



Votes cast for 100 ULBs to be counted today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The counting of ballot papers for the elections of 100 urban local bodies in the State will be held on Saturday. The State Election Commission and the administration have made elaborate arrangements for counting of votes which will commence at 8 am.

As per the data of the SEC, out of 30,29,028 registered voters 19,81,200 (9,83,601 female and 9,97,599 males) had exercised their franchise in the elections.

The SEC has set up 54 counting centres in the State to count the votes of

the 100 ULBs. In these centres it has set up 986 tables to count the votes. The SEC has set up six counting centres in Dehradun district to count votes of six ULBs including Municipal Corporation of Dehradun. For the counting of votes in Udhm Singh Nagar district which has maximum number of ULBs (17) in the State, the SEC has set up four counting centres and 230 tables.

The counting process will involve making bundles of the ballot papers after opening the ballot boxes. The results are expected to be announced on Saturday evening. The declaration of

result and handing over of the certificate of victory by the respective returning officers will end the process of elections of ULBs in the State which started after the issue of the notification for the elections on December 23, 2024.

There are 107 ULBs in the State but the elections were held in only 100 bodies. The State has 11 municipal corporations, 43 municipal councils and 46 Nagar Panchayats. The SEC had set up 1,518 polling stations and 3,393 polling booths for the ULB elections in all parts of the State.

1,454 personnel to carry out vote counting for ULB elections in Dehradun

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A total of 1,454 officials and employees have been deployed for the vote counting process scheduled for Saturday, following the urban local body elections held on January 23 in Dehradun district. There are seven ULBs in the district in which six vote counting centres have been set up with 189 tables. The Dehradun district magistrate and returning officer Savin Bansal stated that seven Returning Officers (ROs) have been appointed to oversee the counting process in the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD). He in-

Vikasnagar, Herbertpur, Musoorie, Doiwala and Selaqui Nagar Panchayat. Besides this, 17 accounting teams have also been formed and deployed in all counting centres to ensure a seamless counting process across all wards in the district, Bansal said. Preparations began early Friday morning at the Forest Rangers Ground in Dehradun city to make arrangements for the vote counting day. Labourers were seen marking entry and exit points and setting up poles for tents to house the counting tables and other fa-

preparations and observing the ongoing work, which continued late into the evening.

The DM assured that all necessary arrangements had been made in all voting centres to

conduct the vote counting process efficiently and peacefully on Saturday.



formed that the vote counting for the MCD will take place at the Forest Rangers Ground, where the administration has set up 105 counting tables. Each RO will supervise 15 tables to ensure a smooth and efficient counting process. Besides this, 14 tables each have been set up in the counting centres of the Municipal Corporation of Rishikesh (MCR) and the municipal councils of

cities. By the afternoon, officials had arrived at the site to finalise arrangements and ensure all systems were functioning smoothly for vote counting day.

Police officers were also deployed at the site to monitor security arrangements. Several ULB election candidates and their agents were also observed inspecting the

Mismanagement in ULB polls detrimental to democracy: Cong

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Congress has alleged that gross mismanagement in the elections of the urban local bodies in the State has weakened the faith of the people in the election process.

Interacting with the media persons at the headquarters of the State Congress on Friday, the chief spokesperson of Uttarakhand Congress, Garima Dasauni said that the participation in the voting is the fundamental right of a citizen and faith of people in

the election process should be of paramount importance. Dasauni said that in Roorkee the voters were lathi charged mercilessly. She said that in Gopeshwar the names of the district level officers responsible for the election process were missing from the voter list. She said that many discrepancies were noticed in the voter list and in one case the name of a 10 year old child was found in the list. Dasauni said that it is an irony that those talking about one nation and one

election, failed to conduct a small election of local bodies properly. She added that it is unfortunate that two former chief ministers were not able to exercise their franchise and names of many prominent personalities such as Jagar singer Pritam Baratwan were missing in the voter list. Dasauni said that names of thousands of the voters who had exercised their franchise in the Lok Sabha elections of 2024 were missing from the voter list of ULB elections.

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Election Commission of India

15^{वाँ} राष्ट्रीय मतदाता दिवस

25 जनवरी, 2025

मुख्य अतिथि

ले ज गुरमीत सिंह

पीवीएसएम, यूवाईएसएम, एवीएसएम, वीएसएम (से नि)
राज्यपाल, उत्तराखण्ड

सांस्कृतिक संध्या

शनिवार, 25 जनवरी, 2025
कार्यक्रम स्थल - बन्नू स्कूल ग्राउंड, रेसकोर्स देहरादून

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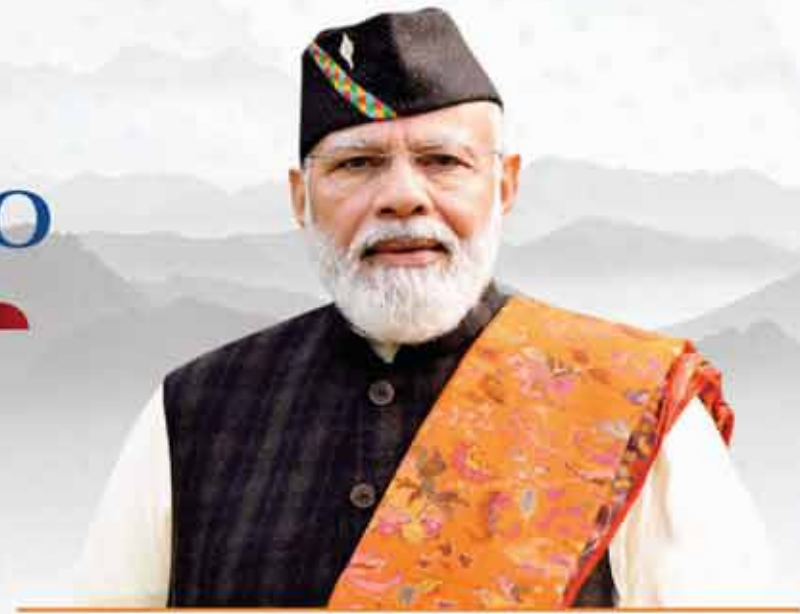
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Udham Singh Nagar: Cycling Trek, Cycling Road, Handball, Volleyball, Shooting Trap, Skate, Mallakhamb.

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

Haridwar: Hockey, Kabaddi, Kushti, Kalaripayattu.

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

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

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

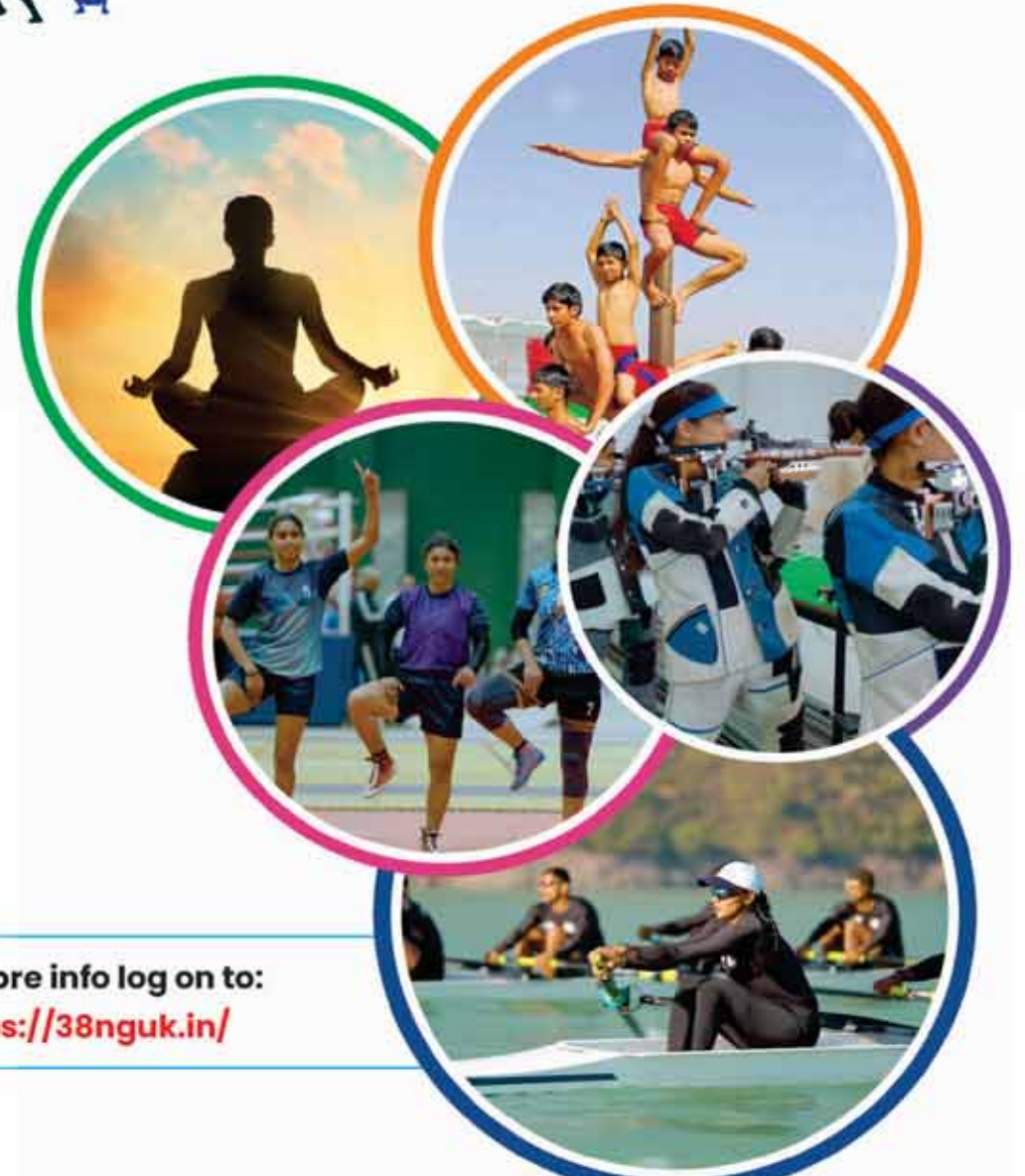
Yoga and Malkhamb have been included in the National Games.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Rekindling historic ties

