

MAHAKUMBH DECLARED NO VEHICLE ZONE



A panoramic view of vehicles stuck in a traffic jam at Jhusi Road during the ongoing 'Maha Kumbh Mela' festival, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh PTI

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Following the tragic stampede at the Sangam during the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, which led to multiple casualties, the administration has taken strict measures to prevent such incidents in the future. As part of these efforts, the entire Kumbh Mela area has been declared a no-vehicle zone, barring all types of vehicles from entering the premises and has canceled all VIP passes till February 4. One of the most significant decisions includes the complete restriction on vehicle movement within the fairgrounds. No private or public transport will be allowed inside, ensuring a safer and more organized movement of pilgrims. Additionally, VVIP passes, which previously allowed certain vehicles access, have been revoked. No special passes will grant exemptions, making the rules uniform for

everyone. To facilitate smooth movement and prevent overcrowding, all major routes within the Kumbh area have been converted into one-way paths. This measure aims to streamline the flow of devotees and reduce the chances of congestion. Furthermore, vehicles coming from neighboring districts are being stopped at the district borders, preventing an influx of additional traffic into the city. The strictest measures will remain in place until February 4, with a complete ban on four-wheelers in Prayagraj. The administration has urged devotees to adhere to these guidelines to ensure a smooth experience at the Maha Kumbh. Authorities have also called for public cooperation in maintaining order and avoiding any further mishaps. Lakhs of devotees heading to Prayagraj for the Mahakumbh Mela are stranded in massive traffic jams but remain

resolute in their quest for a holy dip at the Sangam. Despite extreme congestion, freezing nights, and lack of basic amenities, their faith remains unshaken. The traffic congestion has reached alarming levels, with over 2.5 lakh vehicles stuck at multiple entry points, including Chitrakoot, Varanasi, and Rewa-Prayagraj routes. Traffic jams extend up to 25 kilometers in some areas, bringing vehicular movement to a near standstill. Many devotees, like Atmaram Patil from Maharashtra, have spent days in transit, only to be told to turn back. Others, unwilling to abandon their pilgrimage, have resorted to walking long distances to reach their sacred destination. The situation has been particularly grim along the Varanasi-Prayagraj stretch, where a 20-kilometer-long jam has left hundreds of buses stranded. Vehicles have been halted at key points such as Bhadohi, Gopiganj, and Aurai, with passengers left without

basic facilities. Many travelers, including Vasudev Bhalladwar from Chhattisgarh, have been forced to endure the bitter cold with no access to food, water, or toilets. The lack of arrangements for the stranded pilgrims has led to growing frustration, yet their devotion remains unwavering. Those approaching Prayagraj from Mirzapur and Bhadohi face similar hardships. Roadway buses have been turned back, and thousands of people are stranded at various points with little assistance. In some areas, local residents have stepped in to provide food and water, but the scale of the crisis has left many without relief. Some devotees have voiced their anger, alleging that VIP vehicles are being given priority while common pilgrims are left to fend for themselves. Despite these challenges, most remain firm in their resolve to reach the Sangam, refusing to consider alternate bathing sites offered to them along the way.

Train travel has also been severely affected, with several passenger trains, including the Allahabad-Prayagraj Passenger and Jaunpur-Bareilly Passenger, being canceled. The rerouting of other trains, such as the LTT Express via Varanasi, has further disrupted travel plans. At Pratapgarh and other key railway junctions, thousands of devotees are stranded, waiting desperately for alternate transportation. Meanwhile, along the Rewa-Prayagraj route, nearly 50,000 vehicles have been halted at the Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh border, with authorities struggling to manage the situation. Despite the severe hardships, the spirit of the pilgrims remains unbroken. Braving hunger, cold, and exhaustion, they continue their journey with unwavering faith, determined to take their sacred dip in the Ganga. For them, no hardship is too great in pursuit of this once-in-a-lifetime spiritual experience.



Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, JP Nadda, and Kiren Rijiju with MoS L. Murugan and Arjun Ram Meghwal during an all-party meeting, convened by the government, ahead of the Budget session of Parliament PTI

Modi 3.0 Budget session begins; Kumbh tragedy, Waqf on agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition parties at the all-party meeting on Thursday called for a discussion in Parliament on the Maha Kumbh tragedy and the UP government's alleged focus on VIPs rather than the common pilgrims, as Union minister Kiren Rijiju asserted that the Business Advisory Committee will decide on the agenda of the Budget Session starting from January 31. The session will commence with President Droupadi Murmu addressing the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The Union Budget will be presented on February 1. The first part of the session will conclude on February 13 and the second part will start on March 10. The session will conclude on April 4. The session's legislative agenda has 16 bills, including the Waqf (Amendment) Bill and the Immigration and Foreigners Bill. In the same all-party meeting, NDA Janata Dal (United) sought an extension in the tenure of the Joint Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the bills proposing simultaneous elections, while its another partner, LJP (Ram Vilas), demanded a "special industrial package"

for Bihar. Rijiju described the meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh as constructive and sought cooperation from opposition parties, adding that the customary discussions on the President's address to parliamentarians and the Union Budget are the main priorities in the Budget Session. "Rising" unemployment and farmers' "plight" will also be raised during the Session, several opposition leaders said. At the all-party meeting, sources said, JD(U) leader Sanjay Jha called for an extension in the tenure of the JPC, which was asked to submit its report by the first day of the last week of the Budget Session. Jha is a member of the 39-member committee formed to discuss what is often referred to as a One-Nation, One-Election (ONOE) proposal. The panel headed by BJP MP P P Chaudhary is scheduled to hold its second meeting on Friday. Jha also wanted Parliament to discuss India's current position in Artificial Intelligence as he pointed out the waves that the Chinese upstart DeepSeek has created in the field, so far dominated by US firms.



Police personnel outside Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's Kapurthala House residence, in New Delhi PTI

EC raids Punjab CM Delhi home

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

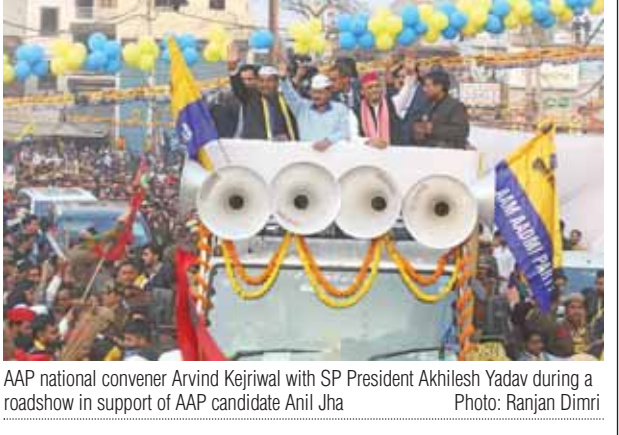
The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday conducted a search at the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's Kapurthala House residence in the national Capital regarding a complaint about 'cash' being distributed from there. "The team was awaiting permission to conduct the search," he added. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) New Delhi Divesh Mahla said, "Regarding the raid being conducted at Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's Kapurthala House residence, it is being done on complaint by the Returning Officer (RO) and Flying Squad Team (FST). Police presence is on requisition and requirement for safety of FST." Meanwhile, the AAP hit out at the BJP for conducting a raid at an elected Chief Minister's house, while not taking any action against BJP for openly distributing money.

An official outside Kapurthala House told the media that a complaint was received regarding 'cash' being distributed from there. "The team was awaiting permission to conduct the search," he added. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) New Delhi Divesh Mahla said, "Regarding the raid being conducted at Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's Kapurthala House residence, it is being done on complaint by the Returning Officer (RO) and Flying Squad Team (FST). Police presence is on requisition and requirement for safety of FST." Meanwhile, the AAP hit out at the BJP for conducting a raid at an elected Chief Minister's house, while not taking any action against BJP for openly distributing money.

EC ask Kejriwal to name Yamuna poison; AAP says CEC securing retirement job

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Dissatisfied with AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal's reply on mixing poison in the Yamuna, the Election Commission on Thursday sought another detailed response from him, saying his remarks prima facie appeared to promote disharmony and enmity between different groups. The Commission has said Kejriwal's responses have been "completely silent" in substantiating his claim of Haryana "poisoning" the Yamuna river. The EC asked Kejriwal what kind of poison was mixed by Haryana, what was the supporting evidence about the quantity, nature and manner of detecting poison and the location where detection of the poison. In a sharp response to EC's directives for seeking factual evidence by 11 am on Friday to substantiate his claim of the Yamuna water being "poisoned" by the Haryana government, AAP chief said Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar is acting as the BJP stooge. Accusing him of seeking a post-retirement job, Kejriwal said he would send three bottles of Yamuna water



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with SP President Akhilesh Yadav during a roadshow in support of AAP candidate Anil Jha. Photo: Ranjan Dimri

to Kumar and his Election Commissioners and challenged him to drink the water. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal alleged that Kumar had "destroyed" the credibility of the Election Commission (EC) and was eyeing a post-retirement position. "The language he has used is not the Election Commission's job. He should contest the election from any seat in Delhi. We will send three bottles to Rajiv Kumar as well. I know they will arrest me in three days, let them do so, I am not afraid," he said. Kejriwal's remarks came hours after the Election Commission shot off another letter to the AAP chief, in which it has stated that

Kejriwal's responses have been "completely silent" in substantiating his claim of Haryana "poisoning" the Yamuna river. The poll body has sought "pointed replies" to five questions, failing which it will take an appropriate decision without further reference to him. The Commission posed five questions, asking: "What kind of poison was mixed by the state government of Haryana in Yamuna? Supporting evidence about the quantity, nature, and manner of detecting the poison, the location where it was detected, which DJB engineers detected it, and how and where?"



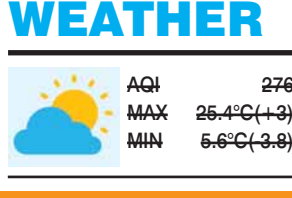
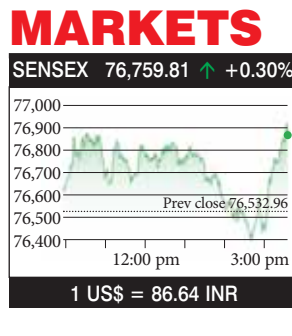
The Union Minister of Railways, Information and Broadcasting and Electronics and Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw announced various projects under INDIAai Mission PTI

India prepares to take on ChatGPT, Deepseek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday outlined global AI ambitions with plans to build its own 'foundational model' that could take on the might of ChatGPT, Deepseek R1 and others, as it lined up "most affordable" common compute facility powered by 18,693 GPUs to be used by startups and researchers. India's bold move comes at a time when Chinese company DeepSeek has turned heads after its AI model overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's appstore, challenging the AI dominance concentrated so far with the US firms, particularly Silicon Valley frontrunner Open AI. IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw exuded confidence that India will build a foundational

model that is world-class, and that it will be able to compete with best models across the globe. The government announced the next steps in its AI blueprint, among them, 18,693 Graphics Processing Unit or GPUs on offer by the empanelled bidders (a list that includes Jio Platforms, CMS Computers, Tata Communications, E2E Networks, Yotta Data Services, and others), and start of AI safety institution, with 8 projects approved under it. The government is also calling for proposals to develop India's own foundational models that would be aligned to Indian context, Indian languages, culture, basically where datasets are "for our country, of our country and for our citizens" and "biases are removed".



NEWS BRIEFS

BJP defeats AAP in Chandigarh Mayor poll
CHANDIGARH: The BJP on Thursday won the post of Mayor while AAP-backed Congress candidates registered victory in the poll for the senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor posts in the high-stakes Chandigarh mayoral elections that took place here. The contest for the mayoral polls was between the BJP and the AAP-Congress combine. AAP was fighting for the post of mayor while the Congress was contesting for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor. In a jolt to the AAP-Congress combine, BJP's Harpreet Kaur Babla was elected as the new mayor of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation after she defeated AAP nominee Prem Lata.

Passenger jet collides with Army helicopter in US
ARLINGTON: An American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members collided with an Army helicopter while landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, prompting a large search-and-rescue operation in the nearby Potomac River. There were multiple fatalities, according to a person familiar with the matter, but the precise number of victims was unclear as rescue crews hunted for any survivors. Three soldiers were onboard the helicopter, an Army official said.

Virat Kohli fans goes frenzy in Capital



Virat Kohli fans thronged Arun Jaitley Stadium here to catch a glimpse of their hero leading to chaos for a brief while outside the stadium. He returned to play for the first time the Ranji Trophy after 12 years. The first day Delhi-Railways match saw fans lining outside the stadium from early morning. There was a brief rush and jostling outside the stadium as spectators tried to make their way inside. No one was injured in the incident, police said. Initially, only one gate was open for entry and people started pushing each other to get inside

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Scores of former Indian skipper Virat Kohli fans on Thursday thronged Arun Jaitley Stadium here to catch a glimpse of their hero leading to chaos for a brief while outside the stadium. He returned to play for the first time the Ranji Trophy after 12 years. The first day Delhi-Railways match saw fans lining outside the stadium from early morning. There was a brief rush and jostling outside the stadium as spectators tried to make their way inside. No one was injured in the incident, police said. Initially, only one gate was open for entry and people started pushing each other to get inside

the stadium, a Delhi Police statement said. "Additional gates were soon opened, easing the situation. No injuries were reported, and the situation is now under control," it said. The 'Gautam Gambhir Stand' was already packed and it hardly took time to fill the lower tier of the 'Bishan Bedi Stand', taking the crowd count well past 12,000 at toss. The deafening roars of "Kohli, Kohli" could be heard from a distance as the former India captain took the field with the rest of the Delhi teammates. Outside Gate 16, the crowd was involved in pushing each other, which led to a couple of fans falling near the entry gate and getting injured. A police bike was damaged and several left behind their shoes. At least three people got injured in the chaos, reports said. The injured fans were treated by the Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) security and police near the gate. One of the fans also needed a bandage on the leg. A security guard was also injured while trying to get the situation under control.

Woman pleads DNA for missing 'monk' husband

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Kumbh Mela, often associated with stories of lost families, has taken an unusual turn. A Jharkhand family believes they have found their long-lost relative, but there's a twist—the man they claim is Ganasagar Yadav, who went missing 27 years ago, now lives as an Aghori monk and refuses to recognize them. Ganasagar disappeared in 1998 after a trip to Patna, leaving behind his wife, Dhanwa Devi, and their two young sons. Over the years, the family had given up hope of ever finding him. But fate intervened when a relative attending the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj spotted a sadhu



resembling Ganasagar and sent a photograph home. Murli Yadav, Ganasagar's younger brother, along with Dhanwa Devi and her sons, rushed to Prayagraj to confront the monk—now known as Baba Rajkumar. However, he denied any connection to his past life. The monk, accompanied by a

Sadhvi, claimed he was from Varanasi and dismissed the family's claims. The family, however, remains firm. They pointed out his distinct long teeth, a forehead injury, and a scar on his knee as proof of his identity. Determined to get answers, they have sought police intervention and demanded a DNA test. "It is generally said, Kumbh mein bichhde kabhi nahi milte (those who get lost at the Kumbh never reunite), but here the case is different. Kumbh has united the family, but the problem is, the monk is yet to recognize his family," said Murli Yadav. The family has decided to wait until the end of the Kumbh Mela. If necessary, they will insist on a DNA test. "If the results prove we are wrong, we will apologize," Murli added. For now, some family members have returned home, while others continue to watch over Baba Rajkumar and his companion, hoping for a moment of recognition or a scientific resolution to finally bring closure to a decades-old mystery.



Kumar from Chhattisgarh equals national record

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Vijay Kumar from Chhattisgarh equaled the clean and jerk national record in weightlifting by lifting 143 kilogrammes after a 105 kilogrammes snatch in the 30 National Games here on Thursday. Kumar won the gold. After this performance, Kumar has equaled the national record set by Maharashtra's Sanket Sargar who set it in 2022. Kumar competed in the 55 kilogrammes men's category in the National Games. He lifted a total of 248 kilogrammes, comprising 105 kilogrammes in snatch and a record-tying 143 kilo-



grammes in clean and jerk.

In another highlight of the

Arya seeks feedback from athletes & officials on 38th National Games

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Sports minister Rekha Arya sought the feedback of athletes and officials on various arrangements including food, in the ongoing 38th National Games. The minister sought the feedback while visiting the Maharana Pratap Sports College on Thursday where she attended a basketball match

also sought information from the athletes regarding their accommodation, duration of stay and travel arrangements.

The Sports minister also observed the squash matches at the Rajiv Gandhi stadium. She instructed the officials to ensure that in addition to implementing security and other logistical arrangements for the players, they should also take measures to prevent any inconvenience to the spectators arising from excessive security protocols. Further, she urged the residents of the State to take the time out to attend the sporting events in significant numbers to support the athletes.

Arya watched the women's match featuring Punjab against Uttar Pradesh, followed by the men's match between Tamil Nadu and Punjab. She said that during her visit she gathered feedback on the arrangements made for the event from the players and the officials. Arya

Father-son duo dies after car falls into gorge in Tehri

PNS ■ NEW TEHRI

A father and son died when the car they were travelling in fell into about 200-metre deep gorge in the Kumalda area of Tehri district on Thursday. The officials informed that the accident occurred near Anand Chowk in the Kumalda area in the morning. After receiving the information about the

ropes and a stretcher and handed them over to the police. The officials said that the victims were identified as 57-year-old Moosa Singh and his 27-year-old son Manveer Singh, both residents of Jardar village in Chamba. They were travelling in their WagonR, registration number UK 07 AR 3411, from Maldevta to



accident, the Tehri district disaster control room alerted the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) to commence a rescue operation at the spot. The officials said that an SDRF team from the Sahastradhara post, led by sub-inspector Rajwar Singh Rana reached the accident site with necessary rescue equipment. Upon reaching the location, the SDRF team retrieved the bodies from the deep gorge. They brought the bodies back to the main road using

Chamba when the car fell into a deep gorge near Anand Chowk in Tehri. Both occupants of the car lost their lives on the spot. The officials said that the police have informed the families and will hand over the bodies after completing the required legal procedure. They also informed that the driver reportedly lost control of the car but the police are yet to ascertain the cause of the accident.

Juvenile escapes from Almora observation home

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A juvenile has escaped from the government observation home in Pandeykhola, Almora district triggering a security alert and raising concerns over the facility's safety measures. The minor reportedly managed to evade the security personnel and the staff of the observation home and escaped. The Almora circle officer Vimal Prasad told The Pioneer that the incident came to light on January 29 when the staff of the observation home noticed the missing boy. According to them, they began an internal search operation and searched at all possible places but failed to trace the minor. Subsequently, the assistant superintendent of the observation home, Shankar Adhikari, formally reported the matter to Almora Kotwali on Wednesday. The CO said that the police have registered a case and launched a search operation. He informed that the escaped minor is originally from Nepal and currently resides in Pithoragarh. "The boy had been at the observation home since 2024 on theft charges in Pithoragarh. Multiple police teams have been formed and deployed to locate him. The police are reviewing the CCTV footage from the surrounding areas and have also alerted authorities in

his home district. Police teams are working to trace the minor at the earliest," he said.

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कार्यालय नगर निगम, देहरादून
पत्रांक-1064 / सांनिगिण / नगिण / वेदुन / 24-25 दिनांक 30.01.2025

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THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS PUBLIC NOTICE

In my Husband army record my name mistakenly recorded as ANITA where as my correct name is ANITA GURUNG as mentioned in other all documents. Army no 1472995P RANK EX HAV NAME VISHNU KUMAR GURUNG R/O VILL. SHYAMPUR, P.O. AMBIWALA (PREM Nagar) DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND. I have changed my correct name in my husband army record vide IN-UK71521290478092X Affidavit 30.01.2025 before Dehradun.

