021. Shah will, however, not be a part of the SGM as he is no longer an office-bearer of the BCCI. The cricket administrator has been at the forefront of expanding the game's imprint globally and recently met top officials of the 2023 Brisbane Olympics organising committee to discuss the sport's inclusion in the Summer Games. Cricket will make a return to the Olympics after 128 years when it is played in the 2028 Los Angeles Games. The sport is not yet confirmed for the 2032 edition in Brisbane. Australian newspaper, The Age, recently reported that Shah will meet meet Cricket Australia chair Mike Baird and his England counterpart Richard Thompson later this month to discuss the finer points of a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between the big three nations.



## Gael Monfils reaches his 35th ATP final

**PTI ■ AUCKLAND**  
Gael Monfils became the second oldest player since 1990 to reach a final on the men's elite tennis tour after beating American Nishesh Basavareddy 7-6 (5), 6-4 in the semifinals at Auckland on Friday aged 38 years, 131 days. Ivo Karlovic holds the ATP Tour record, having won through to final in Pune, India in 2019 at the age of 39 years, 311 days. Monfils edges Stan Wawrinka who was aged 38 years and 124 days when he reached the final at Umag, Croatia in 2023. Karlovic also reached the final at Den Bosch in 2017 aged 38 years, 110 days while Roger Federer (Basel in 2019 aged 38 years and 80 days) and Rafael Nadal (the 2024 Swedish Open at 38 years and 48 days) also are in the top five. Frenchman Monfils has been breaking records steadily in



## Real Madrid walks into Spanish Super Cup final with a 3-0 win over Mallorca

**PTI ■ JEDDAH**  
Jude Bellingham scored again to lead Real Madrid into the Spanish Super Cup final with a 3-0 win over Mallorca in Saudi Arabia on Thursday. The England midfielder, who led Madrid in scoring last season, started this campaign slowly but has netted seven goals in his last eight Spanish league games. He notched another goal in 63rd minute of the Super Cup semifinal when he finally broke down a tough Mallorca that until his goal had imposed its defensive style on the star-studded Madrid. Bellingham blasted in the third shot in a row by Madrid after Rodrygo initially hit the post and goalkeeper Dominik Greif blocked a follow-up by Kylian Mbappé. Bellingham collected the



rebound and slotted his shot from just outside the six-yard box under the on-rushing Greif and past three defenders who were trying to protect the goalmouth. Madrid tacked on two goals late in stoppage time. Mallorca's Martin Valjent scored an own goal when he inadvertently turned a pass by Brahim Diaz into his net. Rodrygo then took Madrid's third. The match ended with a short scuffle after the final whistle before calm was restored. It started when Bellingham slapped the back of the neck of Mallorca defender Pablo Maffeo, who had had an intense duel with Vinícius Júnior during the game. Barcelona awaits Madrid in Sunday's final. Madrid lost Aurélien Tchouaméni, a midfielder playing as a central defender, in the 54th after he took a hard knock to the head during a collision with a Mallorca player. Youth player Raúl Asencio replaced him. Madrid was competing as last season's Spanish league champion, while Mallorca was invited as the runner-up in the Copa del Rey. Former Madrid striker Karim Benzema, who now plays in the Saudi Arabian league, was in attendance. The minor trophy has become a major cash maker for the federation and competing clubs since the federation struck a deal in 2019 to hold it in the Middle Eastern kingdom.

# Pratika, Tejal smash fifties as India beat Ireland by six wickets in 1st women's ODI

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**  
Pratika Rawal showcased maturity beyond her experience, while Tejal Hasabnis capped a memorable comeback, posting a fifty each, as India outplayed an inexperienced Ireland by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match women's ODI series here on Friday. Rawal anchored the modest run chase of 239 after stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana's brisk 41, smashing 10 fours and one six for a career-best 89 (96 balls). Hasabnis, who last played an ODI against New Zealand in October 2024, struck her first fifty after her comeback, remaining unbeaten on 53 off 46 balls with the help of nine boundaries. Rawal and Hasabnis put together a match-winning 116-run partnership from 84 balls with India winning the match with 93 balls to spare. Carrying forward her



dominant form from the West Indies series, Mandhana gave the team a fantastic start with a blistering 29-ball 41, studded with six fours and a six. In the process, she became the second Indian and 15th overall to surpass 4,000 ODI runs. Mandhana unsettled the Irish bowlers with her attacking strokeplay on both sides of the wicket. Her aggression was particularly evident against seamer Dempsey in the eighth over, when she stepped out to hammer a boundary, followed by a six and another four. Her rookie opening partner Rawal, who debuted in the preceding West Indies series, provided excellent support. The duo shared their third fifty-plus opening stand in four matches, keeping the scoreboard ticking with ease. However, Ireland managed a breakthrough right at the end of powerplay when Mandhana mistimed a slog sweep to mid-on, falling nine runs short of her fifty. Harleen Deol (20) and Jemimah Rodrigues (9) looked in good touch initially, but clever bowling by left-arm spinner Aimee Maguire (3/57 from 8 overs) stalled India's momentum temporarily. The 18-year-old Maguire lured Jemimah into stepping

out too far, resulting in a stumping when the batter was at least a foot outside her crease. This phase saw India lose three wickets for 46 runs, but Mandhana's explosive start ensured the team stayed well on par. The inexperience of Ireland

came to fore as they failed to seize the momentum, leaking 21 runs in extras. Laura Delany was the weakest link in their bowling unit and she bowled successive no balls with two waist-high full tosses in the 24th over when Hasabnis cashed in on the opportunity to hit back-to-back fours from the two freebies. Earlier, butter-fingered Ireland let Ireland off the hook with their pathetic fielding as visiting skipper Gaby Lewis carved out a classy 92 to lift her team to a respectable 238 for 7. Opting to bat, Ireland were in deep trouble at 56 for four in the 14th over, but Lewis and Leah Paul (59 off 73 balls) added 117 runs for the fifth wicket to steer their team to safety. Lewis scored her runs in 129 balls, lacing the knock with 15 boundaries. Aided by at least three clear dropped catches and a few misfields, the duo of Lewis

and Paul went about their job in a calculated manner and brought a semblance of stability to the Ireland innings while putting together the team's first-ever century partnership against India. Medium pacer Titas Sadhu effected the first breakthrough for India when she induced an outside edge from Sarah Forbes (9) after the batter tried to play away from her body, and Deepti Sharma did the rest in the slip cordon. Making their first visit to the country, Ireland were reduced to 34 for two thanks to a terrible mix-up that led to the run out of Una Raymond-Hoey (5), who attempted an inexplicable single despite hitting the ball straight to Jemimah Rodrigues at cover. Orla Prendergast (9) was next to go as she was stumped by Ghosh off the bowling of leg-spinner Priya Mishra (2/56), leaving the visitors in a spot of bother at 56 for three in the 14th over.