The President of Indonesia is the chief guest at the Republic Day, a fitting tribute to the friendship between two nations

India will celebrate its 76th Republic Day on January 26, 2025, marking a moment to reflect on the country's remarkable journey since its first Republic Day in 1950. This year's celebrations will have a special touch as Prabowo Subianto, President of Indonesia, will be the chief guest. His presence is a reminder of the deep historical and cultural ties between the two nations, which have seen their share of highs and lows but continue to thrive. Incidentally, the chief guest at the first Republic Day parade was President Sukarno of Indonesia, highlighting the camaraderie between two newly independent nations that had emerged from colonial rule. The relations between the two countries have come a full circle. The early years of India-Indonesia relations were marked by solidarity and mutual support. Biju Patnaik, a prominent Indian freedom fighter, played a key role in aiding Indonesia's struggle for independence, even flying its leaders to safety during critical moments. This partnership extended to global platforms like the Bandung Conference of 1955, which laid the groundwork for the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), co-sponsored by India and Indonesia.



India has come a long way since 1950. From grappling with post-independence challenges like poverty, illiteracy and infrastructural deficits, the nation has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing economies. It boasts advancements in science, technology, space exploration and global diplomacy, while remaining rooted in its democratic ethos. Similarly, Indonesia has evolved into a vibrant democracy and a leading voice in Southeast Asia. Both nations share a legacy of anti-colonial struggles and have worked together in various domains, including trade, culture and defence. The partnership between India and Indonesia has seen its ups and downs. In the 1950s, ties were warm and cooperative, but by the 1960s, geopolitical differences, particularly over relations with China and the 1965 India-Pakistan war, strained the relationship. Indonesia's support for Pakistan during that conflict and claims over parts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands led to significant diplomatic tensions. However, the 1970s marked a period of reconciliation, with agreements on maritime boundaries and a renewed focus on cooperation. Today, Indonesia is one of India's largest trading partners in Southeast Asia, with bilateral trade reaching nearly \$30 billion in 2023-24. The two nations have also strengthened defence ties, including a Defence Cooperation Agreement signed in 2018, signalling a strategic partnership in a region increasingly shaped by competition with China. Prabowo Subianto's visit as the chief guest at India's Republic Day parade holds symbolic and strategic importance. This visit underscores the growing warmth in India-Indonesia relations. The presence of the Indonesian president at this year's parade is a tribute to the enduring friendship between two nations that have weathered challenges and found common ground in their aspirations for peace, prosperity and global cooperation.

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PICTALK



Children holding national flags in a mustard field ahead of Republic Day 2025, at a village near Balurghat

Cooperative commodities exchange: A global vision for farmer empowerment

This initiative leverages technology, blockchain and India's PACS network to empower farmers with fair pricing, sustainability and direct market access

The agricultural sector is the backbone of many economies, particularly in India, where nearly 60 per cent of the population depends on farming for their livelihood. Yet, smallholder farmers often remain at the mercy of intermediaries, fluctuating market prices and unequal access to global markets.

To address these challenges and promote equity, sustainability and growth, a bold initiative is proposed: the establishment of a Global Farmer-Centric Cooperative Commodities Exchange (GFCCE). This platform, rooted in the cooperative model, aims to empower farmers by ensuring fair pricing, direct market access, and sustainable practices. This ambitious project resonates with the global agenda of the World Cooperation Economic Forum to foster inclusive economic growth and social equity. **Empowering Farmers Through Technology** APEX Integration at the heart of this initiative lies technology—a powerful enabler that can bridge the gap between farmers and markets. The



GFCCE will leverage the Government of India's support to develop a robust and accessible digital platform integrated with blockchain technology to ensure transparency and reduce pilferage in the supply chain. Blockchain will create a tamper-proof record of transactions, from production to storage and distribution, enhancing trust and accountability. The project will adopt a PACS-to-APEX (Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies to Apex-level organisations) approach, leveraging India's extensive network of over 95,000 PACS. These societies will act as the foundational nodes, aggregating produce from farmers at the village level. The commodities will then be funnelled through district and state-level federations, culminating

at the national apex organisation, which will oversee operations, ensure fair pricing and manage exports. To address storage issues, a network of modern warehouses will be constructed and integrated with blockchain systems. These warehouses, equipped with real-time inventory tracking, temperature controls and pest management systems, will be strategically located across key agricultural regions. Blockchain connectivity across warehouses will enable seamless tracking of stored produce, ensuring reduced wastage and pilferage. Farmers will also receive warehouse receipts, which can be used as collateral for loans, providing them with immediate financial support. This interconnected system will not only provide farmers with better access to markets but also ensure that the supply chain is efficient, transparent and secure. It will serve as the backbone for procurement planning and play a vital role in stabilising food prices.

Impact on Food Inflation The GFCCE's blockchain-enabled supply chain and warehouse network will revolutionise procurement planning and control food inflation. With real-time data on production, storage, and distribution, government agencies will have accurate insights into commodity availability and demand patterns. This data-driven approach will enable timely procurement decisions, ensuring that food stocks are adequately replenished and distributed. By reducing post-harvest losses and pilferage, the initiative will improve the efficiency of the Public Distribution System (PDS), preventing artificial shortages that often lead to price spikes. Additionally, the transparent pricing mechanism of the exchange will curb hoarding and speculation. This system will also facilitate targeted interventions during periods of surplus or deficit. For instance, in the case of bumper harvests, surplus stocks can be stored efficiently and exported strategically to global markets, preventing a price crash domestically. (The writer was a member of the high level MSP committee, Ministry of Agriculture; views are personal)

The complex terrain of relationships

Relationships, whether personal or professional, are a delicate balancing act of emotions, perspectives and communication



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Relationships are a tricky business. Two people who, at one stage of life, can agree so well that they cannot see or believe in having any difference in the point of view that they will hold. Different perspectives are an enigma; affection, agreement and endorsement are all rolled into one. Identification with each other is more important than identity any day. Very often, it is the bedrock of affection and togetherness in action. The same couple, as time passes and because of hormonal changes in their systems, can and do start having different points of view. What is initially a pleasant disagreement can soon become an assertion of identity. Personality conflicts follow. These personality conflicts can be a logical derivation, and very often, it is difficult to find the origin of the derivation itself. Coherent dialogue in a spirit of give and take can often be substituted by the urge not only to protect one's turf but also to prove oneself more talented and resourceful. It can often become the source of further identity conflicts. The skill to handle such disagreements cannot be taught and is often taken over by other habits.

These habits may include being short-tempered, incoherent talking and having a high pitch in conversation, which is seen as an extension of good logic. The aberrations are far too many to be recounted, and the results are easy to identify. Instead of working together to resolve the differences, it becomes a battleground to show who can prevail. The rest, as they say, is history. In an era, that is full of talk about skills, it is important at this stage of dialogue to focus on life skills. Two people who cannot get together try to demonstrate who has the right of way in a marital relationship. The life story moves from one end of the spectrum to an often incoherent hurtling down the slope of not only a difference of opinion but also a difference in personalities. The analysis can go only so far because then logic gives way to preferences and pas-



ion. This is at the root of many marital discords, and it is difficult to reverse the gears and change the pitch. Unfortunately, while there are numerous dissertations in psychology and elsewhere on relationships, practical-oriented thinking in handling relationships is few and at best, commonsensical. One is merely indicating the value of focused research and showing how a structured approach to problem-solving, even in everyday life, can be very valuable. There is a need to see research as an enabling situation for problem-solving, and many use the phrase 'applied research' for it. In the present day and age, more of the fashion world is about skill, and it is being generously used because of its attractive value in situations that cannot be practically handled. Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not. The important thing is to realise that research requires insights and the adoption of a structured methodology, even in commonsensical situations. It is this aspect of research that can lead to a better quality of life, which can be termed as enabling research and it has to do with life skills. Solving this situation, which afflicts many interpersonal relationships, is simultaneously easy and yet difficult. It is easy to control if one can limit one's communication and how



THE LIFE STORY MOVES FROM ONE END OF THE SPECTRUM TO AN OFTEN INCOHERENT HURLING DOWN THE SLOPE OF NOT ONLY A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BUT ALSO A DIFFERENCE IN PERSONALITIES

much one talks more wisely, keeping the number of words used in a conversation minimal. The truth is, that the more one seeks to talk and explain, the more complex it can become. Let simple things remain simple; it is a significant strategic choice. This approach works because passion subsides, irritations sort itself out and the choice of words and pitch of the voice can be better controlled. One only has to look around to notice how talking less is such an asset in keeping relationships positive. Interpersonal relationships apart, work relationships, also get affected and the impression of losing an argument, even in work-spaces, is a personal defeat. This, by itself, is a self-defeating proposition. It is self-defeating because even if one wins the argument due to positional power or manipulative skills, the scars of a lost argument leave long-lasting damage to relationships. One can indeed often lose a battle to win the war. As indicated earlier, this applies to work situations as much as to real-life, non-work situations. Gentleness and soft words go far, especially when gentleness is received not as a proposition of the weaker person, but as a characteristic and indicator of mutual respect. The best solution to many conflicts is when both come out as winners, and no one is

growing, smitten by the dangerous feeling of having 'lost one's face'. Be that as it may, it is necessary to reduce differences, not to personalities, but to find the best way forward. This best way forward must focus on protecting everyone's ego and be in the interest of the larger good. Much will depend on the personality elements of the players in the situation and indeed the time available to sort it out. Many times, a shortage of time necessitates two decisions that are suboptimal and more to 'get along with a job' than 'finding the best option'. Using tentative words and a hypothesis open to correction and improvement may be the best recipe for conflict resolution. In such situations, the personalities do not win or lose; it is the cause that is handled in a far-sighted way. Examples can be many, and one has to see what the issue at stake is how people perceive the result of the outcome and how they interpret it. In all cases, if there is a loser in an argument, it is best to make him feel that he has not 'lost' and that no personalities are involved. This can be a useful approach to handling institutional issues because every resolution of a conflict should be for the institutional good. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S HYPOCRISY EXPOSED