मेरी पुत्री के आधार कार्ड नं. 909869264506 में त्रुटिवाश उसका नाम SHARDA YADAV गलत दर्ज हो गया है। जबकि मेरी पुत्री का वास्तविक नाम SHRADHA YADAV है। जो उसके जन्म प्रमाण-पत्र पंजीकरण सं- B-2017-6-90024-003686 में भी दर्ज है। भविष्य में मेरी पुत्री को SHRADHA YADAV D/o VISHNU KUMAR YADAV के नाम से जाना पहचाना व पुकारा जाए। निवासी नकरोदा देहरादून उत्तराखण्ड।

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मैंने अपना नाम रागनी सिंह अरोडा (पुराना नाम) से बदलकर रागनी सिंह (नया नाम) कर लिया है। भविष्य में मुझे रागनी सिंह (नया नाम) पुत्री स्वर्गीय श्री सचेंद्र सिंह के नाम से जाना पहचाना जाय। पता-रागनी सिंह पुत्री स्वर्गीय श्री सचेंद्र सिंह 19/1, सुभाष रोड, देहरादून-248001।

My wife's name is wrongly recorded as MINAKSHI DEVI in my military records. Whereas my wife's actual name is MEENAKSHI. As is also mentioned in the Aadhar card, high school certificate. No. 4087677X, rank HAV name Bhupendra Singh son Uday Singh Rawat resident Kotdwari Road Petrol Pump, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand.

मेरी पुत्री - Niyati Chauhan's - Gender is wrongly recorded in ICSE (Class 10) as Male, whereas the correct gender is Female. Arun Chauhan, Father of Niyati, Pankaj Vihar, Dehradun.

मेरे सैन्य अभिलेखोंनुसार, मेरे पुत्र गलत नाम आरव खांदे दर्ज है, उसके आधार नं. 612849688829 अनुसार सही नाम आरव बाबासाहेब खांदे S/o आर्मी नं. - JC-424425L नायब सूबेदार खांदे बाबासाहेब मोहन, ग्राम -सांडवे पोस्ट - सांडवे, तह - अहमदनगर, जिला - अहमदनगर, महाराष्ट्र - 414201 है। शपथपत्र सं. IN-UK71412583677662X

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The general public is informed that a previous original sale deed related to my property bearing Khata No 923, Khasra No 268/2, area 40.41 Sq. Mtr. situated at Mauza Bharuwalla Grant (Cantt Area) District Dehradun and duly registered in the office of Sub Registrar-I, Dehradun vide Book No 1, Jild 6451 page 399 to 422 Document No 3954 dated 23-06-2015 has been actually lost somewhere. Mohd. Tanveer S/o Meharban R/o Village Baleki, Yusufpur, Distt. Haridwar

सूचना
1. मेरे सर्विस रिकॉर्ड में पुत्र का नाम अंश प्रवीन नेगी (ANSH PRAVEEN NEGI) अंकित है, जो कि गलत है, जबकि पुत्र का सही व वास्तविक नाम अनमोल नेगी (ANMOL NEGI) है।
2. मेरे सर्विस रिकॉर्ड में पुत्री का नाम कुमारी प्रीति (KUMARI PREETI) व जन्मतिथि 08.02.2007 अंकित है, जो कि गलत है, जबकि पुत्री का सही व वास्तविक नाम प्रीति नेगी (PRITI NEGI) व सही जन्मतिथि 05.02.2007 है।
3. मेरे सर्विस रिकॉर्ड में पुत्री का नाम कुमारी मनीषा (KUMARI MANEESHA) अंकित है, जो कि गलत है, जबकि पुत्री का सही व वास्तविक नाम मनीषा नेगी (MANISHA NEGI) है।
4. मेरे सर्विस रिकॉर्ड में पुत्री का नाम कुमारी सपना (KUMARI SAPNA) अंकित है, जो कि गलत है, जबकि पुत्री का सही व वास्तविक नाम सपना नेगी (SAPNA NEGI) है।
पुकर सिंह पुत्र श्री आनंद सिंह नेगी निवासी-गुहवाहन लेन नं- 89, ग्राम पो- लोवर नेहरूग्राम, देहरादून उत्तराखण्ड 248005

मेरे पिता के सैन्य अभिलेखोंनुसार, मेरा गलत नाम निखील खांदे दर्ज है, आधार नं. 516241971602 अनुसार सही नाम निखील बाबासाहेब खांदे S/o आर्मी नं. - JC-424425L नायब सूबेदार खांदे बाबासाहेब मोहन, ग्राम -सांडवे, पोस्ट - सांडवे, तह - अहमदनगर, जिला - अहमदनगर, महाराष्ट्र - 414201 है। शपथपत्र सं. IN-UK71413111501600X

मेरे पति के सैन्य अभिलेखोंनुसार, मेरा गलत नाम पुष्पा खांदे दर्ज है, वोटर कार्ड (नं. NIE7541154) अनुसार सही नाम पुष्पा बाबासाहेब खांदे W/o आर्मी नं. - JC-424425L नायब सूबेदार खांदे बाबासाहेब मोहन, ग्राम -सांडवे पोस्ट - सांडवे, तह - अहमदनगर, जिला - अहमदनगर, महाराष्ट्र - 414201 है। शपथपत्र सं. IN-UK71413702294955X

More than Rs 17 crore loans approved in UGB event

PNS ■ PAURI

The Uttarakhand Gramin Bank (UGB) approved loan proposals worth more than Rs 17 crore during a special loan fair organised in Kotdwar on Thursday. Seven branches of the bank approved such proposals of 132 applicants during the event. The UGB chairman Harihar Patnaik informed the public about the various beneficial schemes of the bank while assuring the people about the continued cooperation of the bank. The bank's Pauri regional manager Pravin Goyal exhorted the gathering to take



the full benefit of all the schemes offered by the UGB. The people present on the occasion also expressed their

views on the services provided by the bank while also thanking the bank officials.

Future-ready cyber resiliency strategy crucial to business success: Bajwa

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Keeping crucial data protected from malicious actors has always been important. However, there is a need for urgency within businesses and decision-makers in the AI age. AI has the capability to manufacture more sophisticated ransomware, malware and deepfake attacks. Common threats include data poisoning, ransomware, privacy breaches and social engineering. Stating this, the director of Sales and general manager of Data Protection and Unstructured Data Solutions at Dell Technologies India, Ripu Bajwa said that with the increased reliance of enterprises on tools designed to enhance data collection and analysis, the likelihood of sensitive information being exposed is on the rise. For a module like AI which uses sensitive data to train and



fine-tune its systems, this is a cause of worry. According to a report by Dell Technologies, 45 per cent of Indian businesses felt respondents cited a lack of adequate security and data protection solutions for generative AI. A future-ready cyber resiliency strategy is central to business success in the future of work. It is crucial to safeguard training data, models, configurations, and parameters by ensuring they

are backed up on primary storage and can be transferred to a cyber recovery vault if needed. Additionally, protecting modern workloads like Kubernetes volumes, Elastic Search, PostgresSQL and others is vital to maintaining data integrity and security. He said that the Dell Solution for AI Data Protection, a key part of the Dell AI Factory infrastructure portfolio, guarantees the security and recoverability of data-driving AI workloads. Organisations can take advantage of software and appliances, gaining the performance, efficiency, and scalability that have made Dell a leader in data protection. Data Privacy Day reminds us to prioritise personal information protection in an AI-driven world, he added.

HUDCO to install LED screens in Govt schools in Doon

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) will install smart LED screens in government schools in Dehradun as part of the district administration's Project Utkarsh. The administration has submitted a proposal for Rs three crore to HUDCO which is in its final stage of approval, the Dehradun district magistrate Savin Bansal said. He informed that once sanctioned, this funding will be utilised to integrate advanced digital learning tools into classrooms, ensuring that students in government schools, including those in remote areas, have access to modern educational facilities. He said that alongside HUDCO, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has also extended significant support to the initiative. The ONGC has already approved Rs 1.5 crore from its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fund for the 2024-25 financial year and has granted clearance for additional funding in the 2025-26 financial year. The involvement of both HUDCO and ONGC will help the administration in transforming public education infrastructure in the district, he said. Bansal said that the Project Utkarsh aims to enhance school infrastructure by providing proper furniture, smart classrooms and improved sports facilities. Apart from digital advancements, schools will also receive essential amenities such as whiteboards, two LED lights per classroom, furniture, and outdoor sports facilities. The DM said that to ensure proper fund utilisation, the administration has set Rs one crore aside for the chief education officer. The DM has also invited social organisations and corporate houses to contribute to the initiative, encouraging collective participation in improving the region's educational institutions. Bansal said that with these comprehensive efforts, the administration aims to create a future-ready educational environment in Dehradun's government schools, ensuring that students receive not only quality education but also the necessary infrastructure and resources to support their overall development.

State's first men's self help group wins praise for cleaning up Nagar Panchayat

OP AGNIHOTRI ■ LALKUAN

Though the State government has so far focussed mainly on women's self help groups, the State's first men's self help group in the Lalkuan Nagar Panchayat has also started earning appreciation from both the public and the authorities. The Nagar Pan-

appointed as the administrator here while the executive officer was made responsible for all the tasks. Executive officer Rahul Kumar Singh made consistent efforts and facilitated the creation of 'Gulmohar' the State's first men's self help group under

handled the task of sanitation, garbage collection and segregation in the Nagar Panchayat area. The work by this SHG has created a source of income. The team formed in June last year has facilitated door-to-door garbage collection in seven wards along with the ITBP campus and some areas adjoining the Nagar Panchayat area. The men have collected the segregated garbage from 2,700 homes and commercial establishments, used the organic waste to prepare manure and sell the recyclable waste. Singh said that the men's self help group is being paid for its work. The Nainital district magistrate Vandana Singh felicitated Singh for commendable work on Republic Day considering the work done in the sphere of sanitation in the Lalkuan Nagar Panchayat. Appreciating the work done by the official and the SHG, the district magistrate said that other local bodies should also do likewise.



chayat terms ended in December 2023, after which the sub divisional magistrate was

the administrator Paritosh Verma's guidance. The five-member Gulmohar team first

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE
Dated : - 30.01.2025

S. N.	Name of work with its location	App. Cost of the work (In Rs.)	Address of the office from where the tender form has been issued	Bid Security to be deposited (In Rs.)	Completion period of the work	Date & Time for submission of tender & opening of tender	Website particulars & Address of office
1	14_SrDEE_G_MB_2024 IV Call Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract (CAMC) for three (3) years for On Line UPS of different make and capacities with battery bank installed at various UTS and PRS locations over Moradabad division.	5623105.36 (including GST)	Electrical Branch, Divisional Railway Manager's office, Northern Railway, Moradabad	112500.00	36 (Thirty Six) Months	Tender will be received upto 15:00 hrs and opened at 15:00 hrs on 21.02.2025	www.ireps.gov.in Divisional Railway Manager's office, Northern Railway, Moradabad

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 334/25

NORTHERN RAILWAY 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. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.

Tender No. Date	315-DRM-MB-24-25 DATE 29.01.2025	316-DRM-MB-24-25 DATE 29.01.2025	317-DRM-MB-24-25 DATE 29.01.2025
Name of Work	Heavy Repair to staff quarters at way side stations (excluding RAC Station) with Drains, septic tank Manhole, Floor, Plaster, and door/window and other misc. work under SSE/W/RAC	Heavy Repair to staff quarters at way side stations (excluding BE Station) with Drains, septic tank Manhole, Floor, Plaster and door/window and other misc. work under ADE/BE	Heavy Repair to staff quarters at way side station (excluding SPN Station) with Drains, septic tank Manhole, Floor, Plaster, and door/window and other misc. work under SSE/W/SPN
Tender Closing Date / Time	24.02.2025, 16:00 hrs.	24.02.2025, 16:00 hrs.	24.02.2025, 16:00 hrs.
Advertised Value (Rs.)	69,94,855.64	64,96,637.62	69,99,745.96
Earnest Money (Rs.)	1,39,900.00	1,29,900.00	1,40,000.00
Bidding Start Date	10.02.2025	10.02.2025	10.02.2025
Validity of Offer (Days)	60 days	60 days	60 days
Period of Completion	8 Months	08 Months	08 Months

No.: 75-W/23/WA/Publication Dated:- 29.01.2025 325/2025
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Step up 'plastic-free U'khand' campaign: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With plastic waste continuing to pose a major threat to the environment and human health, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has said that the 'plastic-free Uttarakhand' campaign should be undertaken extensively and on a wider scale. He said everyone should put in effort for conservation of environment and biodiversity in the State. The CM was addressing a meeting of the officers of State administration in a virtual mode from New Delhi on Thursday. He said that schools, colleges, non-governmental organisations and organisations of traders should be involved in the campaign.



The CM directed the officers to make arrangements of putting QR code on the plastic bottles in all the religious places of the State on the lines of Kedarnath.

He said that high quality in the field of sanitation should be established for providing a healthy environment to the people of the State. The CM added that the door to door garbage collection should be made 100 per cent in the State.

should be made aware about segregating dry and wet waste. The CM said that a meeting with the newly elected public representatives in the urban local bodies will be convened soon. He said that in order to ensure that clean water enters the Ganga river, special emphasis should be placed on the cleanliness of its tributaries.

The CM said that the Fit India movement should be

more boosted in the State and activities such as Yoga and exercise should be organised daily in the educational institutions. He said that the work on the open gym project in all the villages should be expedited.

The CM said that the health department should hold regular camps in all parts of the State and arrangements for regular health check-ups

should be made. On a stern note the CM directed that strict action should be taken against those involved in food adulteration by starting an extensive campaign in the State.

The chief secretary Radha Raturi, secretaries Shailesh Bagauli, Nitesh Jha, Ravinath Raman, Chandresh Yadav, Vinay Shankar Pandey, R Rajesh Kumar and other officers attended the meeting.

Clergy certificate for live-in relationship registration under UCC needed only for prohibited partners: Gaur

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Following the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the State, some media reports have raised concerns that a religious certificate from clergy members will be required for registration of live-in relationships. However, UCC Rules Committee member Manu Gaur has clarified that this requirement will only apply to cases where marriage between the partners is prohibited. Such relationships have been clearly specified in Schedule 1 of the UCC.

He said that under UCC, only four documents are required at the time of live-in registration which are proof of residence, date of birth, Aadhaar, and rent agreement documents (if applicable). Additionally, individuals who have been divorced must present a legal divorce decree, while those whose previous spouse has passed away or whose prior live-in relationship has ended must provide relevant docu-

ments at the time of registration.

Gaur further added that a religious certificate verifying the relationship will only be required in cases where the partners have a pre-existing relationship that falls under the prohibited category mentioned in Schedule 1 of UCC.

He said that the purpose of this requirement is not to restrict registrations but to assist applicants in completing the process. Gaur said that the format of the religious certificate has also been clearly defined in the UCC regulations.

He also clarified that under UCC, any individual who has been living in Uttarakhand for one year is eligible for registration. "This residency period is unrelated to permanent or native residency status. The definition of 'resident' in the UCC Act is specific to matters related to UCC," he said.



CANDID NOTES

Gajendra Singh Negi

Dhami's code

The smooth implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in the Himalayan State has etched the name of Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami firmly in the annals of social, political and cultural history of the country. The CM took the onus of onerous task of creating and implementing the code - on which the constitution framers had held intense discussions and which has remained an issue of the political and social discourse in the post-independence era of the country- on himself and in a planned and diligent manner the code was crafted meticulously and its regulations were designed and amalgamated with the existing laws. It is apparent that after fulfilling the promises it made to the electorate on abrogation of article 370, abolition of triple talaq and construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, the ruling BJP intends to move ahead on its plans on UCC and for this, Uttarakhand was selected as a test case. The appreciation heaped by Prime Minister Modi on Dhami during the inaugural ceremony of 38th National Games shows that the young CM has succeeded in the task and his stature and stake has risen considerably in Delhi darbar.

VIP culture

Blatant display of VIP culture on the opening day of the 38th National Games created problems for the sports enthusiasts, locals and sportspersons, and put a blot on the image of the Himalayan State endeavouring to host the mega sports event for the first time in its 25-year long history. Engrossed in the ULB polls just ahead of the inaugural event of the NG 2025, the administration and police probably ignored the situation a huge crowd will create in a stadium with seating capacity of only 25,000. The security protocols associated with the Prime Minister and other restrictions coupled with confused policemen who allowed the movement of hooter mounted VIP vehicles on the wrong side of the road connecting Dehradun city to Rajiv Gandhi sports stadium created a mega chaos on the roads and outside the venue. The arrangements inside the stadium during the cultural programme also proved to be ineffective to deal with surging crowds. The State government should take a lesson from the chaotic event and try to curb VIP culture in the programmes involving public participation.

Khanpur show

Though the spicy yet filthy showdown involving Khanpur MLA Umesh Kumar and former MLA Pranav Singh 'Champion' in Roorkee, falling under the Haridwar district captured media headlines and public attention, it presented a wrong image of Uttarakhand, the State of peace loving, god fearing people. The videos of gun-toting and foul-mouthed law makers have not only created panic in the area but have also divided the local society sharply on the caste lines. Questions are being asked on the slackness of the administration in dealing with the two political rivals when they were targeting and threatening one another on social media platforms. The delay in taking disciplinary action against Pranav Singh- who has a history of creating trouble- by the ruling BJP is also raising doubts over the intention of the saffron party. Concerned citizens are of the view that the Vidha Sabha speaker should take cognisance of the matter and pass strictures against Khanpur MLA against whom a disqualification petition is already pending.

Sewage and waste continue to contaminate the Ganga in Haridwar

ARUN KASHYAP ■ HARIDWAR

Even as official apathy continues to cause contamination of the Bhagirathi in Uttarkashi district, the Ganga river is facing similar conditions in the Haridwar district. At a time when the Mahakumbh Mela is underway at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, an overflowing sewage pumping station in Jwalapur area in Haridwar is reportedly resulting in dirty water and waste entering the Ganga. Locals allege that remains of butchered animals from settlements inhabited by members of a particular community in Kassaban area of Jwalapur also routinely end in the Ganga river especially during the evenings and on special occasions of the community. Those in the area state that such contamination of the holy river is a routine feature.



However, some allege that the negligence of the contractors handling the sewage pumping stations and the departmental officials has resulted in the dirty water directly ending in the river without reaching the treatment plant in the past too.

The Jal Sansthan, Maintenance Division (Ganga) assistant engineer Abdul Rashid has been posted in the Jwalapur area for some time now. Sources state that he has cited various reasons in the past too for similar situations, despite which the contamination of the holy river has continued. The department's executive

engineer Harish Bansal said that the division was aware of the issue. He said that the pumping station experienced overflow probably as something got stuck there. He averred that the issue has been resolved.

Meanwhile, as crores of devotees and visitors visit Prayagraj for the Mahakumbh- bathing in rivers originating in Uttarakhand, years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the ambitious Clean Ganga Mission, it appears as if waters of the holy river are still being polluted blatantly in the State of its origin.

Some defer Mahakumbh visit after stampede at Prayagraj

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

After the recent stampede at the Mahakumbh at Prayagraj in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, some individuals in Dehradun have postponed their plans to visit the event by a few days. Notably, this tragic incident on Wednesday led to the deaths of at least 30 persons while about 60 were injured. Consequently, a segment of the people in Dehradun has altered its trav-

el plans to Prayagraj. They said that they will visit the Mahakumbh a few days later when the crowds thin down to ensure a more comfortable and memorable experience.

Local resident Kajal Negi said that she has booked her train tickets for the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj on February 2. She said that her children had suggested postponing her trip but she has chosen to disregard their advice and is determined to visit the sacred occasion in order to offer prayers for the benefit of all.



visit in two to three days. Yet, following the recent stampede incident at the Mahakumbh, my son has decided to cancel my tickets and rebook for the second week of February," stated senior citizen Hari Mishra. He further said that his son suggested waiting for the crowds to lessen. This would allow him to enjoy his trip to the Mahakumbh in a more

peaceful and comfortable manner. Other residents also stated that they have postponed their plans to attend the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj due to the recent stampede. However, there are many individuals who have not altered their plans and are eagerly looking forward to visiting the Mahakumbh soon.

GDMC hospital to be expanded with 20 more beds in ICU

Largest government hospital in State to enhance facilities for critical cases

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In an effort to improve healthcare services, the administration of Government Doon Medical College (GDMC) hospital has decided to expand the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) by adding 20 beds at the Ayushman building of the hospital. Stating this, the deputy medical superintendent Dr NS Bisht said that the hospital currently has a total of 15 ICU beds. While this number was sufficient in the past, the increasing patient volume has created challenges for the administration in managing and accommodating patients within the ICU. Bisht further stated that the hospital

faces a daily demand for approximately 30 ICU beds. Consequently, both the administration and the patients are facing difficulties which include having to wait or being temporarily admitted to other wards. Discussing the current process for managing the increased demand for ICU beds beyond those already established, Bisht said that when the number of patients in need of ICU exceeds the available beds, the hospital administration addresses the situation by rotating patients at the emergency ward and similar sections. To provide a permanent solution to this



issue, they have decided to add 20 more beds to the

ICU in the Ayushman building of the hospital. He

said that all necessary preparations regarding the

infrastructure have been completed, including the installation of beds, ventilators and other essential equipment for the new 20-bed ICU.