Madam — The ultimatum from Trump to end the prolonging Ukraine-Russia war exposes his hypocrisy. He is aware that it is with the pumping of arms by his country and its allies in Europe that Ukraine is continuing the war. He is also aware that the sanction imposed on Russia had failed miserably, as the same EU partners are buying the same Russian oil from different sources like India. Pumping arms and funds into Ukraine on one hand and giving an ultimatum to end the war on the other is rightly understood by one and all as meaningless, non-serious, and merely publicity-orientated. The entire world knows that maximum wars are waged or promoted by his country. Even while addressing after assuming office, he had demonstrated his imperial thirst by expressing his policy to take over the Panama Canal and Greenland, besides arbitrarily changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico into the Gulf of America. His threat to wage a tariff war goes against the very basic principles of globalisation that promote the free movement of goods, labour, and capital. The world also knows the key role played by the production of arms and promotion of arms trade in the economy of America. Therefore, America needs a war between some countries or the other. Mr. Trump speaking with concern over the huge human loss in Ukraine and Russia due to war is another display of his hypocrisy. Because more devastating impacts are experienced due to climate change, and his actions are hostile to the global efforts to overcome this serious issue. Therefore, one need not attach so much importance to his utterances or Quixotic actions. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

LIQUOR BAN AT RELIGIOUS SITES

Madam—CM of Madhya Pradesh Mohan Yadav has formally announced in Narsinghpur district that a liquor ban

UNESCO honours Mahakumbh



To foster the honour and delight of every Indian, the 45-day-long Mahakumbh Festival was listed in the UNESCO list as the largest peaceful religious congregation of pilgrims on earth. To disperse the Hindu aesthetic religious and spiritualism at the next

level, Maha Kumbh is truly a festival of positivity and spiritualism in India. From Naga Sadhus to Aghoris to all the other pilgrims, Kumbh is an auspicious celebration of Hindu devotees to enchant spirituality for developing godly connection, inner peace, and spiritual harmony. A dip in the Triveni Sangam of the three rivers of Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati will be considered as the precursor of all devil deeds done during the lifetime. A congregation of 450 million, including people from local and global communities, is one of a kind incidence. It is welcoming that UNESCO added this one-of-a-kind religious festivity to its list. It is a moment of extreme celebration and glee for every Indian back at home. We all welcome the UNESCO listing favourably and positively with utmost joy in our hearts. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

will be implemented in 17 religious places in 11 districts of the state. It is believed that the government will send an order to the administration of the cities of the districts where the liquor ban is to be implemented, and the licensed liquor shops will be closed. He also said that liquor will not be allowed to be sold at any cost in the places where God Ram and Krishna set foot. These include Ujjain, Amarkantak, Maheshwar, Omkareshwar, Chitrakoot, Mandasaur, etc. In the Narsinghpur program, he also talked about the harm caused to the health of the family due to alcohol. I do not understand one thing: more or less all the politicians in India, in their speeches, there is a lot of mention of the ill effects & demerits of alcohol and the diseases caused by it. All those smart politicians are found appealing to the people that 'please stay away from consuming alcohol; it harms your health. Hey, when these leaders are so concerned about the health of the people, then why do they not declare a complete ban on the production and

marketing of alcohol? Jang Bahadur Singh | jamshedpur

SCAMMERS TARGET JOB SEEKERS

Madam — The rise of job scams has become a significant problem, with scammers deceiving job seekers by creating fake job postings. These scammers often promise unsuspecting victims the opportunity to work from home and earn a high income, but only after paying for training or equipment. Research the company thoroughly to verify its legitimacy and reputation. Use reputable job boards and websites to search for job openings. Report any suspicious activities or job postings to the relevant authorities. By being aware of these job scam tactics and taking the necessary precautions, job seekers can protect themselves from falling victim to these fraudulent schemes. Khushi Uchenia | Ujjain



FIRST COLUMN

SEEKING TRUE SHELTER IN THE DIVINE

Amid the chaos of desires, ego and karmaphal, how do we find lasting peace



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We are small, ignorant, helpless and unsafe. There should not be any doubt about our smallness with eight billion of us on the earth's planet itself. How knowledgeable we are or can be? Knowledge is unlimited. How much can we learn in one lifetime? Helpless we are from the time we are born till the time comes to dispose of our bodies. Just count how many people we need daily to survive well. And unsafe all of us are, as the Covid-19 pandemic proved. Therefore, we instinctively seek shelter all the time. An infant needs his parents. As one grows, one takes shelter from education to maintain oneself. Education/training over, time comes to seek shelter in a job or a business.

The idea is to have the shelter of enough money to be able to survive decently. Sex overpowers thinking beginning from a young age. Some are drawn towards fame like a sportsperson, while others get into politics, etc. for power. The most fortunate seek the shelter of God. Shelter of God is crucial to exist well. Let us see the degree of difficulty for a quality life. Our nature ('svabhava') is a huge handicap. Something or other from lust, anger, greed, jealousy, ego, etc. predominates if not more than one.

What chance is there to have a quality life? Lust derails almost everyone. One assumes that sex is pleasure, and it has so many forms. The worst thing is it's possessing our minds. Ego is not far behind. Have you met anyone who does not feel his or her superiority vis-



à-vis others? Greed does not allow us to assess our needs sensibly. More is better is the desire and there is no satisfaction. Anger is always lurking near the surface. It surfaces at the drop of a hat, literally. Then, there are karmaphalas always ready to manifest. We know how bad ones hurt. What most people don't realise are the ill effects of good karmaphalas. This is when one gets the feeling of invincibility and makes big mistakes.

People look for rewards during success, and we know what these rewards do to us. The third big enemy is old age, when we become weak and are mostly written off. Are we stuck? Far from it. God would not have made such a sorry Creation. Guidance and help are available to all of us if we accept the role of God in our lives. Ignorance, false pride or laziness stops us from taking God's help, who is the owner, controller and everything. You seek guidance sincerely and see what happens. But we don't; we prefer to be in cyclic thinking short-circuiting our own lives. We condemn ourselves by our obstinate attitude. God is prepared to help all of us at any time, but there is a rider.

We must deserve such help. How to determine who should get or who shouldn't? Therefore, the question everyone should be asking is: how do we become deserving of God's 'kripa' (favour)? Simply, you recognise yourself as a soul – part of God. Then, all spiritual activities will make sense.

Shouldn't parts take shelter from God? Shouldn't we be very respectful to God and pay obeisance to Him? What about the 'dhyani' (meditation) of the entity, who is everything? How about thanking God for all that He does for everyone like providing air, water and sunlight free. In short, we should stop taking shelter of anyone or anything except God, and remain there.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

Winter's tale in Northern India: A season of discontent

Northern India's winter is more than just a fleeting season; it is a relentless narrative of marrow-freezing cold, breath-choking pollution and a grim forecast for years to come



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR



Of freezing marrows and choking breaths William Shakespeare, emperor of narratives, master of metaphors, celebrated craftsman of sentences and acclaimed presenter of deep insights into human nature, had a way of coming up with expressions surviving the passage of time. One of them is "winter of our discontent." Richard, Duke of Gloucester, says in Richard III, "Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this sun of York;/ And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house/ In the deep bosom of the ocean buried." The expression, which adorns one of John Steinbeck's most famous novels as its title, should resonate particularly strongly with people in northern India still in the grip of a winter that is cold, damp and utterly polluted. The chances of things improving in the next few years, are, to put it mildly, bleak.

As the chilling flipside of global warming, the cold months will continue to be increasingly marrow-freezing, since, with Donald Trump taking over as the United States' president, the chances of a deceleration in the pace of climate change, have diminished significantly. This is not to look wistfully back over one's shoulder to a mythical place like the island valley of Avilion, where, pace Alfred Tennyson in a very different context, "falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, / Nor ever wind blows loudly." Climates and the weather have been notoriously fickle cousins throughout history. If any part of the past seems golden, it is because of the distance in time which lends it enchantment.

It had, when it was the present, its warts, some of them rather large and ugly. Floods and droughts took very heavy tolls when meteorological devices and skills for predicting their advent and coping with their aftermath, were far less advanced. In the absence of electrical heating devices, which we have, life could not have been terribly pleasant during the last ice age which had covered



AS THE CHILLING FLIP SIDE OF GLOBAL WARMING, THE COLD MONTHS WILL CONTINUE TO BE INCREASINGLY MARROW-FREEZING, SINCE, WITH DONALD TRUMP TAKING OVER AS THE UNITED STATES' PRESIDENT, THE CHANCES OF A DECELERATION IN THE PACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, HAVE DIMINISHED SIGNIFICANTLY

about 30 per cent of the earth's surface and ended 15, 000 to 20,000 years ago. On a more specific note, slavery was legal in most parts of the world—including the chest-thumping democracies of the West—as late as the second half of the 19th century. The weather, doubtless, has an impact on life and its moods, which influence thought, speech and feeling which, in turn, trigger action.

All of these, at a certain elevated level, power the wheels of history. These also affect inter-personal relations, causing friction and hostility arising from anger and discontent, or cordiality and warmth caused by harmony. The sum total of the interaction among these factors determines the quality of a community's social existence in terms of tensions between collective bodies like class and caste, and stress caused by individual actions like crime, which is often caused by alienation resulting from marginalisation, poverty and anonymity in impersonal societies. A crime can be a perverse act of self-assertion, a sub-conscious statement like, "I kill, therefore I exist"—a variant of Rene Descartes much-quoted assertion, "Cogito ergo sum (literally, "I think, therefore, I am")."

Another form of self-assertion can be participation—to say nothing of playing a leading role—in a mass movement. Eric Hoffer writes in The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, "There is in us a tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves. Success and failure are unavoidably related in our minds with the state of things around us. Hence it is that people with a sense of fulfilment think it a good

world and would like to conserve it as it is, while the frustrated favour radical change. The tendency to look for all causes outside ourselves persists even when it is clear that our state of being is the product of personal qualities such as ability, character, appearance, health and so on." What is the result? Hoffer quotes Thoreau as saying, "If anything ail a man, so that he does not perform his functions, if he has a pain in his bowels even ... he forthwith sets about reforming—the world." (Italics by Hoffer; Thoreau has used the plurals "ail" and "have" as it was done by many in his time in such contexts).

Attempts to reform the world invariably lead to struggles with status quoists. Besides, social tensions and conflicts will increase following rising ocean levels, caused by global warming, submerging coastal areas. Inward migration of people from these regions would trigger clashes over land and resources in the interior areas. The same factors will also be in operation in other areas to which people may escape from regions made uninhabitable by temperatures rising too high to support life.

One can, of course, argue that people would be kind to global warming refugees, realising that they may have to leave their homes someday for the same reason. But then, kindness is not what a person encounters frequently in life; it is the same with gratitude, the lack of which weighed heavily on the Bard of Avon. "Ingratitude," he lamented in King Lear, "thou marble-hearted fiend..." He bewailed in As You Like It, "Blow, blow, thou winter wind, / Thou art not so unkind/As man's ingratitude."

And he says in Twelfth Night, "I hate ingratitude more in a man/ Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,/ Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption/ Inhabits our frail blood." Character attributes like openness towards gratitude are rooted deep inside one's DNA and are modified by the environment as one grows up. Seasonal changes can impact their intensity, as discomfort caused by extreme heat or cold can put one's temper on a short leash.

On the other hand, as Anton Chekhov put it, "People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they're happy." This brings us back to our starting point—northern India's butt-freezing, breath-choking winter. Can one be happy in its midst? The answer will be in the affirmative, as the news of a progeny scaling new heights at work or being gifted with a baby, will warm the cockles of one's heart. This, however, is most likely to be a passing phase, overwhelmed, sooner than later, by the many worries and sadnesses that quotidian existence brings and that, again, are ephemeral.

The more relevant question will be whether one can survive northern India's winter and for how long. The transition to the hereafter caused by pollution stalks one silently but lethally. The final truth in life is mortality. All this has been said before, and will be said again, as one will hear the much-quoted proverb, "What can't be cured must be endured." It has joined the ranks of venerable clichés blessed with eternal life.

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

Cultural heritage tourism: A path to sustainable growth and mutual understanding

Respecting the balance between tourism and heritage enables a mutually beneficial relationship that supports communities, preserves cultural identity and promotes global harmony

Cultural tourism, as defined in the 22nd session of the UN Tourism General Assembly in 2017, is an activity where a visitor's primary motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and engage with the tangible and intangible cultural attractions and products of a destination. These motivations shape the agendas of both the visitor and the tour guide at cultural heritage destinations, bridging the gap between the historical and the contemporary.

The Evolution of Cultural Heritage and Tourism
Cultural heritage has undergone a significant shift in perception, moving from an archaeological focus to the concept of "living heritage" and its reuse. Similarly, tourism has evolved from being largely

centered on pilgrimage to a multifaceted industry encompassing learning, entertainment, experiences, and relaxation. This transformation has elevated tourism as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and job creation across diverse sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment. The industry's ripple effect benefits individuals and communities alike, engaging local businesses, transport operators, craftspeople, tourist guides, and the hospitality industry in a symbiotic relationship.

For these benefits to be fully realised, collaboration among stakeholders is essential. They must work collectively to offer authentic and meaningful experiences that resonate with travelers while preserving the



SUKHDEV SINGH

integrity of cultural sites. **Cultural Heritage as a Driver of Tourism**

A rapidly growing segment within the tourism industry is cultural heritage, which encompasses natural and architectural sites, traditional crafts, cultural events, performances, and intangible knowledge. Recognised as both a commodity and an experience, cultural heritage attracts mar-

ket players, planners, and governments aiming to expand the scope of tourism. It promotes inclusive growth, intercultural exchange and mutual understanding.

The relationship between tourism and cultural heritage is built on mutuality. While cultural heritage serves as a key attraction for tourism, the latter provides the financial and structural support required for its preservation and promotion.

Navigating Contradictions
Tourism operates on the principle of profit and economic growth, while cultural heritage centers on identity and inheritance. These differing foundations can create contradictions. For the tourism industry, cultural heritage is often commodified, whereas for her-



itage conservation, tourism acts as a feeder for sustainability. While these sectors can support one another to an extent, unchecked tourism practices can lead to significant challenges, including overcrowding, environmental and degradation.

To mitigate these issues, regulated practices in cultural heritage tourism must prioritise the symbiotic relationship

between factors influencing tourist experiences and those fostering cultural understanding. Tour operators and tourists must respect the sanctity and protocols of cultural heritage sites. Travelers should be encouraged to appreciate local customs without overstepping boundaries, ensuring a balance between immersion and respect. Sustainable cultural heritage tourism, thus, becomes a pathway to fostering "culture for peace."

Economic and Cultural Benefits of Heritage Tourism
Cultural heritage tourism creates opportunities for income generation and employment. This is achieved by maintaining and showcasing heritage structures, sites, and products. Preservation and management efforts, such as cata-

logging and storytelling, directly benefit from tourism revenue. Simultaneously, the broader economic ecosystem, including hospitality, transportation, and entertainment, flourishes through increased visitor engagement.

However, cultural heritage is far more than a revenue-generating commodity. It serves as a repository of customs, values, and artifacts, connecting communities to their past and reinforcing their identities. Tourism, when responsibly managed, can amplify the significance of heritage sites by fostering research, introducing new narratives, and raising awareness. Reinvestment of economic returns into preservation ensures the longevity and authenticity of cultural heritage.

Challenges of Cultural Heritage Tourism

While tourism can elevate the value of cultural heritage, it also introduces challenges. Overcrowding, environmental degradation, and disruptions to the local population's way of life are common issues.

Sustainable and Responsible Tourism

To maintain a harmonious balance between tourism and cultural heritage, sustainable practices are essential. These include regulating visitor numbers, promoting eco-friendly initiatives, and ensuring that tourism revenue is reinvested into preservation efforts.

(The writer is retired professor of Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar and Vice-Chairman, INTACH; views are personal)

'Putin should negotiate with Ukraine, Zelenskyy ready for talks'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin "should make a deal" with Ukraine, US President Donald Trump has said and asserted that they would meet as soon as they can.

Earlier, he warned his Russian counterpart to end the 'ridiculous war' in Ukraine or face high tariffs and further sanctions. Trump, who was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, said this on Truth Social on Wednesday, a social media platform owned by him.

Talking to reporters in the Oval Office on Thursday, the president said, "I think he (Putin) should make a deal." When asked if he thinks that sanctions on Russia will force Putin to negotiate, he said, "I don't know."

"Russia should want to make a deal. Maybe they want to make a deal. I think, from what I hear, Putin would like to see me. And we'll meet as soon as we can. I'd meet immediately. Soldiers are being killed on the battlefield," he said.

"That battlefield is like no battlefield since World War II... and I have pictures that you don't want to see. Soldiers are being killed on a daily basis at numbers that we haven't seen in decades. It would be nice to end that war. It's a ridiculous war," the US president said.

In response to another question, Trump said Ukraine is ready to make a deal. "He's (Volodymyr Zelenskyy) ready to negotiate a deal. He'd like to stop. He's somebody that lost a lot of soldiers. So did Russia. Russia lost more soldiers, they lost 8,00,000 soldiers," Trump added.

Called out Russian President Putin by name in the social media post on Wednesday, Trump argued that he always had a good relationship with the leader, but that it was time to settle "this ridiculous war!"

He also warned that if there was not a ceasefire deal soon, he would "have no other choice" but to impose tariffs, taxes and sanctions on "anything being sold by Russia to the United States, and various other participating countries."

Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Trump said on Thursday that the OPEC+ alliance of oil exporting countries shares responsibility for the nearly three-year conflict in Ukraine because it has kept oil prices too high. "If the price came down, the Russia-Ukraine war would end immediately," Trump said. Energy sales form a large part of Russia's earnings.

Asked about Trump's comments, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov affirmed Moscow's view that the Ukrainian conflict was triggered by the West's refusal to take into account Russian security interests.

"The conflict doesn't depend on oil prices," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "The conflict is ongoing because of the threat to Russia's national security, the threat to Russians living on those territories and the refusal by the Americans and the Europeans to listen to Russia's security concerns. It's not linked to oil prices."

He said Russian President Vladimir Putin remains ready for contacts with Trump.

Peskov's comments echoed Putin's statements that he had to send troops into Ukraine in February 2022 to fend off a threat to Russia's security resulting from plans for Ukraine to join NATO and to protect Russian speakers living there.