The operation of the expanded ICU will be delayed due to the unavailability of nurses. Stating that the authorities have appointed 250 nurses, he added that their documents are being verified. Once this process is completed, the nurses will be deployed to provide their services and as a result, the additional 20-bed ICU will commence at the hospital, he stated.

Garbage collection resumes in 47 wards after three-day halt

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Garbage collection resumed in 47 municipal wards of Dehradun after a gap of three days on Thursday. The drivers and helpers of the Watergrace Company had suspended the door to door garbage collection for three days due to non-payment of salaries. The disruption affected nearly 40,000 households between January 27 and 29 that caused inconvenience to residents. The Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) has selected a new company to handle waste collection in these wards as the old agency reportedly failed to work efficiently despite several verbal and legal warnings. However, before the company could officially take charge, its drivers and helpers refused to work due to unpaid salaries for December.

This led to a complete halt in garbage collection in these areas for three days that resulted in mounting

waste piles and sanitation issues. The deputy municipal commissioner Rajvir Chauhan told The Pioneer that the MCD intervened and held discussions with the company's officials and instructed them to clear all outstanding dues of the employees. They have assured to clear all dues soon. Following these talks, the workers agreed to resume waste collection services on Thursday that restored normalcy in the affected wards, he said.

It is pertinent to mention here that proper disposal of garbage continues to be one of the major challenges being experienced in the provisional State capital Dehradun. Various attempts by the authorities to ensure effective waste management appear to meet roadblocks at times while other factors including lack of civic sense continue to affect the efficiency of the system.

Army pension row: SC criticizes Centre for 'dragging' retired personnel to court, demands policy reform

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday pulled up the Centre for "dragging" retired armed forces personnel to court and asked it to frame a policy on the issue. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said each and every member of the armed forces who was awarded relief of disability pension from the Armed Forces Tribunal need not be dragged to the top court and the Centre ought to exercise some discretion in filing appeals. "There has to be some pragmatic view. An army personnel works for 15, 20 years and suppose there is some disability, and order of the Armed Forces Tribunal directs payment of disability pension. Why should these persons be dragged to the Supreme Court?" asked the bench. It went on, "We are of the view that the Union govern-



ment must evolve a policy. There has to be some scrutiny before a decision is taken to drag members of the armed forces to the Supreme Court." Observing "frivolous appeals" were being filed by the Centre, the apex court said the morale of the armed forces couldn't be let down by filing such pleas against the relief. "You say whether you are willing to frame a policy. And if you say no then we will have to start imposing heavy costs whenever we find that the appeal appears to be frivolous," the bench cautioned the Centre's coun-

India to seal Rafale-M, Scorpene deals with France soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



India is expected to seal in the next few weeks procurement of 26 naval variant of Rafale jets and three Scorpene submarines from France to further crank up its naval prowess, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday. It is expected that the procurement will be announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris next month to attend a summit on artificial intelligence. Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron are expected to hold bilateral talks on the sideline of the summit, being held on February 10 and 11. The people cited above said all the two deals are in the final stage of finalisation and that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will have to look at them. In July 2023, the defence ministry approved the purchase of 22 Rafale (marine) jets from France, primarily for deployment on board the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. The Defence Ministry had also cleared pro-

urement of three Scorpene submarines from France. Under the Indian Navy's Project 75, six Scorpene submarines have already been constructed in India by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) in cooperation with the Naval Group of France. The procurement of the Rafale (M) jets along with associated ancillary equipment including weapon systems and spares would be based on an inter-Governmental agreement (IGA). The Indian Air Force bought 36 Rafale fighter aircraft in fly-away condition. There is a thinking in the IAF that it should go for at least two more squadrons of the Rafale jets. The defence and strategic ties between India and France have been on an upswing in the last few years. In July 2023, India and France announced a raft of ground-breaking defence cooperation projects including the joint development of jet and helicopter engines. The two strategic partners also had expressed commitment to cooperate in the co-development and co-production of advanced defence technologies, including for the benefit of third countries.

President Murmu, PM Modi lead nation in paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the nation in paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 77th death anniversary on Thursday. President Murmu laid a wreath at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial Rajghat. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Modi and Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Manohar Lal Khattar, among others, also paid floral tributes to the Father of the Nation. A two-minute silence was observed in memory of Gandhi. Earlier, Modi said in a social media post, "Tributes to Pujya Babu on his 77th Tithi. His ideals motivate us to build a developed India. I also pay tributes to all those martyred for our nation and recall their service as well as sacrifices." Gandhi, the most prominent face of India's freedom movement, was assassinated by Nathuram Godse on this day in 1948.

Parliament panel likely to take up issues of fake and paid news, neglect of serious news

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Issues of "rampant" paid news, fake news, many TV news channels focussing on sensationalism, and traditional newspapers' struggle due to digital disruption and declining readership are likely to figure in a parliamentary committee meeting on Friday, sources said on Thursday. The standing committee on Communications and Information Technology headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey is scheduled to "review implementation of laws related to all forms of media" in the meeting in which a host of factors related to the media will be discussed. The panel may also highlight its concerns over disproportionate coverage given to crime and celebrity news at the cost of important and serious news as some channels turn to sensationalism in chasing TRPs, sources said. Media trials of sensational cases at times shape public opinion and affect their legal course, and the committee



cannot overlook it, they said. Issues like TV debates often turn into a platform for shouting matches and mudslinging are expected to figure in the meeting as well. A source said conflict of interests involving media owners, journalists and political entities affects credibility of the news and that ethical boundaries are crossed many a time due to lack of strong regulatory mechanism. Among other key issues that may draw the committee's concerns is the expensive and long-drawn legal battles faced by journalists and media houses that discourage investigative journalism. Severe financial crunch facing regional and vernacular media, and fake news is playing "havoc" in the country, especially during elections, a source said. Among other items likely to invite the panel's attention is the control of social media by big corporate firm based abroad as it can deliver an

irreparable damage to the society, political leaders, political parties and even to the country unless regulated properly. Information and Broadcasting secretary, Prasar Bharti CEO, Press Registrar General and Press Council of India chairperson are among the important functionaries who are expected to appear before the committee. The panel is also expected to traverse the journey of laws and other mechanism related to the media since the enactment of the Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act, 1867, which was later replaced with the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023. The functioning of the Press Council of India (PCI), a statutory quasi-judicial body which functions under the Press Council of India Act, 1978 is also likely to come up for discussion, the sources said. The PCI's main objectives include preserving the freedom of press, and maintaining and improving the standards of newspapers and the news agencies in India.

NCW to celebrate 33rd foundation day, honour paralympians

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Women (NCW) will celebrate its 33rd foundation day on Friday and also honour four paralympians. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar will be the chief guest at the event with NCW Chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar leading the proceedings. This year's theme, "Nari tu Narayani", underscores the resilience and strength of women, inspired by Ahilyadevi Holkar's legacy of leadership and justice. The NCW will also honour four exceptional female paralympians for their perseverance and achievements, recognising them as symbols of empowerment and inspiration for future generations, according to an official statement. Adding to the significance of the occasion, Rahatkar will present the first copy of her book, "Karamyogini Veerangna", to VP Dhankhar. The book celebrates the indomitable courage of former Queen of the Malwa kingdom



Ahilyadevi Holkar, highlighting her role in redefining leadership and governance. Speaking ahead of the event, Rahatkar emphasised the Commission's commitment to amplifying women's voices and ensuring their rightful place in society. "Women today are not just making strides, they are rewriting history. Our theme, 'Nari tu Narayani', encapsulates this transformation as women continue to lead, innovate, and uplift communities across the nation," she said. The event will also feature discussions on Ahilyadevi Holkar's life and her enduring influence on women's empowerment.

GMDA removes encroachments from 12 acres of green belt

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Enforcement Wing of the Gurugram Development Metropolitan Authority (GMDA) removed the illegal encroachment on GMDA green belts on 12 acres of land on Southern Peripheral Road (SPR) on Thursday. During this drive, a total length of 8.5 km from Vatika Chowk to Ghata on both sides across sectors -49,50,57,56,58,62 and 65 were covered. Almost 12 acres of Golf Course Extension Road were made encroachment-free. About 40 hutments, 55 nurseries, 12 Building material shops, 9 Scrap shops, 1 Washing station, 8 dhabas and 6 shops that were operating illegally were demolished. Additionally, 8 cranes that were illegally parked were also removed. Furthermore, GMDA also conducted a drive along

with MCG on sector 62 in front of Time Residency wherein 80 jhuggis, 12 scrap shops and 9 shops spread across an expanse of 1.5 acres were cleared. The drive was held by the Enforcement team led by Nodal Officer (Gurugram) DTP RS Bath, ATPs GMDA Mange Ram and Satinder, along with the Enforcement team of GMDA were present. 50 police personnel also participated in the drive and acted heavily on the encroachment. DTP GMDA also interacted with the supervisors and heads of the surrounding projects and asked them to come forward to develop the stretches of the green belt by partnering with GMDA. He also inspected that wherever MoU has been signed between the Authority and developers to develop green belts, the work has been taken up by the organisation.

Jaishankar hails Trump as 'American Nationalist', cites strong India-US ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Emphasising strong India-US bilateral ties, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday described US President Donald Trump as an "American nationalist". Speaking at an interactive session at Delhi University's Hansraj College, Jaishankar highlighted the evolving nature of global diplomacy and India's approach to it. "I recently attended his (Trump's) oath-taking ceremony and we received good treatment. I believe he is an American nationalist," Jaishankar said in response to a question about whether Trump is India's friend or enemy. He acknowledged that Trump's policies could bring significant changes to global affairs but asserted that India's foreign policy would continue to be guided by national interest. "Yes, he (Trump) will change a lot of things, maybe some



things will be out of syllabus, but we have to conduct foreign policies out of syllabus in the interest of the country," he said, adding, "There may be some issues where we differ, but there will be many areas where things will be in our shed." Jaishankar also stressed the strong personal ties between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Trump, saying, "Our relationship with the US is strong and Modi has a

good personal relationship with Trump." During the session, Jaishankar spoke about India's growing global influence and changing perceptions about the country. "Even non-Indians now say they are Indians, they think it will help them get a seat on a plane somewhere," he said. Reflecting on his career, Jaishankar shared insights into his transition from academia and diplomacy to politics. "I never thought I would become a bureaucrat. My entry into politics happened by accident, or call it fortune, or call it Modi. He (PM Modi) pursued me in a manner that nobody could say no," he said. He highlighted that Indians living abroad still rely on their homeland for support and said, "Jo bhi desh ke baahar jate hain, woh hamaara paas hee aate hain. Baahar hum hee rakhwale hain (Those who leave the country turn to us only. We are their caretakers outside)."

ED cracks down on adulterated milk products manufacturer, freezes ₹6.26 Crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday said it has frozen fixed deposits worth crores of rupees, seized Rs 25 lakh in cash, a few high-end vehicles and property documents worth more than Rs 60 crore during raids against a Madhya Pradesh-based milk products manufacturing company. The searches were undertaken on January 29 in Bhopal, Sehore and Morena as part of a money laundering investigation against Jayshri Gayatri Food Products Pvt. Ltd. And its key persons like Kishan Modi, Payal Modi, Amit Kuklod and others. The ED alleged that the company manufactured "adulterated" milk products and used "false" laboratory certificates purportedly issued by BIS/NABL to secure certification from the Export Inspection Agency (EIA) located at Indore. This certificate was used for export of the adulterated milk products, it claimed. The agency found that these certificates were either originally issued to other companies or obtained "fraudulently" by the accused. So far, 63 "forged" lab certificates have been identified which were used for the export of adulterated milk products to various countries as well as for domestic consumption, the ED said.

Anurag Thakur urges Delhi voters to 'link chains' with BJP, attacks AAP on women and Dalit rights

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Addressing a rally ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, former Union Minister Anurag Thakur urged voters to "link the two chains" -- the Centre and the Delhi government -- saying that just as Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister, Delhi will also have a BJP Chief Minister. The senior BJP leader further accused the Aam Aadmi



Party (AAP) government of being "anti-women and anti-Dalit." Speaking at a massive public rally in Mustafabad in support of BJP Assembly candidate Mohan Singh Bisht, Thakur, along with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, launched a sharp attack on AAP. "The insult of women has happened in AAP. This party is against women and Dalits. Two Dalit ministers from their party have already resigned," he said. He also alleged that the AAP government had "broken the statue of Dr B R Ambedkar," while Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann "disrespected Ambedkar by removing his own garland and placing it on the statue." Calling for a change in Delhi, Thakur urged voters to bring the BJP to power. "We have to save Delhi and ensure the lotus blooms here,"

he said. He further claimed that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the BJP has worked for the welfare of the poor. "Women have been given free LPG gas cylinders, 60 crore people have received Rs 5 lakh worth of free treatment under Ayushman Bharat and 80 crore people have benefited from free rations. All of this has been done by Narendra Modi, the true

messiah of the poor," he said. He also urged people to "connect the links" and bring the BJP to power in Delhi, just as it is at the Centre. "Narendra Modi is the leader of the BJP government at the Centre, and Delhi will also have a BJP Chief Minister. Like in Maharashtra, we will work to serve the people here as well," he added. Delhi will go to the polls on February 5, and the results will be announced on the 8th.

Stampede at Maha Kumbh: Desperate search for missing devotees continues

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
PRAYAGRAJ

More than 36 hours have passed since the tragic stampede at the Maha Kumbh, but for Manoj Dubey, sleep remains elusive. He has been searching frantically for his 72-year-old mother, Kamla Devi, who has been missing since the chaos unfolded.

Kamla Devi had traveled from Jhansi with a group of 18 devotees for the auspicious Mauni Amavasya snan. "We have searched every hospital, every lost-and-found center, but there's no trace of her," said Dubey, his voice breaking. "She was wearing a saffron saree and had an identity card around her neck, but her phone is switched off. We don't know if she is safe or injured."

The tragedy struck between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. on Wednesday after a massive crowd broke through barricades at the ghats, triggering a stampede that left hundreds of devotees trampled. Witnesses described a chaotic scene, with people falling over one another in the dark,



Devotees search for their missing family members following a stampede on 'Mauni Amavasya', during the Maha Kumbh Mela PTI

Nearly 18 hours after the incident, the Mela administration confirmed at a press briefing that 30 people had lost their lives and at least 60 were injured. A judicial probe has been ordered to determine the cause of the mishap. Among those still unaccounted

for is Munni Devi from Fatehpur. Her son, Shivnath Yadav from Ballia, who had traveled with her extended family to Prayagraj. "We all gathered at Sahso Chauraha after the dip, but in the rush, Sunita got separated," said her husband, Dinesh Yadav. "We have spent the past day searching and filing complaints,

with worry. Similar is the plight of Sunita Yadav from Ballia, who had traveled with her extended family to Prayagraj. "We all gathered at Sahso Chauraha after the dip, but in the rush, Sunita got separated," said her husband, Dinesh Yadav. "We have spent the past day searching and filing complaints,

but there's no information. The authorities are overwhelmed, and we are losing hope."

While many families continue their anxious wait, a few have been lucky to reunite with their loved ones. Among them is 65-year-old Annapurna Mishra from Odisha's Puri, who was found after being missing for nearly two days. "My mother disappeared after our evening bath at the Sangam. We feared the worst," said her son, Abhishek Mishra. "Finally, a volunteer spotted her in Sector 20, disoriented and exhausted but safe. We are relieved beyond words."

In another case, 70-year-old Tara Devi from Aligarh, who had traveled alone for the pilgrimage, lost her belongings and went missing. However, she managed to board a train home on Wednesday night. "She always undertakes religious trips alone," said her son, Ravi Sharma. "When she didn't call us after the snan, we panicked. But by some miracle, she found her way back. Her lost purse was recovered and is now at the Mela's lost-and-found center in

Sector 4."

Many stranded devotees are still trying to make their way home. Ram Pratap and his wife, Sumitra Devi, an elderly couple from Kushinagar, are among them. "We just want to reach the railway station and catch a train to Gorakhpur," said Pratap, adjusting his thick glasses. "But we don't know how to get there in this crowd." Authorities claim that the newly established digital lost-and-found center is helping reunite people. "Most missing persons are being reported there, and we are coordinating to track them down," said Umesh Tandon, who oversees the Bharat Seva Dal camp in Sector 4.

Yet, the scale of the crisis remains overwhelming. By Wednesday evening, hundreds of weary devotees were seen lying around the lost-and-found center, waiting for any information on their missing loved ones. Many were too exhausted to even ask for help, their silent despair a grim reminder of the chaos that had unfolded.



UP Government summons experienced officers for ongoing Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
PRAYAGRAJ

After a tragic stampede during the ongoing Maha Kumbh that left 30 people dead, the Uttar Pradesh government has summoned officers who had successfully conducted the 2019 Kumbh Mela.

IAS officers Ashish Goyal and Bhanu Chandra Goswami have been instructed to reach Prayagraj immediately to take charge. The duo had played a crucial role in organizing the 2019 Ardh Kumbh, along with Vijay Kiran. At that time, Bhanu Chandra Goswami served as the District Magistrate (DM) and Vice-Chairman of the Kumbh Mela Authority, while Ashish Goyal was the Commissioner of Allahabad and in charge of the Ardh Kumbh Mela. In addition to these two seasoned officers, five more Special Secretary-rank officials with prior experience in large-scale event management have been assigned to the Maha Kumbh. However, as of now, no additional officers from the police department have been officially deployed for the event. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath conducted a late-night video conference with senior government officials, district magistrates, and police officers from multiple districts,

including Prayagraj, Kaushambi, Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mirzapur, Basti, Jaunpur, Chitrakoot, Banda, Ambedkar Nagar, Pratapgarh, Sant Kabir Nagar, Bhadohi, Rae Bareilly, and Gorakhpur. He directed the ADG Zone Prayagraj and the Prayagraj DM to remain highly alert and ensure seamless arrangements for the fair.

With Basant Panchami approaching, the Chief Minister emphasized the need for stringent security and crowd management measures during the sacred bathing ritual. He instructed officials to ensure there are no traffic jams and to focus on security and convenience for the devotees. Adityanath also highlighted that a significant number of devotees traveling for Maha Kumbh are visiting other religious sites, such as Varanasi, Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, and Mirzapur. He urged authorities in these districts to maintain special vigilance, particularly as the crowd is expected to swell in the coming days. He directed officials to set up designated holding areas to regulate the movement of pilgrims and prevent overcrowding. The Maha Kumbh, considered the largest religious gathering in the world, is expected to attract millions of devotees from across India and beyond.

Fire breaks out at Maha Kumbh, no casualties reported



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
PRAYAGRAJ

A fire broke out in Sector 22 of the Mahakumbh Mela area on Thursday, January 30, engulfing several tents in flames. Fire brigade teams rushed to the scene and are actively working to control the blaze.

While the fire has caused significant damage, there were no casualties, as the affected area was unoccupied at the time. Senior officials have arrived at the site to assess the situation, but the cause of the fire remains unclear. Authorities have assured devotees that safety measures are in place and that efforts are being made to prevent further incidents.

This incident comes just a day after a tragic stampede on Mauni Amavasya, which resulted in the deaths of over 35-40 pilgrims. The large influx of devotees during the auspicious bathing period has created massive logistical

challenges, despite extensive preparations by the administration.

The Mahakumbh fairground has been equipped with over 350 fire brigades, more than 2,000 trained personnel, 50 firefighting centers, and 20 fire posts to ensure a fire-free environment. Additionally, fire protection equipment has been installed across Akhadas and tents to enhance safety and preparedness.

This is not the first fire incident at the Mahakumbh Mela. On January 19, around 4:30 PM, a fire broke out at the Geeta Press camp in Sector 19 near Shastri Bridge, reducing 180 cottages to ashes. The recurring fires have raised concerns over the safety of pilgrims and the effectiveness of precautionary measures. Despite these challenges, the spirit of the devotees remains unwavering. Pilgrims continue to pour into Prayagraj in large numbers, determined to complete their sacred journey and take a holy dip at the Sangam.

Judicial Commission takes charge to investigate tragedy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
LUCKNOW

The three-member judicial commission, constituted to investigate the tragic stampede that occurred on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya during the Prayagraj Mahakumbh, has officially begun its work. The commission members arrived at their office in Janpath, Lucknow, on Thursday, and immediately took charge of the investigation. Commission Chairman Justice (Retd.) Harsh Kumar said, "Since the investigation is a priority, we have taken charge within hours of the announcement." He added, "Although we have a month to



UP Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh with state DGP Prashant Kumar during inspection of the site following a stampede on 'Mauni Amavasya', Prayagraj PTI

complete the probe, we will make every effort to conclude it as quickly as possible." Justice Kumar also confirmed that the commission would soon visit Prayagraj to assess the situation

firsthand. The incident, which occurred during the Mauni Amavasya bathing ritual on Wednesday, resulted in the deaths of 30 people and left 60 others injured. In response,

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath constituted a three-member judicial commission to investigate the causes of the tragedy. The panel is headed by retired Justice Harsh Kumar of the Allahabad High Court and includes retired IAS officer D.K. Singh and retired IPS officer V.K. Gupta as its members.

According to the notification issued in this regard, the commission has been tasked with examining the causes and circumstances that led to the stampede and will also provide recommendations to prevent such incidents in future. The investigation report must be submitted within one month of the commission's formation.

About 65 Lakh devotees flock to Ayodhya within 96 hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
AYODHYA

Following a holy dip in Prayagraj on Mauni Amavasya, a massive influx of devotees began arriving in Ayodhya on the same evening, continuing uninterrupted until Thursday afternoon. The sacred city's streets were packed overnight, and as dawn broke, the air resonated with chants of "Jai Shri Ram." Experts estimate that approximately 65 lakh devotees have reached Ayodhya in 96 hours.

With the swelling crowd, senior officials took command, personally inspecting arrangements throughout the night. Many pilgrims, carrying bundles on their heads and devotion in their hearts, made their way directly from Prayagraj to Ayodhya.



From 4 AM, ritual bathing commenced on the banks of the Saryu River, followed by pilgrimages to Hanumangarhi and the Ram Temple. The sheer volume of devotees transformed Rampath and Bhaktipath into a sea of pilgrims, with long queues stretching late into the night. Given the overwhelming turnout, temple authorities

have extended darshan hours to 18 hours daily, accommodating an estimated three lakh devotees visiting Ram Temple and Hanumangarhi each day. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath actively monitors the situation, issuing directives to ensure seamless management. As a result, officials and employees are working tirelessly to assist

pilgrims. To support the influx, police personnel stationed at the Ram Janmabhoomi complex provide water to devotees.

Additionally, medical camps have been set up within the temple premises for health assistance. Volunteers from the Ram Mandir Trust have also been deployed to serve the pilgrims. The estimated number of arriving devotees is being assessed with railway authorities and police checkpoints along key access routes to Ayodhya. Recognizing the growing numbers, extensive arrangements have been implemented to manage the rush. Holding areas have been designated along routes from Gonda, Ambedkarnagar, Sultanpur, and Lucknow to regulate the flow of pilgrims.

Large groups from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Goa, Maharashtra, and Gujarat continue to arrive in Ayodhya for darshan. Special rail services from Mahakumbh also bring in thousands of devotees daily. To ensure their comfort, Municipal Commissioner Santosh Kumar Sharma has made announcements via loudspeakers near Cantt railway station and Guru Govind Singh intersection, urging pilgrims to utilize nearby shelters for safe and convenient accommodation. A high-level administrative presence ensures smooth operations on the ground. Top officials actively oversee arrangements, including ADG Zone Lucknow S.B. Shirodkar, IG Praveen Kumar, Commissioner Gaurav Dayal,

District Magistrate Chandra Vijay Singh, and SSP Rajkaran Nair. SP Security Balramchari supervises security at the Ram Janmabhoomi complex, ensuring regulated darshan is followed under strict security protocols. Paramilitary forces, along with civil police and PAC, have been deployed for added vigilance. Additionally, ADG Zone, Divisional Commissioner, and IG Birla personally conducts security inspections, walking from Dharamshala to Lata Chowk, interacting with devotees, and reviewing arrangements. With unwavering faith and meticulous planning, Ayodhya continues to witness an unparalleled spiritual spectacle, reaffirming its status as a beacon of devotion and cultural heritage.

TMC fresh attack on Yogi administration

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as the anxious kin of the Prayagraj stampede victims waited for the bodies of their loved ones to arrive in Kolkata, the members of the Trinamool Congress Government on Thursday mounted fresh attack on the Yogi Adityanath administration for what they called "utter mismanagement" leading to the Wednesday's deaths.

Senior Bengal Minister Arup Biswas who had been liaising with the kin of the dead on behalf of the State Government asked the Uttar Pradesh Government to learn the art of controlling large crowds from the Mamata Banerjee administration. "It is not only all about advertising a religious fair to earn money... it is also about taking care of the visitors and not treating them like livestock," Biswas said. "They spent thousands of crore on a high tech system and will earn lakhs of crore from the highly publicized Kumbh Mela but now it all looks to be a system on paper the people who are returning are complaining of utter mismanagement," Biswas a senior Cabinet colleague of Chief Minister Mamata



Banerjee said. The minister who visited the house of Basanti Poddar - a middle aged woman from Kolkata's Aswhini Nagar - who died in the Wednesday's stampede complained how the dead bodies were being released with a plain piece of paper and no postmortem report and other formal documents. "Don't they have any responsibility towards the victims who lost their lives after all the money spent by the lakhs of people who have been visiting the Kumbh Mela is going to the Government

coffer, so they owe some duty towards the pilgrims like the way we do in Ganga Sagar Mela," the minister said. Another senior leader Kunal Ghosh slammed the UP Government saying, "they should learn from the Bengal administration, how we managed the Ganga Sagar Mela, this year more than one crore people visited the fair... and consider that we do not get any funds from the Centre... besides you have to cross a 3.5 km stretch of river on vessels to the mouth of Bay of Bengal... all these have to be meticulously planned and

the entire thing is continuously monitored by our Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee... selling religion for earning money is not what you should do every time." Incidentally in a circuitous remark Mamata Banerjee too had said on Wednesday that large fairs should be meticulously planned and organised. She wrote on the X, "I am deeply saddened to learn of the tragic stampede at the Maha Kumbh, which has claimed at least 15 innocent lives. My thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved pilgrim families. My learning from our Ganga Sagar Mela is that planning and care must be maximal in matters relating to pilgrims' lives in vast assemblies of people. Prayers for the departed souls."

Two persons so far have been reportedly killed in the Wednesday's midnight stampede in Prayagraj. Apart from Basanti Poddar a middle aged woman from Aswhini Nagar, Urmila Mahato a septuagenarian woman too from Salboni in West Mdinapore too died in the stampede. The victims' bodies had not yet reached Kolkata when reports last came in.

Crores of devotees took a holy dip as pilgrims express satisfaction with arrangements

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

On Thursday, during Maha Kumbh 2025, all permanent and temporary ghats, including the sacred Triveni Sangam, were teeming with devotees and pilgrims immersed in spiritual fervor. Many among them were those who had skipped their holy dip on Wednesday due to the heavy crowd and instead chose to bathe on Thursday, coinciding with the Pratipada of Gupt Navratri.

Alongside performing rituals, devotees from across the world lauded the efforts of the local administration and the Yogi government for the well-organized and seamless arrangements at Maha Kumbh. Notably, the Mela administration has urged people to remain patient amid the anticipated large crowds on Basant Panchami, Magh Purnima, and Mahashivratri bathing days and to take necessary precautions during this period. Despite the exhaustion of their long journeys, the enthusiasm and devotion of the bathers on Thursday



remained undiminished. Along with Sangam Nose, a massive crowd gathered at the raw and paved bathing ghats on the Jhansi and Arail sides. The spiritual fervor was evident as devotees continuously chanted 'Har-Har Mahadev,' 'Jai Ganga Maiya,' and 'Jai Shri Ram,' with slogans of 'Modi-Yogi' echoing through the air. A common sentiment among the bathers was that the grandeur and divinity of the current Maha Kumbh are a testament to the efforts of the double-engine government.

They expressed that this government has upheld and elevated Sanatan values in a way no other administration could. Devotees credited this transformation to the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the efficient execution by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Additionally, people widely praised the administration's meticulous planning and its swift response during emergencies, ensuring a seamless experience for all.

Mukesh Bhagat, who traveled from Nagpur with his family, shared that while he faced difficulty reaching Kila Ghat from the Arail side due to the heavy crowd, the moment he took a dip in the sacred river, he felt a surge of new energy. Similarly, Ghanshyam, who arrived from Panipat to bathe at Sangam Nose, expressed that participating in this holy event was not just the result of his own deeds but also the blessings and virtues of his ancestors. Ramavatar Chaudhary from Sikar, Rajasthan, echoed the same sentiment, saying that the instant the cold waters of the Ganga touched his body, all fatigue and worries seemed to vanish in an instant. On Thursday, a massive crowd of devotees from across the country and abroad, along with local residents, gathered to take a holy dip. Many arrived weary from their long journeys, with some even bearing blisters on their feet. Yet, after overcoming these hardships and immersing themselves in the sacred waters, their faces reflected deep faith, peace, and the profound joy of witnessing a truly divine moment.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Greenland gambit

Trump's attempt to acquire Greenland carries serious risks, threatening stability and undermining peace in the region

After assuming office, President Donald Trump has taken an aggressive approach, disrupting the global order—first economically and now through forceful tactics. His push to acquire the Danish island of Greenland by any means signals a potential standoff between the US and Denmark, and possibly even Europe. The push by the US President Donald Trump to acquire Greenland has led to tension between the United States and Denmark. While the idea was initially dismissed as implausible, Trump's administration has intensified efforts to assert influence over the resource-rich Arctic territory under Denmark though autonomous. Denmark has reacted with caution but with significant military reinforcements to protect its territory from any US misadventure. Greenland, the world's largest island, holds immense strategic value. With its rich reserves of rare earth minerals, vital for modern technology and defence systems, Greenland has become a focal point in the global competition. China dominates the rare-earth market, and the US sees Greenland as a potential alternative source to reduce its dependency on Chinese supplies.



Besides, Greenland's location provides a strategic foothold in the Arctic to dominate region. With climate change melting the Arctic ice and opening new shipping routes and exposing untapped resources, global powers, including the US, Russia, and China, have shown heightened interest in securing influence. The island is also home to the Thule Air Base, a key US military installation that plays a pivotal role in missile defence and early warning systems. Denmark has firmly rejected Trump's ambitions, reinforcing its commitment to Greenland's autonomy. In response to the escalating pressure, Denmark has announced a significant military expansion, allocating an additional 14.6 billion Danish crowns (\$2.05 billion) to enhance security in the region. The new military strategy includes the acquisition of three Arctic naval vessels, two long-range drones, and satellite surveillance systems. These enhancements aim to address the limited military presence in Greenland so far. While Greenland remains a semi-autonomous territory under Danish sovereignty, its growing geopolitical relevance has placed it at the center of international power struggles. The implications of US bid to take control over Greenland would be profound. Such a move would dramatically shift Arctic geopolitics, altering the balance of power and potentially heightening tensions between the US, Denmark, Russia, and China. The European Union has also expressed concerns over any potential shift in Greenland's status, as it would affect security dynamics in the region. It remains to be seen whether Trump's push to acquire Greenland will gain momentum or fade into history. Greenland has now become a pivotal battleground, and the Arctic, a once peaceful region, could soon become a new flashpoint the world can ill afford.

its commitment to Greenland's autonomy. In response to the escalating pressure, Denmark has announced a significant military expansion, allocating an additional 14.6 billion Danish crowns (\$2.05 billion) to enhance security in the region. The new military strategy includes the acquisition of three Arctic naval vessels, two long-range drones, and satellite surveillance systems. These enhancements aim to address the limited military presence in Greenland so far. While Greenland remains a semi-autonomous territory under Danish sovereignty, its growing geopolitical relevance has placed it at the center of international power struggles. The implications of US bid to take control over Greenland would be profound. Such a move would dramatically shift Arctic geopolitics, altering the balance of power and potentially heightening tensions between the US, Denmark, Russia, and China. The European Union has also expressed concerns over any potential shift in Greenland's status, as it would affect security dynamics in the region. It remains to be seen whether Trump's push to acquire Greenland will gain momentum or fade into history. Greenland has now become a pivotal battleground, and the Arctic, a once peaceful region, could soon become a new flashpoint the world can ill afford.

PICTALK



Students witness the launch of ISRO's GSLV-F15, marking ISRO's 100th mission, in Sriharikota

PTI

Challenging menstrual taboos in rural India

Cultural taboos and lack of awareness often confine girls and women to their homes, keeping them away from school, kitchens and religious spaces

In India, approximately 335 million women experience menstruation but the majority of them are uncomfortable about speaking about it or discussing their menstrual hygiene problems. Parents, especially in rural areas are often ignorant and unprepared to discuss this subject with their adolescent daughters. However, an ongoing campaign called 'Red Achcha Hai' (Red is Good) running in three states is breaking the silence around menstruation and debunking taboos and restrictions that confine girls and women to their homes and bar them from attending school, entering the kitchen and participating in cultural and religious events.

First started in 2018 as a programme to make women and adolescents in rural areas in Gujarat aware of body literacy, fertility and menstrual hygiene by CHETNA, a not-for-profit working on nutrition, health and women's empowerment, it acquired a new urgency in 2020 when newspapers headlined the shocking story of how girls in a college hostel, supported by a religious trust, were asked to



strip by the college authorities for breaking the hostel's rules for menstruating girls. This made CHETNA realise that they needed to accelerate and escalate their efforts. Thus, the Red Achcha Hai campaign. Started with a new vigour first in rural areas of Gujarat, and Rajasthan and later in Madhya Pradesh, the eye-catching Red Achcha Hai campaign tapped the power of drama and visual communication with the CHETNA team dressed in red explaining the menstrual process, the need for menstrual hygiene and breaking myths and taboos around menstruation. The positive impact of this awareness programme and distribution of 2199 menstrual hygiene management (MHM) kits containing three information booklets, a clothes brush, a nail cutter and a rope to dry the washed

cloth, led to its continuation in 47 schools of Sansad block of Ahmedabad since February 2024. Even while focusing on adolescents, the campaign continued to reach out to women too. In 2023, when the campaign was being conducted across 16 villages of Jhagadia block, Bharuch district of Gujarat, a woman sarpanch was invited as a chief guest for an event to celebrate nutrition week organised on the grounds of an adjoining temple. The sarpanch expressed her reservations as it was the fourth day of her period. However, after some discussions on the myths surrounding menstruation, the CHETNA team motivated her to come to the function. The sarpanch not only came for the function and sat on the temple steps but entered the temple. This act made her an icon for breaking the myths and taboos surrounding menstruation and helped to inspire other women shackled by societal barriers imposed by their families during their menstrual cycle. A mother of a malnourished child, who was also one of the partici-

pants, was menstruating on the day of the function and was reluctant to attend. However, when she was informed that the sarpanch, who was also menstruating, had entered the temple, she took courage and followed her. The sarpanch's actions challenged traditional taboos and set a powerful example. It highlighted the power of education and support in overcoming menstrual stigma. The campaign has reached more than 10,000 women and girls and many young people are coming forward to support the campaign. The students of Riverside School of Ahmedabad City supported the campaign by raising funds for the initiative to end discrimination against women and girls. Poor menstrual hygiene practices may lead to recurring reproductive tract infections which may increase the risk of cervical cancer. The 'Red Achcha Hai' campaign is changing mindsets and empowering women and girls to break free from restrictive cultural norms. (The author is a journalist writing on development and gender; views are personal)



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

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P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

Seed innovation: Key to agricultural growth

Unlocking India's full agricultural potential demands strong policies, industry collaboration and a commitment to technological advancements, especially in seed innovation



AJAI RANA

India stands at the cusp of a transformative shift in its agricultural landscape, driven by its growing population, expanding economy, and the mounting challenges posed by climate change. With the Union Budget 2024 allocating Rs 1.52 lakh crore to agriculture, the government's recognition of the sector's importance in ensuring India's economic future is clear. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for agricultural growth focuses on innovation, sustainability, and resilience. For India to realise its agricultural potential by 2025, however, clear policy frameworks and effective industry collaboration are essential.

At the core of this transformation is the need for a robust, resilient, and technologically advanced seed sector. As India transitions from a traditional, production-centric agricultural model to one that prioritises farmer welfare and income generation, there is a fundamental opportunity to improve livelihoods and promote sustainable agricultural practices. A critical aspect of India's agricultural future lies in scientific advancements, particularly in the development of genetically modified (GM) crops. Globally, GM crops have proven successful in increasing yields, improving pest resistance, and reducing dependency on chemical inputs. Yet, India has been cautious in adopting GM technology, and a transparent, science-based approach to its regulation could help unlock its potential. A national consensus on the safe deployment of GM crops would support the goal of reducing reliance on imports, especially in essential crops like oilseeds and pulses.

The importance of collaboration between the private sector and public institutions such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) cannot be overstated. Such partnerships drive significant research and development efforts across key crops like oilseeds, cotton, and maize, while also protecting intellectual property rights (IPR) to incentivise further innovation. A strengthened IPR framework could position India as a global leader in agricultural research and technol-



ogy. Youth involvement is emerging as a critical force for revitalising India's agriculture. The average age of farmers in India is over 50, which highlights the need to encourage younger generations to enter the field. As of 2022, about 30 per cent of India's youth are employed in agriculture, yet a large proportion still view it as a last resort. Programmes targeting youth education and entrepreneurship in agriculture are gaining traction, with initiatives like the National Agriculture Market (eNAM) and various skill development programs helping young farmers access better technologies and market opportunities. Moreover, youth-led startups in agritech are making an impact in areas like precision farming, farm-to-table models, and sustainable agriculture practices, providing innovative solutions to long-standing problems. For example, the 'Agri-Startups' ecosystem is seeing rapid growth, with over 3,100 agritech startups currently operating in India (as of 2023), and an investment influx that has grown by 20 per cent annually. This demonstrates the growing interest among youth to innovate and lead the agricultural transformation. Furthermore, sectoral integration across the agricultural value chain is becoming more pronounced. India's agri-



FOR EXAMPLE, THE 'AGRI-STARTUPS' ECOSYSTEM IS SEEING RAPID GROWTH, WITH OVER 3,100 AGRITECH STARTUPS CURRENTLY OPERATING IN INDIA (AS OF 2023), AND AN INVESTMENT INFLUX THAT HAS GROWN BY 20 PER CENT ANNUALLY

cultural ecosystem is complex, with each sector, such as poultry, dairy, horticulture, and rural development, playing a distinct yet interconnected role in the overall growth. The government is focusing on strengthening these individual sectors as part of a holistic approach. The GST framework currently presents challenges for the agricultural sector, particularly about the costs and complexities of compliance for farmers and seed companies. Simplifying the GST system could reduce operational burdens and make agricultural practices more sustainable and profitable. Additionally, targeted tax relief or incentives for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in agriculture, particularly in seed production, agro-processing, and machinery manufacturing, could support growth and job creation, especially in rural areas. Restoring the 200 per cent income tax deduction for research and development (R&D) expenditure could significantly boost innovation in the seed industry. By reducing the financial pressures associated with R&D, such a policy would incentivise greater investment in developing drought-resistant and higher-yielding crop varieties. This would be particularly important in critical sectors such as oilseeds and pulses,

where India faces challenges in achieving self-sufficiency. In addition, a unified national-level registration process for seeds, along with the "One Nation, One License" policy, would simplify operations for seed companies. The current multi-state registration process often leads to inefficiencies and delays, hindering the growth of the industry. A streamlined system would enable companies to operate more efficiently and ensure that high-quality seeds reach farmers promptly, fostering growth and innovation in the sector. Research Linked Incentive (RLI) schemes could further encourage innovation by offering financial incentives for successful R&D outcomes. This would accelerate the development of new seed varieties that are climate-resilient and high-yielding, reinforcing India's position as a leader in global agricultural research. Looking ahead, the future of seed research holds exciting possibilities, particularly in areas like biofortified crops, climate resilience, and hybrid development. Breeding drought-tolerant varieties of rice, oilseeds, and pulses will be essential to ensure food security in an era of unpredictable weather patterns. (The writer is the chairman of the Federation of Seed Industry of India and MD & CEO of Savannah Seeds; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CASH PROMISES TO WOO VOTERS

Madam — It is with reference to the news "AAP-BJP fight it out on social media over Guarantees" - January 30 While election debates are not a new trend in Indian elections, the issue has become hotly debated in recent months. Recently, AAP, BJP and Congress have announced schemes and cash benefits to woo voters in poll-bound Delhi. They have made tens of promises to fulfil the needs of the poor, the middle class, women, youth, priests, and other sections of society if they form a government in Delhi. When AAP announces Rs 2100 per month to every unemployed woman of Delhi resident, BJP promises Rs 2500 to those below the poverty line and Rs 21,000 to pregnant women, and Congress promises Rs 2500 to every woman under the proposed Pyari Didiyojana. Also, AAP promises full financial assistance to children from dalit families for pursuing higher education. When BJP promises Rs 15000 for up to two attempts for students preparing for competitive examinations, Congress promises Rs 8500 under the Yuva Udan Yojana apprenticeship scheme for a year. While RBI has warned that rising expenditure on subsidies, including cash transfers to women, could limit productive investments. Activists are yet to arrive at a consensus on whether such schemes actually empower women or not. There are so many cases in the Supreme Court about freebies and cash transfers to residents. A few months ago, SC has issued notices to some state governments and the central government, also to the Election Commission of India, on the plea seeking comprehensive guidelines to bar political parties from distributing cash and other freebies at the expense of taxpayers. A total ban on freebies should be implemented by enacting laws at the centre.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

DeepSeek disrupts AI market



The global AI race has taken a dramatic turn with the rise of DeepSeek, a Chinese startup that claims to rival US industry leaders at a fraction of the cost. Its latest model, DeepSeek-R1, has ignited debate over China's growing AI capabilities, sending shockwaves through tech markets. DeepSeek's AI Assistant, powered by DeepSeek-v3, has surpassed OpenAI's ChatGPT as the top-rated free app on Apple's App Store. The company claims to have trained the model for under \$6 million, a stark contrast to the billions spent by US firms. Even more striking,

DeepSeek-R1 is said to be 50 times cheaper to operate than GPT-4. The impact has been immediate and severe. Nvidia, the AI chip giant, suffered the biggest single-session stock loss in history, wiping out nearly \$600 billion in market value. Investors fear that low-cost Chinese AI models could disrupt the industry, forcing a rethink of AI development strategies.