Ukraine and the West have denounced Moscow's action as an unprovoked act of aggression.

Asked to comment on Trump's claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is ready for a peace deal, Peskov pointed out the Ukrainian leader's earlier decision to rule out any talks with Moscow. "Zelenskyy can't be ready for a deal," Peskov told reporters, adding that "in order to reach a settlement it's necessary to conduct talks, and Zelenskyy forbade himself to hold talks by his own decree."

On Wednesday, Trump threatened to impose stiff taxes, tariffs and sanctions on Russia if an agreement isn't reached to end the war in Ukraine.

Peskov said that the Kremlin was closely following Trump's statements and noted that he imposed a slew of sanctions during his first term.

He said Moscow "remains ready for an equal dialogue, for a mutually respectful dialogue."

"This dialogue took place between the two presidents during Trump's first presidency. And we are waiting for signals that we have not received yet," Peskov said.

UK to convince US Prez Trump not to impose trade tariffs

PTI ■ LONDON

The British government on Friday said it has an argument in favour of convincing US President Donald Trump not to impose tariffs on its trade with the UK.

Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds told the BBC that the United States did not have a trade deficit with the UK on manufactured goods, which would make tariffs unnecessary.

"We've obviously got a services-based economy. The US does not have that deficit with us so that's the logic of that position, I think we've got an argument to engage with," said Reynolds.

Tariffs are a key part of Trump's economic agenda as he assumed office for a second term earlier this week. He not only sees them as a way of growing the US economy, protecting jobs and raising tax revenue but also as leverage to pursue other policies targeted at certain countries.

He has indicated a tax on imports from China and has also threatened tariffs on Canada and Mexico. Tariffs, or higher taxes on imports to the US, would make it more expensive for companies to sell goods in the world's largest economy. However, Trump has since indicated that he "would rather not" impose tariffs, suggesting trade deals are on the table.

The US President told global executives at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos this week that they could either produce their goods in the US or face widespread tariffs worth hundreds of billions or even trillions of dollars.

Reynolds, among the ministers who were in Davos to "spotlight UK's investment offer to global business leaders", met European Union Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic at the summit and went on to thank him for "incredibly positive" comments on a possible new post-Brexit agreement between Britain and the 27-member economic bloc.

"We can improve the terms of trade with the EU in a way which doesn't revisit customs unions or single markets or the arguments of Brexit, and we can do that whilst pursuing closer trade links around the world," Reynolds said.

The Labour Party had contested last July's general election with a manifesto pledge to lower Brexit-related barriers and red tape for the export of food and farm products to the EU. "Britain is back in business under this government, and our Plan for Change is already delivering for working people. The UK is the most connected market on earth, and we will continue to be the home for innovative businesses looking to face outwards to the world," added Reynolds.

His Cabinet colleague, Chancellor Rachel Reeves, was also in Davos to make the case for Britain as one of the "most exciting places in the world" for investments at a time when the domestic economy is navigating a sluggish phase.

"I will not rest until the UK economy is growing and this government is delivering on its Plan for Change, so we can put more money in people's pockets. The time to invest in Britain is now," she said.



President Donald Trump signs an executive order as he attends an indoor Presidential Inauguration parade event at Capital One Arena, Monday in Washington, as White House staff secretary Will Scharf watches.

Donald Trump signs executive order to declassify JFK assassination files

Washington (PTI): US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order seeking to declassify files on the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Asserting that the victims' families and the American people deserve to know the truth about these assassinations, the executive order directs the Director of National Intelligence to present a plan within 15 days for the "full and complete release" of all John F. Kennedy assassination records. It also directs the Director of National Intelligence to immediately review the records on the Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations and present a plan for their full and complete release within 45 days.

"That's a big one. A lot of people are waiting for years, for decades. And everything will be revealed," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office wherein he signed the executive order.

This executive order stated that continued withholding of the John F. Kennedy records is long overdue and not in the public interest.

"Although no Act of Congress directs the release of information pertaining to the assassinations of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the Reverend Dr. Martin

Japan's leader says he's preparing for tough negotiations with US President

Tokyo (PTI): Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, struggling to stabilise his minority government, said Friday he will seek to maintain regional security and prepare for tough negotiations with US President Donald Trump to maintain a strong American presence in the Asia-Pacific.

Ishiba has been seeking to meet with Trump since his election victory in November and is arranging a trip to Washington in the coming weeks. With a minority government following a significant election loss in October due to voter anger over his party's financial scandals, Ishiba is struggling to stay in power at least until the next major elections this summer.

"With the balance of power in the region making a historic change, we must further deepen Japan-US cooperation and ensure the US commitment to the region to prevent any power vacuum from destabilizing it," Ishiba said in a policy speech to parliament.

Japan's concern about a US retreat from the region comes as China's military is becoming increasingly assertive and North Korea has repeatedly test-fired ballistic missiles as it advances its nuclear and missile programs.

Luther King, Jr, I have determined that the release of all records in the Federal Government's possession pertaining to each of those assassinations is also in the public interest," Trump said in the order. Making President John F. Kennedy assassination files public was part of Trump's poll campaign promises. He had on multiple occasions pledged to release the JFK files, specifically stating in June 2024 that he would do so "early on."

"When I return to the White House, I will declassify and unseal all JFK assassination-related documents. It's been 60 years, time for the American people to know the TRUTH!" Trump had said.

Israelis await next four hostages' names in ceasefire deal

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Relatives of hostages still being held by militants in Gaza called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday to ensure all remaining captives are freed, while also appealing to US President Donald Trump to continue pressing for their release.

As a fragile six-week ceasefire between Israel and Hamas entered its sixth day, Israelis waited anxiously for the names of the next four hostages who will be released from among the more than 90 still held in Gaza.

In the Palestinian enclave, civilians in the central and southern part of the Gaza Strip hoping to return to the remnants of their home in the battered north faced an agonizing wait. Israel believes about a third, or possibly as many as half, of the more than 90 hostages still in Gaza have died. Hamas has not released definitive information on how many captives are still alive or the names of those who have died. Dear President Trump,

first of all we want to say thank you for the happy moments we felt this week. But we want to tell you we still have 94 hostages, we need them all at home," said Ayelet Samerano, whose son Yonatan Samerano is among those still being held.

"Please do not stop. Please continue to press and do everything so that all the 94 hostages will come home immediately." In the first phase of the ceasefire deal, 33 hostages are expected to be released gradually in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

The first three Israeli hostages were freed in exchange for 90 Palestinian prisoners on Sunday, the first day of the ceasefire that has halted the 15-month war that has devastated Gaza. More than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and wide swaths of the territory have been destroyed.

According to the deal, on Friday Hamas is to announce the names of the next four hostages to be released on Saturday, after which Israel

will also release a list of which Palestinian prisoners will be freed.

The hostages were among about 250 men, women and children captured by militants who burst across the border into Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people in an attack that sparked the war in Gaza. About 100 were released during a brief ceasefire in November that year, while the bodies of around three dozen hostages have been recovered in Gaza and eight hostages have been rescued by the army.

"I call from here to the Prime Minister and negotiating team — you're doing excellent work — do whatever is necessary to bring everyone back, to the last hostage," Samerano said. "We ask you to ensure phase two of the deal is agreed upon before finishing the current phase. We cannot continue living in uncertainty. All hostages must return, and none of them has time left."

The 33 to be released in the first phase will include women,

US Prez targets California water policy as he prepares to tour LA fire damage

Washington (PTI): As President Donald Trump prepares to tour wildfire damage in California, he's zeroing in on one of his frequent targets for criticism: State water policy.

Since the fires broke out Jan 7, Trump has used social media and interviews to accuse the state of sending too much water to the Pacific Ocean instead of south toward Los Angeles and highlighted how some hydrants ran dry in the early hours of the firefight in Pacific Palisades.

In the first hours of his second term, Trump called on federal officials to draft plans to route more water to the crop-rich Central Valley and densely populated cities in the southern part of the state. Two days later he threatened to withhold federal disaster aid unless California leaders change the state's approach on water.

Here's a look at the facts behind Trump's comments and what power the president has to influence California water: In general, most of the state's

water is in the north, while most of its people are in the drier south.

Los Angeles, the nation's second largest city, depends on drawing water from elsewhere. Meanwhile the relatively dry Central Valley is home to fertile land where much of the nation's fruits and vegetables are grown.

Two complex systems of dams and canals channel rain and snowmelt from the mountains in the north and route it south. One is managed by the federal government and known as the Central Valley Project, while the other is operated by the state of California and known as the State Water Project.

Both transport water through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, an estuary that provides critical habitat to fish and wildlife including salmon and the delta smelt, one of Trump's fascinations.

Southern California gets about half its water from local supplies such as groundwater,

according to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, a regional water wholesaler. Metropolitan provides the rest of the water from state supplies and the federally managed Colorado River system.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power also manages its own aqueducts that draw water from the eastern Sierra Nevada.

Federal officials guide how much is routed to the delta to protect threatened species and how much goes to Central Valley Project users, mostly farms. That project does not supply water to Los Angeles. State officials are expected to follow the same environmental guidelines, said Caitlin Peterson, a research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California's Water Policy Centre.

Federal and state officials typically coordinate how they operate those systems.

The delta connects inland waterways to the Pacific, and



Caretakers release panda cubs at a playground to make public debut ahead of Chinese Lunar New Year at Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu in southwestern China's Sichuan Province on Thursday.

UK MP flays 'Emergency' film screening disruption by 'Khalistani terrorists'

London (PTI): An Opposition Conservative Party Member of Parliament has urged the UK Home Secretary to intervene after his constituents in north-west London were threatened by "masked Khalistani terrorists" who burst into a screening of Kangana Ranaut's film 'Emergency'.