US President Donald Trump called DeepSeek's rise a "wake-up call," urging American firms to stay competitive. However, concerns are growing over China's access to restricted Nvidia H100 chips, raising questions about how DeepSeek trained its models. The AI world now faces two possibilities: a new Cold War in AI, where the US and China develop separate ecosystems, or a global AI price war that democratises access to advanced AI. Either way, DeepSeek has proven that China is no longer playing catch-up—it's setting the pace.

Gopalswamy J | Myslapore

DRESSCODE FOR SIDDHIVINAYAK

Madam—The news that the Siddhivinayak temple trust, Mumbai, issued an advisory by barring devotees from adhering to dress sense and suggested avoiding torn jeans and prohibiting skirts and revealing clothes inside the premises. Having taken notice of the recent ghastly incidents at Govt RG Kar Hospital, Kolkata, and inside the Anna University campus, Chennai, there is an increase among perpetrators and wicked minds even when dressed properly. May be the reason that in order to bring good sense to prevail, the devotees, while praying before the lord, cross their arms and pull on their ears and also tap the temples gently not only to forgive and also to bless them with pious qualities. Dress to kill shouldn't end up otherwise in danger.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

AT LEAST 30 DEAD IN STAMPEDE

Madam —A stampede broke out at the Sangam Nose area of Maha Kumbh, Prayagraj, at around 1 am on the inter-

vening night of Tuesday and Wednesday as lakhs of devotees rushed to take the holy dip on the auspicious occasion (bathing in the river will cleanse their sins and help attain salvation) of Mauni Amavasya. Due to the stampede at the world's largest religious gathering in India, at least 30 people were killed, with many more injured, a doctor at the Kumbh Mela festival told AFP. As a result, the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad has postponed the Amrit Snan. Political leaders expressed concerns, demanding immediate action and better future arrangements for pilgrim safety and wellbeing. People come from different places, bound by their faith, and they end up paying with their lives. Mahamandleshwar Premanand Puri has blamed the administration for the deadly stampede at Maha Kumbh Mela, stating they prioritised VIPs over safety preparations.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

TRUMPS INFLUENCE ON INDIAN ECONOMY

How India's digital economy could be shaped by his policies



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, has left an indelible mark on both American and global politics. While much of the discussion about his policies and influence has focused on traditional industries like trade, defence, and foreign relations, Trump's impact could extend beyond these sectors — especially to economies like India. As the world's largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing digital economies, India stands to experience both challenges and opportunities in the wake of Trump's post-presidency actions and his political stances. Here's a closer look at how Trump could shape India's digital economy.

Trade Policies and Digital Tariffs - Trump's "America First" policy introduced a more protectionist approach to trade, focusing on reducing imports and ensuring favourable terms for US companies. India has seen its digital space expand rapidly, particularly with global tech giants and startups. However, if Trump or his political allies push for new tariffs or restrictions on foreign tech investments — or increase scrutiny on digital platforms operating in India — it could complicate business relations. While this may benefit India's indigenous tech sector and could leverage such scenarios to strengthen local supply chains and reduce dependency on US companies, it will certainly be bad for US India's bilateral trade. **Geopolitical Tensions and Digital Sovereignty** Another area where Trump's impact could be felt is in the realm of digital sovereignty. Trump's earlier administration frequently took stances against Chinese technology companies. India, too, has followed suit with actions



against Chinese apps, and the digital sovereignty debate is likely to continue. Should Trump's influence result in stronger US-India alliances in the digital space, it could accelerate India's drive for data privacy regulations, local data storage mandates, and greater control over its digital infrastructure. The US and India will have the opportunity to collaborate on setting global standards for cybersecurity, data protection, and artificial intelligence.

If the relationship between the two countries remains strong, it could also lead to joint ventures that power India's emerging tech ecosystem. US-India Strategic Digital Alliance - Under Trump, the US-India relationship generally saw an uptick in strategic collaboration, especially in defence, technology, and trade. Post-Trump, this alignment could be further amplified. As a leader in traditional and digital technologies, Trump's legacy of prioritising high-tech industries in the US could create opportunities for Indian companies to collaborate with American firms in research and development. For India, this could mean access to cutting-edge technologies in fields like AI, 5G, quantum computing, and blockchain. Such collaboration could increase India's digital infrastructure capabilities, making it more competitive in the global market. Promoting E-Commerce Growth - Trump's policies favoured business growth, especially in the private sector.

His approach to deregulation, tax cuts, and incentivising entrepreneurship could be leveraged by Indian businesses, particularly in the e-commerce space. While Donald Trump's influence on India's digital economy is not straightforward, his policies, legacy and post-presidency actions could create ripple effects across global digital markets, including India. Whether it's through tighter immigration restrictions, geopolitical positioning, or shifts in trade relationships, India's digital economy must remain agile, harnessing both challenges and opportunities. India's emerging tech scene is robust and well-positioned to adapt to global changes.

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

Freebies could push Delhi to fiscal disaster



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite repeated warnings from the Supreme Court about the detrimental impact of freebies on free and fair elections, political parties continue to offer them



In the din of blistering campaign in Delhi with the central theme of major political parties being on "freebies" - an acronym for 'something given free of charge' - it may be worthwhile to remind them about two observations made by the Supreme Court (SC). In an order in *S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors* given in July 2013, the SC had observed that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people. "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree." A decade later, hearing a PIL on 'freebies', on January 25, 2022, it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue, budget for freebies is going above the regular Budget". But, all this seems to have fallen on deaf ears. The state elections held since 2022 have witnessed political parties intensely competing with each other to mesmerise voters with a deadly combination of free goods and services and cash assistance. These have played a dominating role in winning elections. In Delhi, the offers have reached their 'NADIR'. The starting point was an announcement by the finance minister Atishi in the budget for 2024-25 reg. The Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women above the age of 18 in the national capital. Meanwhile, the ex-Chief Minister and convener of AAP Arvind Kejriwal promised an increase in income support under the MMSY to Rs 2,100 a month for every woman.

AAP has also promised free medical services to all above 60 at all hospitals; financing foreign education for Dalit students; free bus travel for all students; 50 per cent concession on metro fares; life insurance cover of Rs 10 lakh, accident insurance of Rs 5 lakh for all auto-rickshaw drivers and e-rickshaw pullers; wedding aid of Rs 1 lakh for their daughters and free coaching for their children; Rs 18,000 per month for all pujaris and granthis etc. Not to be left behind, the BJP has come up with a package that is far more lucrative. It has promised Rs 2,500 a



THE RECKLESS SPENDING OF THE TAXPAYER'S MONEY ON FREEBIES IS NEITHER A RECOGNISED POLICY NOR IS SANCTIONED IN A COURT OF LAW. IT IS BLATANT FINANCIAL IRREGULARITY THAT AMOUNTS TO BRIBING VOTERS USING PUBLIC MONEY SOLELY FOR GAINING ADVANTAGE IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

month to women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY); Rs 21,000 to pregnant women; LPG cylinders for Rs 500 and free cylinder on Holi and Diwali; a stipend of Rs 1000 a month to SC students pursuing technical and vocational courses; free education for needy students from KG to PG; free travel for students on Delhi Metro; Atal Canteens in Jhuggi Basti clusters providing nutritional meals for Rs 5 only; implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme and additional cover of Rs 5 lakh for senior citizens. BJP has vowed to continue all existing schemes.

The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognised policy or custom".

The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognised policy nor is sanctioned in a court of law. It is blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely for gaining advantage in electoral politics. Yet, the parties continue with it. What about the impact on the budget? Look at the BJP offer. The number of women above the age of 18 years in Delhi is around 67 lakh. @Rs 2500 per month under MSY or Rs 30,000 annually to each woman, giving assistance to them all will require Rs 20,100 crore per annum. According to an estimate, there are about 15 lakh pregnant

women. @Rs 21,000 per woman, the total outgo comes to Rs 3150 crore annually. As for subsidy on LPG, take consumption of 4 cylinders per household (HH). The cost supply is around Rs 1000 per cylinder, for two cylinders (Holi and Diwali), the subsidy will be Rs 2000 whereas for the other two @ Rs 500 each, the outgo will be Rs 1000 or Rs 3000 per HH. Taking a total of over 82.5 lakh HHs (current Delhi population of 330 lakh divided by 4 being the average HH size), the annual impact would be Rs 2500 crore.

Look at free education for needy students from KG to PG. According to the latest data available, around 9.91 per cent of Delhi's population was considered below the poverty line in 2011-12. The current population is 330 lakh, and the poor are 33 lakh. Of this, takes one-third or 11 lakh to be persons in the studying age 4 - 25 years. Taking the average expense of educating a child in India at the bare minimum of Rs. 20,000 per annum, the total expense on "needy students" in the city would be about Rs 2200 crore annually. The additional burden of these four guarantees alone on the Delhi government's budget is Rs 27,950 crore (20,100+3150+2500+2200).

Other freebies would bloat this figure by several thousand crore. Already, the finances of the Delhi government are in a precarious state. Against the total expenditure of Rs 76,000 crore during FY 2024-25, the total revenue is estimated at around Rs 58,000 crore. This leads to a fiscal deficit (FD) of Rs 18,000 crore which is 80 per cent higher than the FD for FY 2023-24 at Rs 10,000 crore. The surge in FD is despite a steep reduction of over 30 per cent in capital expenditure from the bud-

get estimate (BE) of Rs 22,000 crore for FY 2023-24 to Rs 15,000 crore for FY 2024-25.

The government's current debt is about Rs 40,000 crore. But, this is not all. We also need to add the loans taken by its departments such as Delhi Jal Board (DJB): Rs 70,000 crore and Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC): Rs 10,000 crore as the liability for servicing those debts is vested entirely in the NCT government. This takes the total debt of Delhi to Rs 120,000 crore.

The situation has come to such a pass that CM Atishi has approached the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). The precariousness of the state's finances has a lot to do with the freebies which are estimated to cost about Rs 11,000 crore during 2024-25. Add to this at least Rs 30,000 crore being the impact of guarantees given during this election, freebies alone would dent the exchequer by Rs 41,000 crore annually.

Delhi government could be starting at an FD of close to Rs 50,000 crore. And, its debt would balloon to Rs 150,000 crore. The ball won't stop here. When used to doles, people will want more and more and parties can't say no. When, even a die-hard reformist and fiscal disciplinarian like Modi is forced to give way to freebies (courtesy, of Kejriwal's brand of politics), things will only worsen. What if people stop working (very likely when they get money sitting at home) and tax-payers stop paying taxes (likely when they see their earnings being frittered away in distributing doles to those who don't work)? The National Capital could be staring at fiscal disaster.

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

Neravu Scheme: A catalyst for social change

It is a transformative movement dedicated to changing lives through direct action, offering relief and assistance to bring about social and economic change

Philanthropy has always been a driving force behind social progress, bridging gaps and providing succour to those in need. Often, it is the initiative of an individual or an organisation that reaches out to support the underserved. Marginalised sections of society, often ill-equipped to fend for themselves, view such assistance in dire circumstances as a matter of life and death. Across the country, there are numerous examples of individuals and organisations stepping up to aid the needy. In southern India, Mangalore, Karnataka, the MRG Group - a prominent business conglomerate with interests spanning hospitality, real estate and finance - has taken a remarkable step in this direction through its transfor-

mative initiative, the "Neravu". **The Neravu Initiative: A Lifeline for Thousands** Launched in 2019 with an initial allocation of Rs 1.25 crore, the Neravu has grown significantly in scope and impact. It has reached a remarkable milestone, disbursing Rs 6 crore in financial aid to support 3000 families and 60 organisations, benefiting approximately 15000 individuals.

The assistance provided - ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 1 lakh for individuals and up to Rs 25 lakh for organisations - addresses diverse needs, including medical emergencies, education, sports, and social welfare. What sets the initiative apart is its scale and robust framework, ensuring that aid reaches thousands of households. The "Neravu" program is



B K JHA

underpinned by a rigorous selection process to ensure the most deserving candidates receive support. An impartial committee meticulously reviews applications, prioritising critical medical cases, disabilities, and exceptional achievements in academics and sports. The programme extends beyond Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Shivamogga districts to

Kerala's Kasaragod district, showcasing its inclusive approach.

What is Neravu?

The word Neravu means 'support' in Kannada, and this initiative lives up to its name as one of the largest corporate-run financial assistance programs in India. Designed to address the immediate and long-term challenges faced by economically disadvantaged communities, the focus is on:

- 1. Education:** Scholarships ensure access to quality education for underprivileged students.
- 2. Healthcare:** Financial aid covers critical treatments and surgeries for those unable to afford medical expenses.
- 3. Livelihood Enhancement:** Vocational training and resources empower individu-



als to achieve self-reliance. **Impact of the Neravu** Mangalore, a thriving port city known for its cultural diversity and economic activity, has witnessed a profound impact from the "Neravu". **Educational Opportunities:** Many students from low-income families have pursued higher education, thanks to scholarships. **Healthcare Access:** Critical

medical interventions have been made possible for individuals lacking access to quality healthcare.

Empowerment: Vocational training programmes have enabled women to contribute to their households. The MRG Group has expanded the reach of the "Neravu", demonstrating how corporate philanthropy can transcend geographical boundaries. Empowering Communities Through Philanthropy The "Neravu" initiative's impact goes beyond immediate financial relief, fostering self-reliance and community upliftment. Beneficiaries have shared inspiring stories of transformation. For instance, Raj Lakshmi, a graduate from a nearby village and the eldest among her sib-

lings, completed her studies with the Neravu's support. Now employed as a computer instructor, she supports her family of five. "I could complete my course because of "Neravu", and today, I am able to earn a living and help my family," she shares.

Making a Difference The Neravu exemplifies how corporate initiatives can address pressing issues while fostering inclusive growth. Neravu's structured approach ensures that aid reaches the right people. In a world grappling with economic disparities, programs like "Neravu" serve as a beacon of hope. By addressing the root causes of poverty and empowering individuals, the initiative has brought tangible change to countless families.

Dr K Prakash Shetty, Founder & Chairman MRG Group, the visionary behind this movement, emphasises that philanthropy is not merely about monetary aid but about fostering a culture of self-reliance and social participation. Under his leadership, the MRG Group has blended business success with meaningful social impact, setting a benchmark in corporate social responsibility. The "Neravu" stands as a testament to the transformative power of structured philanthropy. By addressing fundamental challenges and empowering individuals, it inspires a collective commitment to building a more equitable society.

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

Hamas frees 8 more hostages

Israel puts prisoner release on hold

PTI ■ KHAN YOUNIS

Hamas-led militants freed eight hostages on Thursday as part of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, but the chaotic handover of some of the captives, who masked militants shuttled through a rowdy crowd of thousands, drew an angry protest from Israel.

Israel was supposed to release 110 Palestinian prisoners later in the day, including around 30 serving life sentences for deadly attacks against Israelis. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the move was put on hold until the "safe release" of hostages can be assured.



A crowd greets Islamic Jihad and Hamas fighters as they arrive for the hand-over of Israeli and Thai hostages to the Red Cross in the south Gaza Strip town of Khan Younis, Thursday. AP/PTI

Over six weeks, Hamas is to free 33 Israeli hostages — roughly one third of those held — in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. As part of the truce, Israel has also pulled its forces back from major cities and allowed hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to return to their homes in war-torn Gaza.

gated to watch, some from the tilted rooftops of bombed-out buildings. Footage showed hostage Arbel Yehoud looking stunned as masked militants hustled her through the shouting crowd, sometimes pushing people back.

7 attack, hugging and crying with her parents. Earlier, people cheered, clapped and whistled in a square in Tel Aviv as Berger's handover unfolded on big screens next to a large clock that's counted the days the hostages have been in captivity. Some held signs saying: "Agam we're waiting for you at home."

Gaza when she was not. The United States, Egypt and Qatar, which brokered the ceasefire after a year of tough negotiations, resolved the dispute with an agreement that Yehoud would be released on Thursday. Another three hostages, all men, are set to be freed Saturday along with dozens more Palestinian prisoners.

The sides are also to begin talks on a second phase aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and Hamas, whose October 7, 2023, attack into Israel sparked the fighting. The hostages released Thursday included a female Israeli soldier, a 29-year-old Israeli woman, an 80-year-old Israeli man, and five Thai labourers who had been working in southern Israel when they were captured.

About 20 friends of Yehoud gathered in southern Israel watched as the tense scene unfolded on live television. Some cried. Others had their hands over their eyes or mouths. One friend yelled at the news anchor to "shut up" when she said the situation appeared dangerous. The crowd then burst into tears after she was turned over to the Red Cross. Netanyahu condemned the "shocking scenes" and called on international mediators to ensure the safety of hostages in future releases.

At the square, the White House's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, met briefly with families of hostages. "My message is that we're with the families and that we care for them," he told The Associated Press. A number of foreign workers were taken captive along with dozens of Israeli civilians and soldiers during Hamas' attack. Twenty-three Thais were among more than 100 hostages released during a week-long ceasefire in November 2023. Israel says three Thais remain in captivity, two of whom are believed to be dead.

On Monday, Israel began allowing Palestinians to return to northern Gaza, the most heavily destroyed part of the territory, and hundreds of thousands streamed back. Many found only mounds of rubble where their homes had been. In the first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas is set to release a total of 33 Israeli hostages, including women, children, older adults and sick or wounded men, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israel says Hamas has confirmed that eight of the hostages to be released in this phase are dead.

Hours later, a chaotic scene unfolded at a handover of the other seven hostages in the southern city of Khan Younis, in front of the destroyed home of slain Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. Hundreds of militants from Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group arrived with a convoy, and thousands of people

The other Israeli released Thursday was Gadi Moses, 80. Five Thai nationals were freed and identified by Israel as Watchara Srioum, 33, Pongsak Tanna, 36, Sathian Suwankam, 35, Bannawat Seathao, 27, and Surasak Lamnau, 32. The Israeli army confirmed all eight were brought into Israel. The government released footage of Berger, who was among five young, female soldiers abducted in the October

Among the people set to be released from prisons is Zakaria Zubeidi, a prominent former militant leader and theatre director who took part in a dramatic jailbreak in 2021 before being rearrested days later. Israel said Yehoud was supposed to have been freed on Saturday and delayed the opening of crossings to northern

The Israeli military says it killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence, and that it went to great lengths to try to spare civilians. It blames civilian deaths on Hamas because its fighters operate in dense residential neighbourhoods and put military infrastructure near homes, schools and mosques. The Israeli offensive has transformed entire neighbourhoods into mounds of rubble, and it's unclear how or when anything will be rebuilt. Around 90 per cent of Gaza's population has been displaced, often multiple times, with hundreds of thousands of people living in squalid tent camps or shuttered schools.

Jet with 64 aboard collides with US Army helicopter

PTI ■ ARLINGTON

An American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members collided Wednesday with an Army helicopter while landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, prompting a large search-and-rescue operation in the nearby Potomac River. There were multiple fatalities, according to a person familiar with the matter, but the precise number of victims was unclear as rescue crews hunted for any survivors. Three soldiers were onboard the helicopter, an Army official said.

helicopter on a training flight while on approach to an airport runway. It occurred in some of the most tightly controlled and monitored airspace in the world, just over three miles south of the White House and the Capitol. Investigators will try to piece together the aircrafts' final moments before their collision, including contact with air traffic controllers as well as a loss of altitude by the passenger jet.

Washington, with temperatures registering as high as 60 degrees Fahrenheit, following a stretch days earlier of intense cold and ice.

There was no immediate word on the cause of the collision, but all takeoffs and landings from the airport were halted as dive teams scoured the site and helicopters from law enforcement agencies across the region flew over the scene in methodical search for bodies.

American Airlines Flight 5342 was inbound to Reagan National at an altitude of about 400 feet and a speed of about 140 miles per hour when it suffered a rapid loss of altitude over the Potomac River, according to data from its radio transponder. The Canadian-made Bombardier CRJ-701 twin-engine jet, manufactured in 2004, can be configured to carry up to 70 passengers. A few minutes before landing, air traffic controllers asked the arriving commercial jet if it could land on the shorter Runway 33 at Reagan National and the pilots said they were able. Controllers then cleared the plane to land on Runway 33. Flight tracking sites showed the plane adjust its approach to the new runway.

On Wednesday, the Potomac River was 36 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The National Weather Service reported that wind gusts of up to 25 mph were possible in the area throughout the evening. American Airlines CEO Robert Isom expressed "deep sorrow" for the crash and said the company was focused on the needs of passengers, crew, first responders and families and loved ones of those involved. Some 300 first responders were on scene. Inflatable rescue boats were launched into the Potomac River from a point along the George Washington Parkway, just north of the airport, and first responders set up light towers from the shore to illuminate the area near the collision site. At least a half-dozen boats were scanning the water using searchlights.

"We are going to recover our fellow citizens," District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser said at a somber news conference at the airport Thursday morning in which she declined to say how many bodies had been recovered. Sen. Roger Marshall of Kansas said, "When one person dies it's a tragedy, but when many, many, many people die it's an unbearable sorrow." President Donald Trump said he had been "fully briefed on this terrible accident" and, referring to the passengers, added, "May God Bless their souls."

Less than 30 seconds before the crash, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it had the arriving plane in sight. The controller made another radio call to the helicopter moments later: "PAT 25 pass behind the CRJ." Seconds after that, the two aircraft collided.

"It's a highly complex operation," said D.C. fire chief John Donnelly. "The conditions out there are extremely rough for the responders." The US Army described the helicopter as a UH-60 Blackhawk based at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. The helicopter was on a training flight. Military aircraft frequently conduct training flights in and around the congested and heavily-restricted airspace around the nation's capital for familiarization and continuity of government planning.

Passengers on the flight included a group of figure skaters, their coaches and family members who were returning from a development camp that followed the US Figure Skating Championships in Wichita. "We are devastated by this unspeakable tragedy and hold the victims' families closely in our hearts," US Figure Skating said in a statement.

The plane's radio transponder stopped transmitting about 2,400 feet short of the runway, roughly over the middle of the river. Video from an observation camera at the nearby Kennedy Center showed two sets of lights consistent with aircraft appearing to join in a fireball. "I know that flight. I've flown it several times myself," said Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas. He said he expected that many people in Wichita would know people who were on the flight. "This is a very personal circumstance," he said. The collision occurred on a warm winter evening in

The crash is serving as a major test for two of the Trump administration's newest agency leaders. Pete Hegseth, sworn in days ago as defence secretary, posted on social media that an investigation has been "launched immediately" by the Army and the Defence Department. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, just sworn in earlier this week, said at a somber news conference at the airport early Thursday that his agency would provide all possible resources to the investigation.

ICC has Putin, Netanyahu in its sights, yet its courtrooms empty

PTI ■ THE HAGUE

For a few hours last week, the International Criminal Court looked poised to take a Libyan warlord into custody. Instead, member state Italy sent the head of a notorious network of detention centres back home. That has left the court without a single trial ahead for the first time since it arrested its first suspect in 2006. And it's now facing serious external pressure, notably from US President Donald Trump. Though its docket remains empty, the court still wields an USD 200 million annual budget and a large number of legal eagles keen to lay their hands on Russian President Vladimir Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"The point of the ICC is to investigate and prosecute those most responsible for international crimes." Empty courtrooms show how hard it is to end impunity. The only permanent global court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the world's most heinous atrocities has not been in this position for almost two decades. Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga became the first person convicted by court in The Hague. In 2012, he was sentenced to 14 years in prison for conscripting child soldiers. Since Lubanga's trial began, the court has had a slow but steady stream of proceedings. To date it has convicted 11 people and three verdicts are pending. It has issued 32 unsealed arrest warrants. Those suspects range from Netanyahu and Putin to Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony and Gamlet

Guchmazov, accused of torture in the breakaway region of South Ossetia in Georgia. But it faces numerous challenges. Trump, on his first day in office, reinstated an executive order from his previous term sanctioning court staff. A more damaging piece of legislation, which would sanction the court as an institution, has passed one chamber of Congress but is stalled in the Senate for now due to opposition from Democrats. The previous chief prosecutor, Gambian Fatou Bensouda, described being the subject of "hug-style tactics" while she was in office. The court was the victim of a cybersecurity attack in 2023 that left systems offline for months and some technical issues have still not been resolved. In 2022, the Dutch intelligence service said it had foiled a sophisticated attempt by a Russian spy using a false

Brazilian identity to work as an intern at the court. The current prosecutor, British lawyer Karim Khan, has requested a record-breaking 24 arrest warrants. But many suspects — like Putin — will probably remain beyond the reach of the court. Neither Russia nor Israel are members of the court and do not accept its jurisdiction, making it highly unlikely those countries would extradite their citizens, let alone their leaders, to the ICC. "They haven't issued arrest warrants for people who they are likely to arrest," says Mark Kersten, an international criminal justice expert at University of the Fraser Valley in Canada. Ultimately, countries are responsible for physically apprehending people and bringing them to The Hague, says Chaikel, whose group oversees nearly 200 human rights organisations worldwide.

Bill introduced in US Senate to restrict birthright citizenship

Washington (PTI): A group of Republican Senators has introduced a bill in the US Senate to restrict birthright citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants and non-immigrants on temporary visas. According to Senators Lindsey Graham, Ted Cruz and Katie Britt, who introduced the bill, the exploitation of birthright citizenship is a major pull factor for illegal immigration and a weakness for national security. The US is one of only 33 countries in the world with no restrictions on birthright citizenship, they said. The legislative move comes after an executive order on the matter, signed by President Donald Trump on the first day of his presidency, has been blocked by a federal judge in Washington state. The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that in 2023, there were 2,25,000 to 2,50,000 births to illegal immigrants, amounting to close to seven per cent of births in the US. It is long overdue for the United States to change its policy on birthright citizenship

because it is being abused in so many ways, said Graham. "One example is birth tourism, where wealthy individuals from China and other nations come to the United States simply to have a child who will be an American citizen. When you look at the magnets that draw people to America, birthright citizenship is one of the largest," he said. "I also appreciate President Trump's executive order to address birthright citizenship. It is time for the United States to align itself with the rest of the world and restrict this practice once and for all," Graham said. "The promise of American citizenship should not incentivise illegal migration, but that's exactly what has happened for far too long," said Britt. "Senator Lindsey Graham's and my Birthright Citizenship Act would codify President Trump's commonsense stance and end the abuse of birthright citizenship that I do not believe is consistent with the original meaning of the 14th Amendment's Citizenship Clause," she added. "This will protect our nation's sovereignty, disincen-

tivise illegal migration, and ensure America's citizenship practices are stronger and better aligned with peer countries around the globe," Britt said. The three Senators said in September 2024, two individuals from California were found guilty in a "birth tourism" scheme. Predominantly Chinese clients paid the operators of a "maternity hotel" tens of thousands of dollars to come to the US to give birth. Clients were coached on how to lie during the admissions process. A 2022 Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee report found a birthing company catering to the wives of Russian oligarchs, celebrities, athletes and public figures. The Birthright Citizenship Act of 2025 specifies who can receive citizenship by virtue of their birth in the United States, including children born to at least one parent who is either a citizen or national of the US, a lawful permanent resident of the US, or an alien performing active service in the armed forces. This bill only applies to children born after the date of enactment.



M23 rebels patrol in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Wednesday. PTI

Trump talks so much that WH stenographers, everyone else struggling to keep up

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The White House stenographers have a problem. Donald Trump is talking so much, the people responsible for transcribing his public remarks are struggling to keep up with all the words. There were more than 22,000 on Inauguration Day, then another 17,000 when Trump visited disaster sites in North Carolina and California. It's enough to strain the ears and fingers of even the most dedicated stenographer, especially after four years of Joe Biden's relative quiet. Now there are discussions about hiring additional staff to keep up with the workload, according to people with knowledge of the conversations who insisted in anonymity to discuss internal matters. The flood of words is one of the most visible — or audible — shifts from Biden to Trump,

who craves the spotlight and understands better than most politicians that attention is a form of power. He's been speaking nearly nonstop since starting his second term, drowning out dissenting voices and leaving his opponents struggling to be heard. Take Wednesday, for example. During a signing ceremony for legislation to accelerate deportations, Trump, a Republican, talked up his accomplishments, claimed Hamas was using US-funded condoms to make bombs in Gaza, defended his administration's efforts to freeze federal spending and reduce the government workforce, veered through descriptions of migrant violence and made the surprise announcement that Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, would be used as a detention centre for people who are in the US illegally. Trump's commentary remains

laden with falsehoods, including baseless allegations about voter fraud and assertions that California water policies worsened the recent wildfires. Sometimes he speaks off the cuff about consequential geopolitical matters, such as a recent suggestion that Palestinians should be displaced from Gaza while the enclave is rebuilt. It can be hard to know when to take him seriously, like when he muses about serving a third term, which the US Constitution does not allow. But now that Trump is back in the presidency, it's hard to ignore him. "He's dictating the news on his terms," said Michael LaRosa, who worked as a television producer before serving as a spokesperson for former first lady Jill Biden. "He's become America's assignment editor." Most presidents try to start their terms with a bang, seiz-

ing the moment when their influence could be at its peak. However, Trump is in a different league. Biden, a Democrat, spent 2 hours and 36 minutes talking on camera and used 24,259 words in his first week in office four years ago, according to numbers generated by Factbase. Trump's comparable stats: nearly 7 hours and 44 minutes and 81,235 words last week. That's longer than watching the original "Star Wars" trilogy back-to-back-to-back, and more words than "Macbeth," "Hamlet" and "Richard III" combined. It's also much more than when first Trump took office for his first term eight years ago. Back then, he was only on camera talking for 3 hours and 41 minutes and spoke 33,571 words. Trump has spent decades practising the best ways to get people to pay attention to him. As

Trump orders 30k migrant detention facility

Washington (PTI): US President Donald Trump has signed a presidential memorandum to set up a 30,000-person migrant facility at Guantanamo Bay to detain "high-priority criminal aliens." The Guantanamo Bay facility, which has so far been used to hold terrorists, will now also house illegal immigrants with criminal records. The signing took place on Wednesday, with Trump directing the Departments of Defence and Homeland Security to prepare the facility. According to the memorandum, he ordered the expansion of the Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay to accommodate "high-priority criminal aliens" and address related enforcement needs. "Most people don't even know about it."

Challenges galore as Sitharaman, team frame FY26 Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, set to make history with her eighth consecutive Union Budget, has worked tirelessly with key officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, to prepare a budget of over ₹50 lakh crore for FY26. The Budget will have to address several challenges, including decelerating economic growth, falling value of Rupee against the US dollar and moderation in consumption demand. The economic growth is estimated to slow to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY25. This is the lowest growth since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic which hit the world in 2019. Sitharaman, who has steered the Indian economy through many difficult phases, including once-in-a-century pandemic, is again confronted with economic deceleration, moderation in consumption,

stagnant private investment, and an uncertain geopolitical situation. On account of various factors, the rupee plunged to an all-time low of 86.7 per US dollar earlier this month. The team, assisting the Finance Minister to frame Budget proposals for 2025-26, includes Revenue Secretary Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Arunish Chawla, Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju, and Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran. The uphill task before the Finance Minister and her team would be to bolster growth without sacrificing fiscal prudence. The government is also expected to stick to the fiscal glide path of reducing the fiscal deficit to below 4.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product



(GDP) in FY26 amidst various headwinds. Finance Secretary and Revenue Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey: The oldest hand at the finance

ministry who has been involved with the Budget making process since October 2019 when he joined DIPAM as Secretary.

In September last year, Pandey, a 1987-batch IAS officer from Odisha cadre, was appointed the Finance Secretary. The Finance Ministry has six

departments -- Revenue, Economic Affairs, Expenditure, Financial Services, DIPAM and DPE -- and the senior most bureaucrat

in the ministry is designated as the Finance Secretary. He has been credited with divestment of Air India and PSU dividend policy among others during his tenure as DIPAM Secretary. Before serving as Secretary in the DIPAM, Pandey held many significant positions in the Union government and the Odisha government, in addition to serving a stint in the Regional Office of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). Economic Affairs Secretary, Ajay Seth: The second oldest hand at the finance ministry who has in past handled four Budgets since 2021. The Budget division under his departments anchors the entire Budget making process. The balance sheet matching between revenue and expenditure and borrowings are all matched by the Budget division under him. Seth is credited with heading

initiatives such as India's first sovereign green bond issuance, and the creation of the Infrastructure Finance Secretariat. Ensuring that the economy stays on the fiscal glide path while charting out the new strategy of targeting the debt-to-GDP ratio will be some of the items that will be on top of Seth's agenda in the upcoming Budget. Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil: A 1991-batch IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, Govil took charge of the Expenditure department in August 2024. This will be Govil's first stint in Union Budget making and he will have a tough task in giving projections for subsidy in the Budget at a time when rupee is weakening. DIPAM and Department of Public Enterprises Secretary Arunish Chawla, a 1992-batch Bihar cadre IAS officer, took charge in DIPAM and DPE in December 2024.

Russia in talks with India for group visa-free travel

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Russia is in discussions with India for a 'group-free visa regime,' allowing a specified number of tourists travelling together in a group to enter the country without a visa, a Moscow City Tourism Committee official said on Thursday. "When there is a group of tourists travelling together to Russia, the particular number should be mentioned in the document for the visit to become visa free. For example, in the Chinese document, the group should be 10-20 people. The Russian government is in talks with the Indian External Affairs Ministry for a final agreement on the number of people comprising a group from India to avail this facility," Moscow City Tourism Committee Chairman Evgeny Kozlov told PTI. Kozlov further said India is an important country and ranks second in terms of source market among far abroad countries after China. "India is a priority market for us. For us among the far abroad countries, China ranks at the number one position, followed by India. Indians are also good spenders while travelling, spending around USD 2,000 per person per trip," he said on the sidelines of an event on Wednesday evening.



In the first nine months of 2024, January-September, Moscow received 19.7 million guests including 61,000 Indians, he said. "We've been improving tourism infrastructure, second, actively promoting Moscow in our key countries like India. At the same time introducing e-visa regime," he added. Among segments, Kozlov said, Moscow City is focusing on Business, Wedding, Family and Film tourism. Meanwhile, he said, a

delegation of the Moscow City Tourism Committee is in talks with production houses to invite them to shoot in Moscow City. "We want to attract Indian visitors to Moscow through cinema, therefore, our delegates are meeting with production houses and film directors to invite them to showcase Moscow City in their films. We are planning to provide them with incentives, which is still under discussion," Kozlov added.

the tourism image of Moscow our priority. There are three reasons for the increase in international visitors. First, we've been improving tourism infrastructure, second, actively promoting Moscow in our key countries like India. At the same time introducing e-visa regime," he added. Among segments, Kozlov said, Moscow City is focusing on Business, Wedding, Family and Film tourism. Meanwhile, he said, a

GAIL Q3 profit rises 36 per cent on compensation from LNG supplier

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-owned gas utility SGAIL (India) Ltd on Thursday reported a 36 per cent rise in net profit in the December quarter after a one-off gain from compensation received from an overseas LNG supplier for non-delivery of committed cargoes. It posted a standalone net profit of ₹3,867.38 crore in the October-December period of FY25 compared with ₹2,842.62 crore in the year-ago period, India's biggest gas transportation and marketing company said in a stock exchange filing. Revenue from operations was almost unchanged at ₹34,957.76 crore with all three major business segments - natural gas and LPG transportation services, natural gas marketing and petrochemicals-reporting nearly the same revenues as the previous year. The company had an exceptional income of ₹2,440.03 crore as compensation received from a former unit of Russian energy giant Gazprom. GAIL had in December 2023 initiated legal proceedings against SEFE Marketing and Trading Singapore Pte Ltd in the London Court of

International Arbitration for non-delivery of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) under a long-term contract. It sought USD 1.817 billion in compensation for the default in delivery of committed cargoes by SEFE. Earlier this month, it agreed to end the arbitration after SEFE paid USD 285 million (₹2,440.03 crore). GAIL had in 2012 signed a 20-year deal to buy as much as 2.85 million tonnes per annum of LNG with Russian energy giant Gazprom. The deal was signed with Gazprom Marketing and Singapore (GMTS), which at the time was a unit of Gazprom Germania, now called SEFE. The Russian parent gave up ownership of SEFE after western sanctions were imposed on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. SEFE had stopped supplying LNG to the Indian company in June 2022 to meet its own demand. It resumed supplies in March 2023. GAIL had sought damages for the period of non-supply. "Consequent upon settlement agreement dated January 15, 2025 entered with one of the LNG supplier, which includes payment of USD 285 million by LNG supplier to the company towards settlement

of litigation for non-supply of LNG cargoes during FY 2022-23, the company has recognised ₹2,440.03 crore (USD 285 million) as an exceptional income during the quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2024," GAIL said. During the October-December quarter, GAIL's earnings before tax from gas transportation business rose to ₹1,370.29 crore from ₹1,402.81 crore a year back. Natural gas marketing saw a 53 per cent jump to ₹2,880.98 crore. Petrochemical margins, however, shrank to ₹4.68 crore from ₹61.94 crore in the October-December period 2023 and ₹157.49 crore in the preceding quarter of July-September 2024. For the first nine months of the current fiscal year, net profit rose by 39 per cent to ₹9,263.29 crore. The board of directors of the company in their meeting on Thursday declared an interim dividend of ₹6.50 per equity share, amounting to ₹4,273.81 crore. Later, GAIL in a statement said during the quarter under review, the average natural gas transmission volume stood at 125.93 million standard cubic meters per day as against 130.63 mmscmd in Q2 FY25.