Bob Blackman told the House of Commons that similar disruption of the screenings of the "very controversial" film took place in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Slough, Staines and Manchester. It has resulted in the Vue and Cineworld cinema chains deciding to pull the film from many theatres in the UK.

"On Sunday, many of my constituents gathered and paid for a screening of the film 'Emergency' in the Harrow

Vue cinema. At about 30 or 40 minutes into the screening of the film, masked Khalistani terrorists burst in, threatened members of the audience and forced the screening to end," Blackman said in Parliament on Thursday.

The film is very controversial, and I am not commenting on its quality or content, but I defend the right of my constituents and other members' constituents to be able to view it and make a decision on it. It covers the period when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India," he said.

The MP noted that there are certain views in the UK that it is an "anti-Sikh film" but asserted that his constituents should be able to judge for themselves

US arrests 538 illegal immigrant criminals

Washington (PTI): The US has arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals, including a suspected terrorist, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors, the White House has said.

In a series of posts on X on Thursday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the Trump administration also deported hundreds of illegal immigrant criminals via military aircraft. "The largest massive deportation operation in history is well underway. Promises made. Promises kept," she said.

Leavitt said, "The Trump Administration arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals including a suspected terrorist, four members of the Tren de Aragua gang, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors."

Underlining that deportation flights have begun, she asserted that President Donald Trump is "sending a strong and clear message to the entire world: if you illegally enter the United States of America, you will face severe consequences."

The Republican-led House on Wednesday gave final approval to a bill requiring the detention of unauthorised immigrants accused of theft and violent crimes. This marks the first legislation for President Trump to sign, aligning with his plans to crack down on illegal immigration, which has received some bipartisan support.

Trump on Wednesday also issued executive orders aimed at sealing the US-Mexico border and deporting millions of immigrants without permanent legal status.

Government approves ₹500 Crore capital infusion in IFCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic financial institution IFCI on Friday said the government has approved ₹500 crore capital infusion in the company through the preferential issue of shares. The Department of Financial Services has conveyed sanction of the President of India to release funds of ₹500 crore to IFCI Ltd towards subscription to the share capital during FY 2024-25, the state-owned entity said in a regulatory filing. Following this, the meeting of the board of directors of the company is called on January 29, 2025, to consider the Preferential Issue of equity shares to the central government, subject to the approval of shareholders, stock exchanges and such other regulatory authorities



As may be required. With the infusion, the government's holding in the company is expected to further increase from the existing 71.72 per cent as of September 2024. The capital infusion plan for IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha in December. The Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up by the government on July 1, 1948, as the first development financial institution in the country. The Finance Ministry, in November 2024, in principle approved the 'Consolidation of IFCI Group', which entails the merger/amalgamation of

IFCI Limited and Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited and other group companies. As per the proposal, Stock Holding Corporation of India Ltd, IFCI Factors Ltd, IFCI Infrastructure Development Ltd and IIDL Realtors Ltd will merge with IFCI Ltd. Further, Stock Holding Services Ltd, IFCI Financial Services Ltd, IFIN Commodities Ltd and IFIN Credit Ltd will be merged into a single entity, which will be a direct subsidiary of the consolidated listed entity. Additionally, Stock Holding Management Services Ltd, Stock Holding Securities IFSC Ltd, IFIN Securities Finance Ltd, IFCI Venture Capital Funds Ltd and MPCON Ltd shall be direct subsidiaries of the consolidated listed entity that is IFCI.

FM Sitharaman takes part in customary halwa ceremony

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday participated in a traditional 'halwa' ceremony, marking the final stage for the preparation of Union Budget 2025-26 to be unveiled on February 1 in the Lok Sabha. The ceremony is a customary ritual in which traditional dessert 'halwa' is prepared and served to officials and staff members of the finance ministry who are involved in the preparation of the budget. It is organised in the basement of North Block, which houses the ministry in the national capital and is attended by the finance minister and other high-ranking officials. According to sources, the Finance Minister participated in the ceremony and also took a round of the Budget Press and reviewed the preparations besides extending her best wishes to



the officials concerned. Sitharaman is going to present Budget 2025-26, the eighth straight budget in a row, on the backdrop of GDP growth moderating to 6.4 per cent in the financial year as against 8.2 per cent recorded in the previous fiscal. Like the previous four full Union Budgets and one Interim, the full Union Budget 2025-26 will also be delivered in paperless form. All the Union Budget documents, including the Annual Financial Statement (commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill etc. As prescribed by the Constitution, will be available on the 'Union Budget Mobile App' for hassle-free access to Budget. Besides Sitharaman, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and other senior officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth and other senior officials were present at the ceremony.



RBI penalises J and K Bank, Bank of India, Canara Bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday said it has penalised Jammu and Kashmir Bank, Bank of India, and Canara Bank for deficiencies in regulatory compliance. Jammu and Kashmir Bank has been penalised Rs 3.31 crore for contravention of certain norms related to financial inclusion - access to banking Services - Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA), 'Know Your Customer' and 'Loans and Advances - Statutory and Other Restrictions'. In another release, the RBI said Rs 1 crore penalty has been imposed on the Bank of India for non-compliance with certain provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949. A penalty of Rs 1.63 crore has been imposed on public sector Canara Bank for non-compliance with certain directions on priority sector lending, the interest rate on deposits and financial inclusion - access to banking services - BSBDA, the RBI said. Also, a penalty of Rs 1 lakh has been imposed on Datson Exports, West Bengal for non-compliance with certain directions issued by the RBI on 'Managing Risks and Code of Conduct in Outsourcing of Financial Services by NBFCs'. In each case, the RBI said penalties were based on deficiencies in statutory and regulatory compliance and were not intended to pronounce upon the validity of any transaction or agreement entered into by the entities with their customers.

Insurers expect tax benefits, concessions for healthcare sector in Union Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurers are hopeful of a host of tax benefits, including concessions for the insurance and healthcare sectors, from the Union Budget 2025-26 to be unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1. SBI General Insurance MD and CEO Naveen Chandra Jha said that as India advances toward financial inclusivity and universal healthcare, the upcoming Budget is expected to further strengthen the health insurance sector. Initiatives like Bima Sugam, designed to achieve the goal of 'Insurance for All' by 2047, are expected to receive regulatory and fiscal support to address the protection gap, he noted. "Additionally, the budget is likely to focus on expanding access in underserved regions through government-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and advancements in digital infrastructure," Jha added.



to the non-life insurance industry remained the same at 1 per cent during 2023-24. Subrata Mondal, MD and CEO of IFFCO Tokio General Insurance said the Union Budget provides an essential opportunity for the government to implement reforms that can address industry challenges and encourage the broader adoption of insurance products. One key expectation is the enhancement of tax incentives for policyholders to promote wider uptake of insurance, he added. Another priority is increasing budgetary support for government-backed insurance schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Ayushman Bharat, he added. "They would significantly improve access to insurance for underserved populations, particularly in rural and economically weaker regions," Mondal said. Sameer Bansal, MD & CEO, PNB MetLife, said that while India is a fast-growing economy fuelled by its rising middle-class population of 25-45-year-olds, the proportion of people above the age of 60 is equally increasing at a rapid pace. Financial stability is a cornerstone of a secure future. One of our hopes for the upcoming budget is to see support for pension and annuity plans, which are key financial instruments for the retirement planning needed to create that stability, he added. "Tax support for pension plans offered by life insurers on par with the National Pension Scheme will provide both greater choice and allow diversification of assets into multiple pension plans," he said. Bansal also urged the government to consider removing GST on premiums for annuity plans to support pensioners and make annuities more affordable and accessible. Universal Sampo General Insurance Managing Director and CEO Sharad Mathur opined that strengthening the insurance sector is essential for driving financial resilience, economic stability, and inclusive growth. With targeted reforms and incentives like the reduction of GST on Health insurance, we can unlock the true potential of insurance, ensuring wider coverage, encouraging innovation, and building a secure future for every individual and business, Mathur said. Srikanth Kandikonda, Chief Financial Officer, ManiPalCigna Health Insurance, said that given the rising healthcare costs and the need for higher sum insured cover, the government should reduce the tax burden by increasing the limits under Section 80D of income tax for premiums paid for health insurance to Rs 50,000 for all and Rs 1 lakh for senior citizens. "This is crucial for achieving the government's vision 'Insurance for all by 2047' and would substantially reduce the financial burden on families investing in their health and financial wellbeing," Kandikonda added. During 2023-24, the non-life

Rupee rises 22 paise to close at 86.22 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rupee appreciated 22 paise to close at 86.22 against the US dollar on Friday, as a decline in the US dollar index supported investor sentiments. Forex traders said weak crude oil prices also boosted the local unit, while sustained foreign fund outflows weighed on the local unit. Traders further noted that the upcoming Union Budget will play a crucial role in shaping market sentiment and the rupee's trajectory. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a strong note at 86.31 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.16 and a low of 86.36. It finally closed at 86.22, rising 22 paise against the US dollar from previous close. On Thursday, the rupee declined 9 paise to settle at 86.44 against the US dollar. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said the rupee strengthened this week as the dollar index saw a



significant decline. He said the drop in the dollar came after US President Donald Trump's oath taking on January 20, while concerns over heavy tariffs on China were alleviated after no such drastic measures were announced. This brought relief to global markets and supported emerging market currencies like the rupee. "Adding to the rupee's strength was a softer trend in crude prices, which reduced import pressure and supported the domestic currency. The rupee is likely to remain in a range of 85.80-86.50, with further movement depending on global cues, crude price trends, and any fresh policy signals from the Indian government," Trivedi said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading down 0.56 per cent to 107.44. The Dollar Index has recently surged, reaching a high of 110, fuelled by escalating uncertainty surrounding the "Trump factor". However, this rally in the Dollar Index is unlikely to be sustained as global uncertainties subside and Trump-related risks diminish, CR Forex Advisors - MD Amit Pabari said. Moreover, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, US President Donald Trump called for an immediate interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve, a move that will generate a negative sentiment for the DXY, Pabari added. Meanwhile, Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.47 per cent to USD 78.66 per barrel in futures trade. Brent oil was trading at USD 78.03 per barrel as Trump asked Saudi to lower prices so that he could make Russia stop the war. He has also threatened sanctions against Russia if they do not get out of the war, Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 329.92 points, or 0.43 per cent, to settle at 76,190.46 points, while the Nifty declined 113.15 points, or 0.49 per cent, to 23,092.20 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,758.49 crore, according to exchange data.