SEBI imposes ₹7 lakh fine on Motilal Oswal Financial Services

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Thursday imposed a penalty of Rs seven lakh on Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd for flouting stock broker and depository participant rules. It has been directed to pay the fine within 45 days, according to an order passed by the SEBI. This came after SEBI conducted inspection of the stock broker and depository participant, MotilalOswal Financial Services Ltd, jointly with stock exchanges and depositories for the inspection period from April 2021 to June 2022. In its probe, the regulator found that Motilal Oswal Financial Services did not resolve 26 complaints within a period of 30 days, transferred securities of credit balance clients to "client unpaid securities account", and incorrectly reported Margin Trading Funding (MTF) collaterals to the exchange. Additionally, it had done wrong reporting and short collection of margin on one instance in CM (capital market) segment, on one instance in FO (futures and options) segment and on five instances in currency derivative segment. The regulator noted that 39 clients had traded in June 2022 but these clients were considered as inactive by the broker and their funds were parked aside as on June 2022. "I find that the allegation that the Noticee (Motilal Oswal Financial Services) while setting aside funds of ₹3.50 crore belonging to 39 active clients, has shown incorrect reasons viz. Non-availability of client's bank account and non-traceability of client, stands established," SEBI Adjudicating Officer Amar Navlani said. The regulator said the "Noticee being a SEBI-registered stock broker and depository participant was required to comply with the applicable provisions of securities laws, which it had failed to comply with. Such failure and non-compliances accordingly needs to be dealt with suitable penalty".

Rupee falls nine paise against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee depreciated nine paise to close at 86.64 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by a strong US dollar amid a hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve. Forex traders said the rupee continued to face pressure due to sustained foreign fund outflows and the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.58 and touched a high of 86.56 and a low of 86.65 against the American currency during the session. The local unit settled at 86.64 (provisional), registering a fall of nine paise over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee pared its initial losses to settle

on a positive note, higher by two paise to close at 86.55 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent lower at 107.98. "US dollar gained on the hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve. Fed kept interest rates unchanged at 4.25-4.5 per cent at its Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting on Wednesday," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. The US Fed kept rates on hold but was hawkish in its outlook as it said rates would be held higher for a longer period, downplaying expectations for future rate cuts. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias on strength in the US Dollar and selling pressure from FIIs. Month-end Dollar demand from

importers may also weigh on the rupee," Choudhary added. There is uncertainty over tariffs by the US administration, which may further pressure the rupee. However, any central bank intervention may support the rupee. Traders may take cues from GDP and weekly unemployment claims data from the US. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the Union Budget of February 1 and the RBI's bond buying on Friday, which may lead to volatility, Choudhary added. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.64 per cent to USD 76.09 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 226.85 points, or 0.30 per cent, up at 76,759.81 per cent, while the Nifty rose 86.40 points, or 0.37 per cent, to close at 23,249.50 points.

Markets rally for third day on buying in blue-chips

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Extending the winning run to the third day, benchmark indices - Sensex and Nifty - closed higher on Thursday on buying in heavyweight stocks Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and HDFC Bank. The 30-share Sensex advanced 226.85 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 76,759.81 in a volatile trade. During the day, it surged 429.92 points or 0.56 per cent to 76,962.88. The NSE Nifty went up by 86.40 points or 0.37 per cent to 23,249.50. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, Nestle, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, Hindustan Unilever and HDFC Bank were the biggest gainers. Bajaj Finance climbed nearly



two per cent after the company reported an 18 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to ₹4,308 crore for the December quarter. Tata Motors tanked over seven per cent after the firm reported a 22 per cent fall in consolidated net profit to ₹5,578 crore for the third quarter ended December

2024, impacted by a decline in revenue from its passenger and commercial vehicles divisions. ITC Hotels, Bajaj Finserv, Adani Ports, Tech Mahindra, Zomato and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other laggards. "The Indian markets concluded on a positive note despite fluctuating between gains and losses. The fall in oil

prices due to a rise in US inventories and an ease in US 10-year yield after the US Fed's hawkish view may decelerate FIIs outflow. "The upcoming budget may be seen as an inflection point, which is likely to reverse the current bearish trend if the policies restore growth and consumption," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in positive territory. Markets in Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong were closed due to holidays. European markets were trading in the green. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹2,586.43 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.43 per cent to USD 76.25 a barrel.

TCPL Q3 net profit down 6.5 per cent, revenue up 16.8 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
FMC major Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) on Thursday reported a 6.5 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit to ₹281.92 crore in the third quarter ended on December 2024. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of ₹301.51 crore in the October-December quarter a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from TCPL. Revenue from operations rose by 16.81 per cent to ₹4,443.56 crore during the quarter under review. It was at ₹3,803.92 crore in the year-ago period. TCPL's "India Foods and International business delivered another strong quarter of topline and market share", the company said in its



earning statement. Total expenses of TCPL in the December quarter was at ₹4,087.07 crore, up 22 per cent. Tata Consumer's total income,

which includes other income was at ₹4,495.16 crore, up 16.34 per cent. In the December quarter, TCPL's overall branded

business was up 18.3 per cent to ₹4,026.15 crore. It was at ₹3,403.31 crore in the corresponding quarter last fiscal. TCPL's branded

businesses include tea, coffee, water and other various value-added businesses. Its revenue from the branded business in India was up 19.31 per cent to ₹2,833.68 crore in the December quarter. TCPL's international branded business was up 15.95 per cent to ₹1,192.47 crore. While, its revenue from non-branded business was at ₹446.12 crore, up 8.66 per cent during the quarter. This segment includes TCPL's plantation and extraction business of tea and coffee. Commenting on the results Managing Director & CEO Sunil D'Souza said, "We delivered a topline growth of 17 per cent in Q3 FY25, growth was broad based with strong performance in India Beverages and Foods.

"During the quarter, we recorded robust double digit growth in the India tea business, backed by strong volume growth. There has been continued momentum & market share gain in the India salt business and strong growth in Tata Sampann," he said. TCPL's recent acquisitions-Capital Foods and Organic India performed well and is expanding these businesses in the Food Service and pharma channels respectively. "In India, we continued to strengthen our Sales & Distribution infrastructure with the scale-up of split routes for our salesforce, resulting in significant improvement in range selling. Channels of the future i.e. E-commerce and Modern trade continue to fuel growth momentum," he said.

INBRIEF

REC LIMITED FLAGS OFF MOBILE MEDICAL UNITS FUNDED WITH ₹4.29 CRORE IN PUNJAB

CHANDIGARH: REC Limited, a Maharashtra CPSE, under its flagship CSR initiative Mobile Medical Units has committed ₹4.29 crore for the procurement and deployment of four Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) in four districts of Punjab.

IP UNIVERSITY ONLINE ADMISSION PROCESS TO BEGIN FROM FEBRUARY 1

NEW DELHI: Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIPU) has announced the admission process for over 40,000 seats in various undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD programs in 106 affiliated colleges and 18 university schools for the academic session 2025-26.

JANUARY READS

EXPLAINING THE GRAND RITUAL OF MOKSHA



The book is a radical journey of the Naga sadhus, the traditions of the akharas, and the timeless practices of devotion, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**



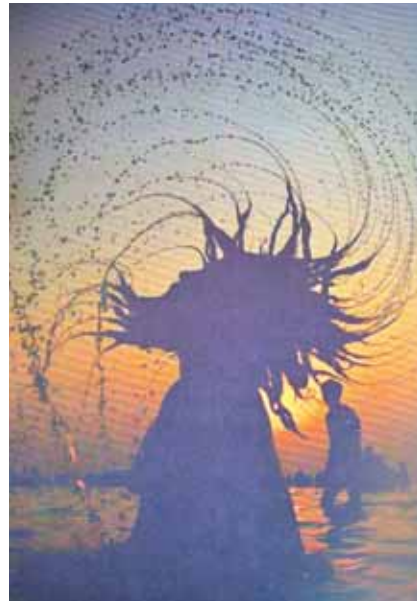
Taking you through the world's largest congregation of the Kumbh Mela, the book *The Divine Kumbh: Echoes of Eternity: Ganga, Shipra, Godavari, and Sangam* takes you through the different mythologies, meanings, and history that revolves around this biggest Hindu gathering.

Deepak Kumar Sen's book explores life at the Kumbh Mela, where millions of devotees unite at India's sacred rivers every 12 years. The book is richly illustrated with beautiful and soulful pictures that unravel ancient mythology, dynamic rituals, and deep spirituality. The book has chapters that take you through the *akharas*, the life of aesthetic monks, and their traditions and practices. The chapter on the *Juna* and *Nirmohi akharas* is a deep dive into the traditions, lineages, and formations of these akharas. Because of the numerous tales surrounding them, many people attend the Mela to see the procession of the *Naga sadhus*, which are said to exit the mela unknowingly after the snan. Travellers from all over the world swarm to the Kumbh Mela to see the extraordinary presence of *Naga babas* meditating and carrying out various rites. The *Naga sadhus* are a talk that is very excitedly shared among the people, about

ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: *The Divine Kumbh: Echoes of Eternity: Ganga, Shipra, Godavari, and Sangam*
 Author: Deepak Kumar Sen
 Publisher: Niyogi Books Private Limited
 Price: ₹695 Pages: 180

their lives and where they live. The book provides detailed insights into the life and actions of *Naga sadhus*, the reasons why they stay naked, and much more stepping into their world. The book also takes you through the relationship between the moksha and the Kumbh, explaining the cycle of life and death. The notable chapter of the book is about the *Shahi Snan* which talks about the royal bathing done by the saints that is associated with bathing of different akharas on specific days of the Kumbh mela. The pages in the book take you through various camps formed for the *Nirvana Naga Gosains, Niranjani, Bairagis*, and the other three. According to the event timetable, the *Purna (full) Kumbh Mela* is held on the banks of a river once every twelve years in four locations: *Prayag (Allahabad),*



Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik. It is based on the movement of planets. Haridwar and Prayag host the *Ardh (half) Kumbh Mela* every six years. According to *Sen*, the precise zodiacal positions of the Sun, Moon, and planet Jupiter, kumbh is celebrated at these locations. The venue for the next Kumbh Mela is chosen at the holiest time, occurring at the exact moment when these zodiacal conditions are fulfilled. The book provides a comprehensive insight into the essence of the Mela. It beautifully bridges the ancient heritage with modern innovations, showcasing how the *Kumbh* is a global phenomenon while retaining its spiritual core. The main attraction of the book is the vivid imagery beautifully being a double spreader on the pages between the writeups. The images give a beautiful representation of the written history and truth that define this iconic event. *The Divine Kumbh* invites readers on a profound journey to experience the magic, faith, and cultural richness of one of humanity's most enduring spiritual traditions. The book is a must-read for those wishing to connect with the soul of India and understand the unparalleled significance of the *Kumbh Mela*.

Book: *Global Tumult: India as a Pole Star*
 Author: Sujan Chinoy
 Publisher: Rupa Publication
 Price: ₹395

Book: *Brain On!*
 Author: Deb Smolensky
 Publisher: Rupa Publication
 Price: ₹295

Book: *A Stitch in Time: The Biba Story*
 Author: Meena Bindra
 Publisher: Rupa Publication
 Price: ₹595

Book: *Carnival: A Novel*
 Author: Sayam Bandyopadhyay
 Translated by Arunava Sinha
 Publisher: Aleph Book Company
 Price: ₹499

Book: *Raj Yoga: Freedom Awaits*
 Author: Shivani Singh
 Publisher: Om Books International
 Price: ₹1,295

Sacred Art of the Ramayana

Dr. Rooplekha Chauhan's *Ram Viraje Rangon Mein* is a vibrant artistic exploration of the Ramayana through Madhubani art

Dr Rooplekha Chauhan's *Ram Viraje Rangon Mein* is a stunning and evocative visual and spiritual journey through the epic narrative of the Ramcharitmanas. Drawing creative inspiration from her lifelong devotion to Lord Shri Ram, Chauhan blends her mastery of Madhubani art with the profound wisdom of the Ramayana to create a series of paintings that transcend mere aesthetics. Published by Prabhat Publications, this book is both an artistic homage and a devotional offering of a sacred heart to her deity. The preface introduces this beautiful book as "a series of paintings" that depict the major episodes of the Ramcharitmanas through Madhubani art, making it a priceless possession for sadhakas and devotees of Lord Rama. The painter in Dr Chauhan writes, "My colours and my brush became the medium of my spiritual practice, worship, and prayer." The creative brushwork of the artist moves sequentially through pivotal moments of Lord Ram's life, starting with Goswami Tulsidas and culminating in Ram's coronation and the Ashwamedha Yagna. Through this artistic journey, Dr Chauhan articulates her personal spiritual growth, stating that the project brought her "immense mental peace and strength." Dr Rooplekha Chauhan's paintings capture the essence of Lord Ram's life with a unique blend of devotion and artistry. Episodes such as Sita's Swayamvar, the rescue of Ahalya, and the Agni Pariksha are rendered with

intricate designs, vibrant colours, and deep symbolism. The Madhubani style, known for its geometric patterns and vivid hues, serves as a perfect medium to narrate these divine stories. As Dr Chauhan points out, these paintings are "not just paintings, but also have valuable messages inherent in them, which silently communicate between the literate and the illiterate." The book highlights a fusion of artistic styles and the cultural heritage of Lord Rama. While deeply steeped in traditional Madhubani art, Chauhan also incorporates elements of Gond art. This innovative approach enriches the visual narrative, providing a fresh perspective on the timeless tale. The paintings follow a chronological order, beginning with the divine birth of Lord Ram, moving through his formative years, exile and eventual return to Ayodhya. The artist's ability to depict the emotional intensity of scenes like Sita's abduction or Jatayu's sacrifice brings a narrative coherence to the series, making it more than just a collection of isolated artworks. Chauhan shares her personal journey from a medical professional to an artist deeply immersed in spirituality. After retiring as Dean of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Medical College, she rediscovered her childhood passion for art. Her decision to focus on Madhubani paintings of Ramcharitmanas episodes reflects her desire to merge her artistic talents with her spiritual inclinations. The book also documents the

recognition Chauhan's work has received at national and international forums. Her participation in the Second and Third International Ramayana Conferences highlights the universal appeal of her art, which transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries. The book artistically captures many significant themes and episodes from the Ramayana. For instance, in the 'Kaushalya's Vision' section, the celestial form of baby Ram, as revealed to Mother Kaushalya, is depicted with breathtaking intricacy, emphasising the divine nature of the protagonist. Similarly, in the section of Sita's Swayamvar, the artist has brought this pivotal moment to life through vibrant depictions of the assembly, reflecting the grandeur and sanctity of

ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: *Ram Viraje Rangon Mein*
 Author: Dr. Rooplekha Chauhan
 Publisher: Prabhat Publications
 Price: ₹2,500

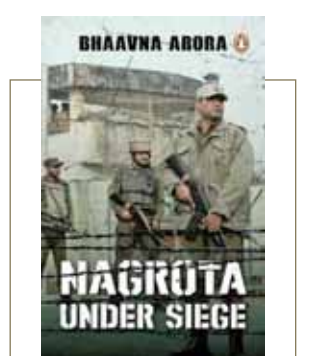
the event. In the section of Agni Pariksha, the artist in Chauhan captures the emotional turmoil of this episode and offers a poignant visual interpretation of Sita's resilience and purity. Lastly, in the section of Ashwamedha Yagna, the culmination of Lord Ram's earthly journey is presented as a symbolic assertion of dharma and the fulfilment of divine purpose. Dr Rooplekha Chauhan's work exemplifies the transformative power of art. Her paintings, while visually captivating, also resonate with a deeper spiritual message. The detailed brushwork and use of traditional motifs pay homage to the rich cultural heritage of India. Additionally, the autobiographical notes add a personal dimension, allowing readers to connect with the artist's inner journey. To sum up, *Ram Viraje Rangon Mein* is a vibrant testimony to Dr Rooplekha Chauhan's devotion, artistic talent, and cultural consciousness. It serves as both a visual feast for art enthusiasts and a spiritual guide for devotees of Lord Ram. As Chauhan aptly remarks, "The fame of Shri Ram is eternal and infinite, yet the human intellect has moulded it in its own form." This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the intersection of art, spirituality, and Indian cultural traditions. — About the reviewer: Dr Shaleen Kumar Singh heads the Department of English at Swami Shukdevanand College, Shahjahanpur (UP) and can be contacted at shaleen@sscollegespn.ac.in

A Gripping Tribute to Valor and Sacrifice

By **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

In the book "Nagrota Under Siege" Bhaavna Arora has managed to provide the readers with a poignant account of the terrorist attack on the Nagrota Army base in Jammu and Kashmir. It blends emotional eloquence with factual accuracy and completely expresses the deep impacts of the place on Arora's mind. The author does not simply tell a story; for her, the clash and the impact on the lives of soldiers' families is the real and sad reality. The author vividly details the events surrounding the attack and manages to sort of 'bring the document to life' by making it a part of the narrative rather than just an add on feature. Within the brutal context of the situation, one can witness the sheer bravery of people like Major Akshay Girish, who Arora makes the centre of attention

in the story. The psyche of their family, portrayed with deep insanity, shows the struggles of people not actively participating in the war. The author's way of voicing the sentiments of people is exceptional, and so is his investigative insight. There is no attempt of revealing crude realities, and that is why it stands to be a brilliant



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: *Nagrota Under Siege*
 Author: Bhaavna Arora
 Publisher: Penguin
 Price: ₹299

tribute to the soldiers. This fervent tribute to our troops is crisp and sans any flourishes. It's nothing short of a screenplay that can very well form another actioner highlighting the sheer grit, determination, sacrifice, and most importantly, patriotism of Indian armed forces. The non-linear narrative follows the attack by three Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) militants on an army unit in Nagrota (Jammu and Kashmir) on 29 November 2016. The deadly attack leads to numerous gun fights and the army neutralising all three militants. But the hostage situation leads seven soldiers, including two officers of senior rank, to martyrdom. The extensive interviews, real photos (provided by personnel and families), and back stories that are simultaneously heartwarming and gut-wrenching, make this novel an addition to an illustrious library of tributes to our armed forces.

WORLD BOOK FAIR 2025



For over five decades, the New Delhi World Book Fair (NDWBF) has been a destination for readers, writers, and publishers alike. As it celebrates its 52nd year, the fair promises an even grander experience from 1st to 9th February 2025 at the newly constructed halls (2-6) in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. Whether you're hunting for rare finds, exploring new releases, or simply soaking in the literary atmosphere, this is the place to be. Step into a world where every page holds a story waiting to be discovered!