CBIC notifies rules for entities to get TIN

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Entities that are not required to get a GST registration but are required to make a tax payment under the GST Act provision can now obtain a Temporary Identification Number (TIN). The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has notified an amendment to GST rules to issue TIN to entities that are not required to register under the GST Act but need to make payments under some specific provision. Under Goods and Services Tax (GST) rules, registration is mandatory for businesses with an annual turnover of ₹40 lakh and ₹20 lakh in the manufacturing and services sectors, respectively. "Where a person is not liable to registration under the Act



but is required to make any payment under the provision of the Act, the proper officer may grant the said person a temporary identification number," CBIC said while introducing Rule 16A in Central GST Rules. The decision to issue TIN to entities that are otherwise not required a GST registration was taken by the GST council in its meeting last month. This would ensure smooth tax payments while reducing the compliance burden on those who do not regularly engage in taxable activities.

AIMTC urges government to address challenges faced by transport sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) national president Harish Sabharwal on Friday asked the government to address issues like exorbitant increase in toll tax rates and misuse of the e-challan system. The charge handover and oath taking ceremony of the newly elected officer bearers of AIMTC was held on Friday, where Amritlal Madan, the outgoing President of AIMTC, officially passed on his responsibilities to the newly elected president Sabharwal and his team. AIMTC in a statement said some of the key issues that will be high on Sabharwal's agenda include abolition of border checkpoints in the states especially in



Maharashtra, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh. The truckers body said exorbitant increase in toll tax rates, checking misuse of E-challan system and impractical ban on 10-year old diesel vehicles in Delhi-NCR are also on agenda of the newly-elected president of AIMTC. AIMTC also demanded that the government should constitute 'Drivers Samajik Suraksha Welfare Board' with representatives from AIMTC. It also demanded that drivers should be covered in the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Ayushman Bharat Yojana. According to the statement, the transportation sector is a key contributor to India's economy, accounting for approximately 7.7 per cent of India's GDP (PPP adjusted). AIMTC also announced that every year the 24th Day of January will be celebrated as 'National Drivers Day'. In 1936, AIMTC was established as a non-political, not-for-profit apex body representing India's road transport sector in both cargo and passenger segments. It encompasses over 95 lakh truckers, 50 lakh passenger vehicle operators, and 3,500 associations nationwide, impacting over 20 crore people directly or indirectly.

Government restricts import of herbicide Glufosinate

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The government on Friday imposed restrictions on imports of herbicide Glufosinate priced below ₹ 1,289 per kg, with a view to discourage inbound shipments of the chemical. However, if the prices are above this value, imports are allowed without any restriction. "Import of Glufosinate and its salts (purity - minimum 95 per cent) is restricted for CIF value below ₹ 1,289 per kg. However, import of Glufosinate and its salts is free if CIF value is ₹ 1,289 per kg and above," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification. CIF value (cost, insurance, and freight) is a trade term used in international commerce to determine the

Used-car sales in India to cross one crore annual mark by 2030: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian used-car market is expected to cross 1 crore sales mark annually by 2030 with offtakes increasing across both urban and smaller towns, according to a report by CARS24. As per the 'Gear of Growth: The 2024 Indian Used-Car Market Report', Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi are driving the country's used-car boom. "The market is projected to grow from 4.6 million sales in CY23 to a whopping 10.8 million by CY30, cruising ahead with an impressive CAGR of 13 per cent," CARS24 Co-Founder Gajendra Jangid said. As the customer preferences change for more affordable and dependable options, the



used-car market is witnessing an uptick vis-a-vis the new car market, he added. As per the report, SUVs continue to dominate the used car market with a share of 16.7 per cent in 2024. Their spacious design, versatility, and premium appeal make them a favourite across both urban and rural markets, it noted. The report highlighted that the post-COVID era has seen a significant shift in consumer preferences, with 12 per cent

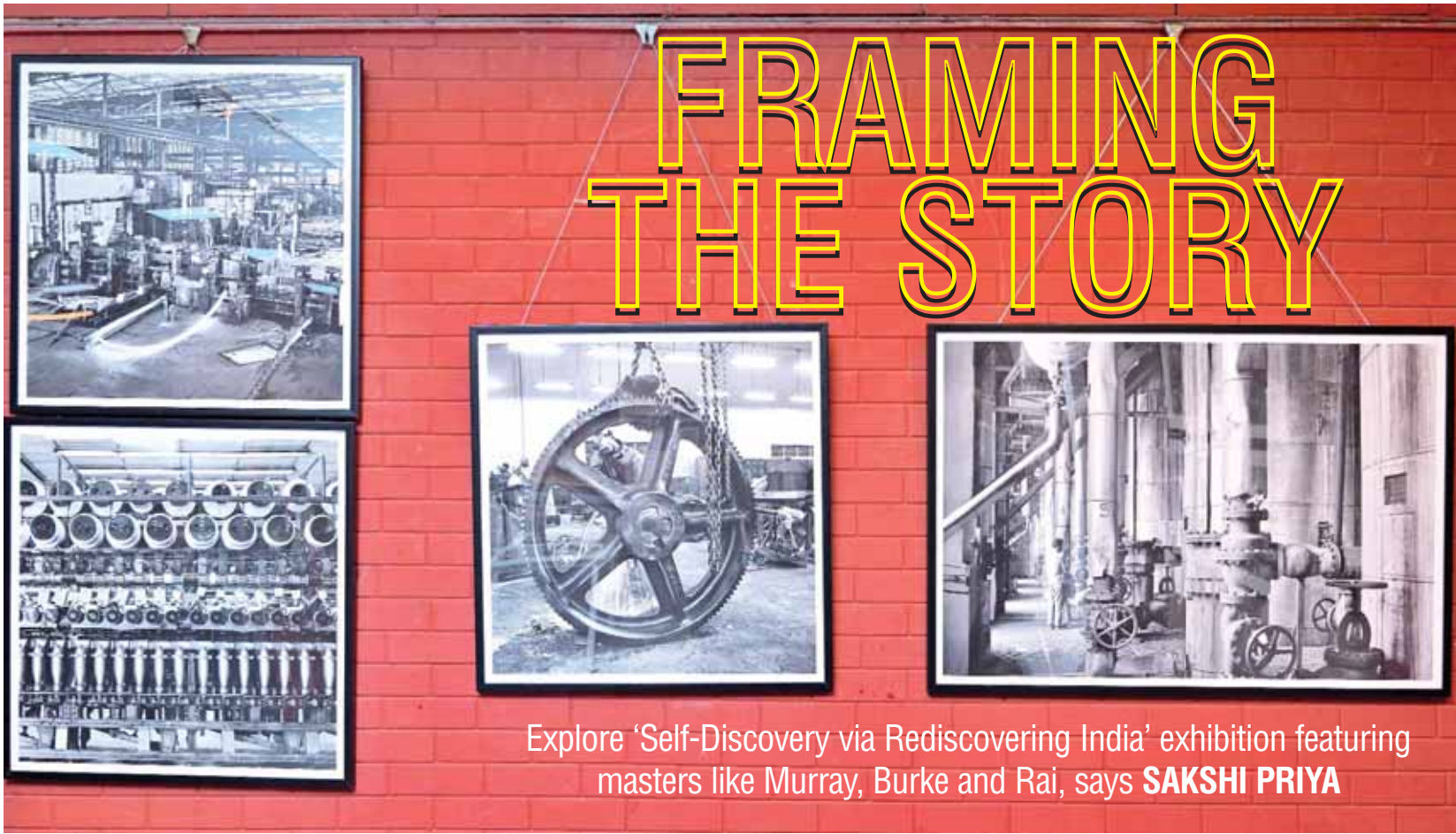
of car buyers prioritising personal mobility for convenience and safety over shared transportation. Maruti Suzuki Swift has become the most sought-after model across both metro and non-metro cities, the report said. Additionally, models like the Hyundai Santro, Tata Tiago NRG, and Maruti Wagon R have consistently delivered exceptional resale value, solidifying their popularity among budget-conscious and value-driven buyers, the report said. As per the report, financing for new cars has seen significant growth, climbing from 60 per cent in 2010 to 84 per cent in 2024, highlighting the increasing consumer reliance on loans for vehicle ownership.

AMPHENOL LAUNCHES TWO MADE-IN-INDIA TECH SOLUTIONS

Amphenol, a world leader in interconnect solutions for Communications, Mobile Consumer Products, RF, Optical, Broadband and Commercial electronics markets, today ushered into the next era of sustainable technology solutions with the launch of DuraSwap Concentric Connectors and Type 6 Charging Gun solution designed and manufactured in India at the country's premier battery technology showcase, the Bharat Battery Show 2025 organised under the aegis of Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

WORKSHOP ON BEAUTY FOR BETTER LIFE

AMRITSAR: Directorate of Placement and Career Enhancement of Guru Nanak Dev University in coordination Life Long Learning Department organised a workshop on the topic of "Beauty for Better Life" under the CSR of L'oreal implemented by Naandi Foundation - Mahindra Pride classroom. Workshop offered 40 hours of free training for Cosmetology and Beauty culture to the students of Life Long Learning Department. The students were trained on the said domain and life skills. More than 50 students have undergone the skill training from an Industry expert.