For the Convenience of Rail passengers during KUMBH MELA-2025, Railways are operating several Special Trains in addition to regular trains. The date wise list of Special Trains is given below:-

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 01.02.2025 (SATURDAY)						
Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station To	Arr. Time	Stoppages	
04210	Prayagraj Sangam	11:15	Jaunpur	14:00	Prayag, Phaphamau, Phulpur, Janghai & Mariahu Stations	
04209	Jaunpur	14:15	Prayagraj Sangam	17:15		
04202	Prayagraj Sangam	12:20	Alamnagar	17:00	Prayag Jn., Kunda Harnamganj, Unchahar Jn., Rae Bareilly, Bachhrawan & Utraitia Jn. Stations	
04201	Alamnagar	19:15	Prayagraj Sangam	23:25		
04206	Prayagraj Sangam	13:30	Ayodhya Cantt.	17:00	Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn. & Sultanpur stations	
04205	Ayodhya Cantt.	08:45	Prayagraj Sangam	12:15		
04228	Ayodhya Dham Jn.	16:45	Prayagraj	21:50	Ayodhya Cantt, Bharatkund, Kurebhar, Sultanpur, Chilibila Jn., Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh & Phaphamau Jn. Stations.	
04274	Jaunpur Jn.	18:40	Phaphamau Jn.	22:20	Zafarabad Jn., Mariahu, Janghai Jn. & Phulpur Stations.	
04292	Lucknow Jn.	14:00	Prayagraj	19:55	Utraitia Jn., Mohanlalganj, Bachhrawan, Rae Bareilly Jn., Unchahar Jn., Pariawan Kalakankar Road, Garhi Manikpur, Lalgalganj & Phaphamau Jn. Stations.	
04251	Prayag Jn.	20:30	Ayodhya Cantt.	23:55		
04252	Ayodhya Cantt.	15:45	Prayag Jn.	19:55	Phaphamau Jn., Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn. & Sultanpur stations	
04253	Phaphamau Jn.	11:15	Ayodhya Cantt.	14:45		
04254	Ayodhya Cantt.	06:15	Phaphamau Jn.	10:15	Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn. & Sultanpur stations	
04255	Prayag Jn. (Ring Rail)	05:35	Prayag Jn. (Ring Rail)	21:30	Phaphamau, Mau Aмма, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh, Chilibila, Khundaur, Sultanpur, Kurebhar, Khajurhat, Bharatkund, Ayodhya Cantt, Salarpur, Sohwal, Deorakot, Baragaon, Rudauli, Rauzagaon, Patraaga, Daryabad, Saidkhanpur, Safadarganj, Rasauli, Barabanki, Safedabad, Malhour, Lucknow, Utraitia, Mohanlalganj, Kankaha, Nigohan, Shrirajnagar, Bachhrawan, Kuneanganj, Harchandpur, Gangaganj, Rae Bareilly, Rupamau, Fursatganj, Jais, Bani, Gauriganj, Talakhajuri, Amethi, Misrauli, Maa Chandika Devi Dham Antu, Jagesharganj, Chilibila, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh, Shandeve Dham Bishnathganj, Mau Aamma, Siwaith & Phaphamau Stations	
04065	Phaphamau Jn.	23:30	Delhi Jn.	13:40	Rae Bareilly Jn., Lucknow, Hardoi, Shahjehanpur, Bareilly, Rampur, Moradabad, Amroha, Gajraula Jn., Garhmuktesar, Hapur, & Ghaziabad Stations	
04408	Delhi Jn.	23:25	Phaphamau Jn.	14:15	Ghaziabad, Hapur, Garhmuktesar, Gajraula Jn., Amroha, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Shahjehanpur, Hardoi, Lucknow & Rae Bareilly Jn. Stations	
02417	Subedarganj	21:35	Delhi Jn.	08:55		
02418	Delhi Jn.	09:30	Subedarganj	19:40	Fatehpur, Govindpuri, Etawah Jn., Tundia Jn & Aligarh Jn. Stations	
05011	Gorakhpur Jn.	14:30	Ayodhya Cantt.	19:35	Sahjanwa, Maghar, Khalilabad, Basti, Babhnan, S Narayan Chhapiya, Maskanwa, Mankapur Jn., & Ayodhya Dham Jn.	
05012	Ayodhya Cantt.	21:50	Gorakhpur Jn.	04:30	Ayodhya Dham Jn., Mankapur Jn., Maskanwa, S Narayan Chhapiya, Babhnan, Basti, Khalilabad, Maghar & Sahjanwa, Stations	
05078	Gonda Jn.	21:40	Ayodhya Dham Jn.	23:50	Barua Chak, Motiganj, Jhilahi, Mankapur Jn., Tikri, Nawabganj Gonda, Katra & Ramghat Halt Stations	
04117	Prayagraj Jn.	22:20	Ayodhya Cantt.	03:30		
04118	Ayodhya Cantt.	05:15	Prayagraj Jn.	10:15	Prayag, Phaphamau Jn., Mau Aamma, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh & Sultanpur Stations	
04111	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	06:00	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	18:50	Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Goshainganj, Ayodhya Dham, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn., Mau Aamma, Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations	
04112	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	06:30	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	21:00		
04113	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	17:30	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	07:45	Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Goshainganj, Ayodhya Dham, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn., Mau Aamma, Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations	
04114	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	17:45	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	08:00		
04120	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	13:30	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	04:00	Prayag, Phaphamau Jn., Mau Aamma, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn., Sultanpur, Ayodhya Cantt., Ayodhya Dham, Gushaiganj, Akbarpur, Shahganj Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Zafarabad Jn., Mariahu, Janghai Jn., Bhadohi, Banaras, Madhosingh Gyanpur Road, Handia Khas, Jhusi & Prayagraj Rambag Stations	
05312	Kathgodam	13:50	Jhusi Jn.	13:00	Haldwani, Lalkua Jn., Kichha, Baheri, Bhojipura Jn., Pilibhit Jn., Purnapur, Mailani, Gola Gokaranath, Lakhimpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Mau Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi & Banaras Stations	
05314	Kasganj	19:50	Jhusi Jn.	17:45	Soron Shukar Kshetra, Ujhani, Badaun, Bareilly Jn., Bareilly City, Izzatnagar Jn., Bhojipura Jn., Pilibhit Jn., Purnapur, Mailani, Gola Gokaranath, Lakhimpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Mau Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi & Banaras Stations	
05286	Jhusi Jn.	17:45	Jaynagar	10:15	Gyanpur Road, Varanasi, Aunrihar Jn., Ghazipur City, Ballia, Chhapra, Dighwara, Sonpur Jn., Hajipur Jn., Muzaffarpur Jn., Dholi, Samastipur Jn., Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn. & Madhubani Stations	
05004	Gorakhpur Jn.	21:30	Jhusi Jn.	06:00	Chauri Chaura, Gauri Bazar, Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Salempur Jn., Belthara Road, Mau Jn., Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations	

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 02.02.2025 (SUNDAY)						
Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station To	Arr. Time	Stoppages	
04210	Prayagraj Sangam	11:15	Jaunpur	14:00	Prayag, Phaphamau, Phulpur, Janghai & Mariahu Stations	
04209	Jaunpur	14:15	Prayagraj Sangam	17:15		
04202	Prayagraj Sangam	12:20	Alamnagar	17:00	Prayag Jn., Kunda Harnamganj, Unchahar Jn., Rae Bareilly, Bachhrawan & Utraitia Jn. Stations	
04201	Alamnagar	19:15	Prayagraj Sangam	23:25		
04206	Prayagraj Sangam	13:30	Ayodhya Cantt.	17:00	Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn. & Sultanpur Stations	
04205	Ayodhya Cantt.	08:45	Prayagraj Sangam	12:15		
04222	Ayodhya Dham Jn.	10:10	Prayagraj	15:45	Ayodhya Cantt, Bharatkund, Kurebhar, Sultanpur, Chilibila Jn., Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh & Phaphamau Jn. Stations.	
04228	Ayodhya Dham Jn.	16:45	Prayagraj	21:50	Ayodhya Cantt, Bharatkund, Kurebhar, Sultanpur, Chilibila Jn., Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh & Phaphamau Jn. Stations.	
04274	Jaunpur Jn.	18:40	Phaphamau Jn.	22:20	Zafarabad Jn., Mariahu, Janghai Jn. & Phulpur Stations.	
04292	Lucknow Jn.	14:00	Prayagraj	19:55	Utraitia Jn., Mohanlalganj, Bachhrawan, Rae Bareilly Jn., Unchahar Jn., Pariawan Kalakankar Road, Garhi Manikpur, Lalgalganj & Phaphamau Jn. Stations.	
04251	Prayag Jn.	20:30	Ayodhya Cantt.	23:55		
04252	Ayodhya Cantt.	15:45	Prayag Jn.	19:55	Phaphamau Jn., Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn. & Sultanpur stations	
04253	Phaphamau Jn.	11:15	Ayodhya Cantt.	14:45		
04254	Ayodhya Cantt.	06:15	Phaphamau Jn.	10:15	Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn. & Sultanpur stations	
04255	Prayag Jn. (Ring Rail)	05:35	Prayag Jn. (Ring Rail)	21:30	Phaphamau, Mau Aamma, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh, Chilibila, Khundaur, Sultanpur, Kurebhar, Khajurhat, Bharatkund, Ayodhya Cantt, Salarpur, Sohwal, Deorakot, Baragaon, Rudauli, Rauzagaon, Patraaga, Daryabad, Saidkhanpur, Safadarganj, Rasauli, Barabanki, Safedabad, Malhour, Lucknow, Utraitia, Mohanlalganj, Kankaha, Nigohan, Shrirajnagar, Bachhrawan, Kuneanganj, Harchandpur, Gangaganj, Rae Bareilly, Rupamau, Fursatganj, Jais, Bani, Gauriganj, Talakhajuri, Amethi, Misrauli, Maa Chandika Devi Dham Antu, Jagesharganj, Chilibila, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh, Shandeve Dham Bishnathganj, Mau Aamma, Siwaith & Phaphamau Stations	
04407	Phaphamau Jn.	23:30	Delhi Jn.	13:40	Rae Bareilly Jn., Lucknow, Hardoi, Shahjehanpur, Bareilly, Rampur, Moradabad, Amroha, Gajraula Jn., Garhmuktesar, Hapur & Ghaziabad Stations	
02418	Delhi Jn.	09:30	Subedarganj	19:40	Fatehpur, Govindpuri, Etawah Jn., Tundia Jn & Aligarh Jn. Stations	
05011	Gorakhpur Jn.	14:30	Ayodhya Cantt.	19:35	Sahjanwa, Maghar, Khalilabad, Basti, Babhnan, S Narayan Chhapiya, Maskanwa, Mankapur Jn., & Ayodhya Dham Jn.	
05012	Ayodhya Cantt.	21:50	Gorakhpur Jn.	04:30	Ayodhya Dham Jn., Mankapur Jn., Maskanwa, S Narayan Chhapiya, Babhnan, Basti, Khalilabad, Maghar & Sahjanwa, Stations	
05078	Gonda Jn.	21:40	Ayodhya Dham Jn.	23:50	Barua Chak, Motiganj, Jhilahi, Mankapur Jn., Tikri, Nawabganj Gonda, Katra & Ramghat Halt Stations	
05077	Ayodhya Dham Jn.	00:45	Gonda Jn.	03:30		
04117	Prayagraj Jn.	22:20	Ayodhya Cantt.	03:30		
04118	Ayodhya Cantt.	05:15	Prayagraj Jn.	10:15	Prayag, Phaphamau Jn., Mau Aamma, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh & Sultanpur Stations	
04111	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	06:00	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	18:50	Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Goshainganj, Ayodhya Dham, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn., Mau Aamma, Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations	
04112	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	06:30	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	21:00		
04113	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	17:30	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	07:45	Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Goshainganj, Ayodhya Dham, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn., Mau Aamma, Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations	
04114	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	17:45	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	08:00		
04120	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	13:30	Prayagraj Jn. (Ring Rail)	04:00	Prayag, Phaphamau Jn., Mau Aamma, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratappgarh Jn., Sultanpur, Ayodhya Cantt., Ayodhya Dham, Gushaiganj, Akbarpur, Shahganj Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Zafarabad Jn., Mariahu, Janghai Jn., Bhadohi, Banaras, Madhosingh Gyanpur Road, Handia Khas, Jhusi & Prayagraj Rambag Stations	
05177	Gorakhpur Jn.	15:00	Jhusi Jn.	01:00	Chauri Chaura, Gauri Bazar, Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Salempur Jn., Belthara Road, Mau Jn., Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations	
05179	Gorakhpur Jn.	10:30	Jhusi Jn.	19:50		
05180	Jhusi Jn.	23:00	Gorakhpur Jn.	08:30	Chauri Chaura, Gauri Bazar, Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Salempur Jn., Belthara Road, Mau Jn., Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations	
05185	Gorakhpur Jn.	20:30	Prayagraj Rambag	05:30	Chauri Chaura, Gauri Bazar, Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Salempur Jn., Belthara Road, Mau Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road, Handia Khas & Jhusi Stations	
05129	Chhapra	18:30	Jhusi Jn.	02:25	Suraimanpur, Sahatwar, Bansdih Road, Ballia, Phephna Jn., Chit Baragaon, Karimuddin Pur, Yusufpur, Ghazipur City, Nandganj, Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations	
05163	Thawe Jn.	15:30	Jhusi Jn.	02:45	Gopalganj, Manjagarh, Ratan Sarai, Sidhwalia, Dighwa Dubauli, Rajapatti, Masrakh, Sham Kauria, Marhaura, Paterhi, Khairah, Chhapra Kacheri, Chhapra, Suraimanpur, Sahatwar, Bansdih Road, Ballia, Phephna Jn., Chit Baragaon, Karimuddin Pur, Yusufpur, Ghazipur City, Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi Jn. Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations.	
05125	Chhapra	10:05	Prayagraj Rambag	18:35	Suraimanpur, Sahatwar, Bansdih Road, Ballia, Phephna Jn., Chit Baragaon, Karimuddin Pur, Yusufpur, Ghazipur City, Nandganj, Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road, Handia Khas & Jhusi Jn. Stations	
05126	Prayagraj Rambag	21:55	Chhapra	06:30		
05121	Dohrighat	08:00	Prayagraj Rambag	16:45	Muradpur (Halt), Amila, Ghosi, Kopaganj, Indara Jn., Mau Jn., Paniara, Pipri Dih, Naik Dih, Dullahapur, Jakhnian, Hurmujpur Halt, Sadat, Mahpur, Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road, Handia Khas & Jhusi Stations	
05122	Prayagraj Rambag	21:45	Dohrighat	06:00		
05101	Azamgarh	22:45	Jhusi Jn.	05:20	Sidhari Halt, Sathiaon, Muhammadabad, Khurahat, Paligarh, Mau Jn, Paniara, Pipri Dih, Naik Dih, Dullahapur, Jakhnian, Hurmujpur Halt, Sadat, Mahpur, Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations	
05159	Bhatni Jn.	21:00	Jhusi Jn.	03:30	Peokol, Salempur Jn., Lar Road, Turtipar, Belthara Road, Gobindpur Dugli, Kirihapur, Chakra Road, Indara Jn., Mau Jn., Dullahapur, Jakhnian, Sadat, Aunrihar Jn., Bhojipura Jn., Baheri, Kichha, Lalkua Jn. & Haldwani Stations	
05311	Jhusi Jn.	15:00	Kathgodam	13:55	Banaras, Varanasi, Varanasi City, Mau Jn., Bhatni Jn., Deoria Sadar, Gorakhpur Jn., Basti, Gonda Jn., Sitapur Jn., Lakhimpur, Gola Gokaranath, Mailani, Purnapur, Pilibhit Jn., Bhojipura Jn., Baheri, Kichha, Lalkua Jn. & Haldwani Stations	
05313	Jhusi Jn.	19:45	Kasganj	18:00	Banaras, Varanasi, Varanasi City, Mau Jn., Bhatni Jn., Deoria Sadar, Gorakhpur Jn., Basti, Gonda Jn., Sitapur Jn., Lakhimpur, Gola Gokaranath, Mailani, Purnapur, Pilibhit Jn., Bhojipura Jn., Baheri, Kichha, Lalkua Jn. & Haldwani Stations	
05004	Gorakhpur Jn.	21:30	Jhusi Jn.	06:00	Chauri Chaura, Gauri Bazar, Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Salempur Jn., Belthara Road, Mau Jn., Aunrihar Jn., Varanasi City, Varanasi, Banaras, Madhosingh, Gyanpur Road & Handia Khas Stations	
05003	Jhusi	07:45	Gorakhpur Jn.	16:25		
07109	Narasapur	06:00	Banaras	15:45	Bhimavaram Jn., Tanuku, Nidadavolu Jn., Rajamundry, Samalkot Jn., Annavaram, Elamanchili, Anakapalle, Duvvada, Pendurti, Kottavalasa, Vizianagaram Jn., Bobbili, Parvatipuram, Rayagada, Muniguda, Kesinga, Titagarh, Balangir, Barghar Road, Sambalpur Jn., Jharsuguda Jn., Rourkela, Hatia, Ranchi, Muri Jn., Barka Kana, Tori, Latehar, Barwadih Jn., Daltonganj, Garwa Road Jn., Japla, Son Nagar, Dehri On Sone, Sasaram, Bhabua Road, Chandauli Mjhrw, Pt.deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Keshi & Varanasi Stations	

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Tata Steel Chess: Gukesh beats Warmerdam to stay in lead

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

World champion D Gukesh defeated Dutch Grandmaster Max Warmerdam to stay in sole lead on 7.5 points at the end of the 10th round of Tata Steel Chess tournament here. It was another eventful day for Gukesh who is now closing in on the 2800-rating barrier. The victory with black came easily when Warmerdam missed the line after being level for quite some time. It was a closed Sicilian where Gukesh knocked down a couple of pawns to force resignation in 34 moves. The youngest world champion is a half point ahead of nearest rival Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. Holding the sole third spot is R Praggnanandhaa on 6.5 points after a finely crafted victory over Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia. Arjun Erigaisi's hunt for an elusive victory continued for the 10th day running as he drew with Vincent Keymer of Germany. P Harikrishna defended a slightly worse rook endgame to hold his fort against top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States, while Leon Luke Mendonca played out a draw with Anish Giri.

Praggnanandhaa came up with a dominating performance against Fedoseev who chose the Tarrasch defense as black. The opening saw Praggnanandhaa getting a structural advantage and he nurtured it quite well in the middle game. The game was devoid of drama towards the end as Praggnanandhaa sacrificed all his pawns to make a new queen on board. The calculation was perfect and it was all over in 48 moves. Keymer showcased his opening preparation to hold Erigaisi easily. The closed Ruy Lopez did not put up enough challenge and Keymer sacrificed a pawn early to maintain parity. Erigaisi had to give the pawn back in the middle game and the position just petered out to be level. Harikrishna had to face some stiff resistance against Caruana who played black. Down a pawn in the rook and pawns endgame, Harikrishna made use of his remaining resources and drew after 68 moves. In the Challengers' section, R Vaishali went down fighting against tournament leader Nguyen Thai Van Dai of the Czech Republic while Divya Deshmukh lost another game in the event

against Frederik Svane of Germany. Vaishali, on five points, shares the ninth spot and Divya, on two, is on 13th spot in the 14-players round-robin tournament. Just three rounds remain in the first major of the year. **Results: Round 10:** Masters: Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 3) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 5); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 6.5) beat Vladimir Fedoseev (6); Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5) lost to D Gukesh (Ind, 7.5); P Harikrishna (4.5) drew with Fabiano Caruana (USA, 5.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 5.5) drew with Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 4); Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 3) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4); Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 7) beat Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5).

Challengers: Nguyen Thai Van Dam (Cze, 7.5) beat R Vaishali (Ind, 5); Divya Deshmukh (2) lost to Frederik Svane (Ger, 6); Yakubboev Nodirbek (Uzb, 5) drew with Benjamin Bok (Ned, 6.5); Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 4.5) beat Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1); Suleymanli Aydin (Aze, 6.5) beat Nogerbek Kazymbek (Kaz, 5); Miaoyi Lu (Chn, 5.5) drew with Ediz Gurel (Tur, 5.5); Erwin LAMi (Ned, 7) beat Faustino Oro (Arg, 2.5).



Niko Kovac will take over as new coach: Borussia Dortmund



PTI ■ DORTMUND

Niko Kovac will be the new coach of Borussia Dortmund as last season's Champions League runner-up looks to rescue a troubled season. The former Bayern Munich and Monaco coach will start work Sunday. Dortmund's managing director for sport Lars Ricken told broadcaster DAZN following the team's 3-1 win over Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League on Wednesday. "We have reached an agreement in principle. He will take over the team on Sunday," Ricken told DAZN, and said Dortmund would discuss potential signings with Kovac before the transfer window closes Monday. Youth team coach Mike Tullberg oversaw Wednesday's game Dortmund's first win of the new year in all competitions — and will remain in his interim head coach role for Saturday's Bundesliga game at Heidenheim, Ricken said. Kovac takes over a team which is 11th in the Bundesliga and is heading for a playoff in the Champions League after finishing 10th in the 36-team league phase. Nuri Sahin was fired last week following a 2-1 loss at Bologna. It's the first job for Kovac since he was fired as coach of Wolfsburg in March. Born in Berlin, Kovac played international soccer for Croatia and coached the Croatian national team from 2013 to 2015.

Narmada clinches gold in women's 10m air rifle

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Former World Cup winner Narmada Nithin Raju overcame a strong field, which included Asian Games medallist Ramita Jindal and Olympian Elavenil Valarivan, to not just create a national record but miss equalling the world mark by a fraction of a point on her way to clinching gold in the women's 10m air rifle event at the 38th National Games here on Thursday. Narmada, representing Tamil Nadu, clinched the top podium finish with a score of 254.4, beating back the challenge from Maharashtra's Arya Borse (252.5) and Ramita (230.4) in the eight-shooter final. In the process, she broke the national mark of 252.9 set by Olympian Apurvi Chandel at the 2019 World Cup in New Delhi. The world record in the event is 254.5 points, set by Huang Yuting of China at last year's ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi. This was 23-year-old Narmada's third-biggest career achievement in the event after she had won the 10m air rifle mixed team gold partnering Rudranksh Patil at the 2023 Cairo World Cup and bagging a bronze at the World Cup in Bhopal the same year. Self-assured and in total control of her nerves, Narmada, who was third at the end of the qualification round on Wednesday, shot a string of superb scores to stamp her authority over her more illustrious rivals in the final. She consistently shot high scores with three of her shots achieving maximum impact of 10.9, while another two shots in the 24-shot final fetched her 10.8. She didn't go below 10 in any of her 24 shots in the final. Maharashtra's Arya Borse, 22, too enjoyed a great outing and, on any other day would have clinched