Explore 'Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India' exhibition featuring masters like Murray, Burke and Rai, says SAKSHI PRIYA

becomes evident how photography has documented India's evolution. Early works by pioneers like *Linnaeus Tripe* and *Samuel Bourne* provide a visual history of India's landscape and architecture. Their photographs are windows into a bygone era, evoking a sense of nostalgia for a time that is both familiar and distant. The collection doesn't just stop at capturing landscapes or monuments, it explores the lives of people, the complex relationships between humans, animals and nature and the political shifts that have shaped the country. Works by contemporary masters like *Raghu Rai* and *Jyoti Bhatt* add a modern perspective, demonstrating how photography has continued to evolve as an art form while remaining true to its roots as a medium for storytelling. The exhibition's focus on India's cinematic and political history further enhances its significance. Photographs from the sets of iconic films, as well as snapshots from key political



moments, provide an intimate look into the country's cultural and social landscape. These images not only reflect history but also shape the way we remember it. With access to an extensive digital archive containing over 22,000 photographs, the exhibition offers a deeper dive into India's history, allowing visitors to explore beyond the gallery walls. This combination of physical and digital resources provides a comprehensive view of India's rich visual heritage. The *Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India Part III* exhibition is a reflection of India itself. It is an invitation to reconnect with the nation's history, to see it through the eyes of those who have captured its most defining moments. For anyone interested in understanding the soul of India, this exhibition is a rare and valuable opportunity to experience the country's past, present and future through the lens of some of the greatest photographers.

PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

Photography has a way of preserving moments, not just in images but in emotions, in stories and in history. Stepping into the *Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India* exhibition, curated by *Neville Tuli*, feels like embarking on a personal journey through time. Hosted by the *Tuli Research Centre for India Studies (T.R.I.S.)*, the collection showcases photographs that capture the essence of India, spanning over a century. This third installment of the series presents a stunning collection of photographs that bring together India's rich cultural heritage, its landscapes, and the people who have shaped its story. The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to experience not only the visual beauty of India but the depth of its historical and emotional connections. The collection highlights some of the earliest photographs from the mid-1800s, including *Dr. John Murray's Bishessur Nath Temple, Benares (1858)*. The albumen print, preserved in its pristine form, speaks to the timeless spirituality of Varanasi. Similarly, *Colin Roderick Murray's Jagmandar Water-Palace at Udaypur (1873)* captures the reflective beauty of Rajasthan, where the delicate interplay of water and architecture tells its own story. As one moves through the exhibition, it

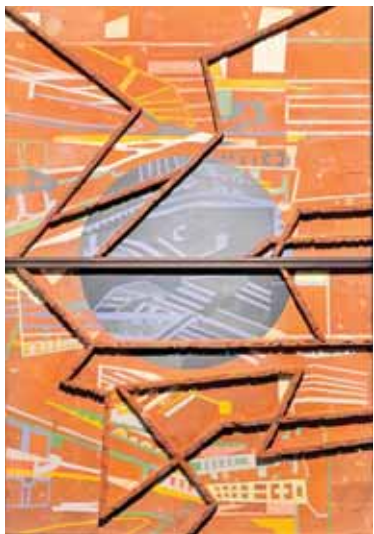


ART BEYOND THE CITY

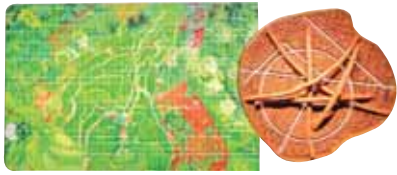


By SAKSHI PRIYA

In *Terraform*, *M. Pravat* invites us to walk through a world that feels both familiar and unsettlingly fragmented. This solo exhibition, hosted at STIR Gallery, Delhi, is an ambitious exploration of how our built environments intersect, clash and coexist with nature. By using materials like bricks, pigment, dust and LED lights, *Pravat* creates pieces that feel like echoes of urban landscapes, half-built, half-ruined and wholly captivating. Walking into the gallery feels like stepping into a suspended reality. The sculptures and installations seem to hold secrets, each fragment whispering stories of cities in transition. *Pravat's* work doesn't just replicate the urban environment; it deconstructs it, laying bare the tensions between construction and destruction, between human ambition and nature's quiet defiance. As I moved through the space, I found myself reflecting on my own relationship with the city, its noise, its chaos and its beauty.



What struck me most was how each piece felt alive, as if caught mid-metamorphosis. There's a raw, unpolished energy to the work that mirrors the constant flux of modern life. *Pravat* has a remarkable ability to take the ordinary, bricks, stone, dust



land elevate it into something profound. The interplay of light and shadow adds another layer, creating moments that feel almost cinematic, as though you're watching the city breathe. But beneath the aesthetic appeal lies a deeper message. *Terraform* is a powerful commentary on the relentless pace of urbanisation and its cost to the natural world. *Pravat's* art is not preachy; instead, it nudges you gently, encouraging introspection. It's a reminder that we are living in a delicate balance, one that we often take for granted. For me, the most thought-provoking aspect of the exhibition was its sense of incompleteness. These aren't polished, finished works, they're intentionally raw, mirroring the way cities are always in a state of becoming. It's both unsettling and oddly hopeful, a

expression to human resilience and the possibility of change. *Pravat's* ability to turn complex themes into visceral experiences is what makes this exhibition so memorable. *Pravat's Terraform* goes beyond being a traditional art exhibition. It's an immersive experience that urges us to pause and reflect on the way we shape and inhabit the world around us. It encourages a deeper look at the delicate balance between creation and destruction, challenging us to rethink our relationship with the spaces we build and the nature we often overlook. As the artist explained, "This landscape is actually magical lands, a digital landscape. I'm inspired by the digital format and I started rendering a digital feeling. When you see it from a distance, it looks consciously faded, like it's mathematically exercised in certain ways, cutting your land and developing your shape. The challenge is how I mixed everything together, where contrast exists between the elements, and people should think about why this context has changed."



Steps of Serenity

By TEAM VIVA

In moments where words cannot express the depth of emotion, dance becomes a powerful form of communication. *Samaya Chauhan's Rangapravesham* performance in New Delhi was a beautiful example of this truth. At just sixteen, *Samaya's* talent shone brightly, captivating the audience and bringing to life the rich tradition of Kuchipudi. The evening marked her transition from a student to a full-fledged performer, celebrating her growth as an artist. The recital opened with the graceful *Ganpati Vandana*, a prayer to Lord Ganesha, followed by *Dashavatar*, in which *Samaya* depicted the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. Through her precise footwork and expressive movements, she brought each avatar's story to life. A particularly emotional part of the performance was *Saanson Ki Maala pe Simrun Main Pii Ka Naam*, choreographed by *Padma Bhushan Shri Raja Reddy*, where *Samaya* beautifully expressed the spiritual

connection between two souls. The performance concluded with *Tarangam*, in which *Samaya* danced on the rim of a brass plate, telling stories of *Lord Krishna's* childhood. The complexity of the rhythmic patterns and *Samaya's* graceful footwork demonstrated her technical skill and deep understanding of the dance form. *Dr. Aseem Chauhan*, Chancellor of Amity University, presented a Vote of Thanks, saying, "The essence of today's incredible performance by my daughter *Samaya* is the notion of Guru Shishya Parampara, the sacred bond between the Guru and his disciple." This connection was evident in the performance, with *Samaya* drawing on the teachings and guidance of her esteemed gurus, *Padma Bhushan Shri Raja Reddy*, *Smt. Radha Reddy* and *Smt. Kaushalya Reddy*. The evening was a celebration of culture, tradition and the bond between mentor and disciple. *Samaya's* performance highlighted the beauty of Kuchipudi, reminding the audience of the timeless connection between dance, history and emotion.



BRM 2025: UNITING CULTURES THROUGH THEATRE



By TEAM VIVA

The *National School of Drama (NSD)* is set to host the 25th edition of *Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM)* from 28 January to 16 February 2025, marking a significant milestone in its history as the world's largest theatre festival. For the first time, the festival will expand beyond India, with performances in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Kathmandu, Nepal, alongside 11 Indian cities including Bengaluru, Jaipur and Ranchi. Themed *One Expression, Supreme Creation*, BRM 2025 will feature over 200 productions from nine countries, including Russia, Germany and Taiwan, creating a

global platform for collaboration and cultural exchange. Renowned actor and NSD alumnus *Rajpal Yadav* has been named the *Rang Doot* (Festival Ambassador) of this year's event. The festival will also emphasise inclusivity by featuring productions involving marginalised communities such as *Santhal tribes, sex workers, transgender persons and children*. Virtual performances under the initiative *Vishwa Jan Rang* will include NRIs and youth from all seven continents. NSD Director *Shri Chittaranjan Tripathy* said, "Bharat Rang Mahotsav has evolved into a global celebration of theatre, providing a platform to share and celebrate

diverse creative expressions. With its expanded reach, this year's festival sets a new benchmark." BRM 2025 will also include director-audience dialogues, masterclasses, seminar and cultural experiences like folk and traditional performances, Rang Haat exhibitions and a vibrant food bazaar. The Opening Ceremony at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi, will feature Rang Sangeet, a musical performance by the NSD Repertory Company, as part of celebrations marking NSD's 65th anniversary and the Repertory's 60th year. With its unique blend of global outreach, inclusivity, and cultural immersion, BRM 2025 promises to be a landmark event in the world of theatre.

