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Inside

**MONEY 10**  
EV FIRMS AGREE TO END  
SUBSIDY AFTER EXISTING  
SUBSIDY REGIME ENDS: GOYAL

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Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## GRAP III INVOKED

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As the air quality index plummeted to very poor at 371, the Commission of Air Quality Management (CAQM) invoked stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) with immediate effect, amid a rise in air pollution. As part of the Stage 3 of the GRAP, for private vehicle owners who still drive in a BS 3 petrol car or a BS 4 diesel car, driving the vehicles in Delhi and NCR districts is out of bounds with immediate effect. However, people with disabilities are exempt from these restrictions. Moreover, non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards are banned in the capital. The national capital, battling

### WEATHER

AQI	371
MAX	21.2°C
MIN	7°C

smog and poor air quality since the beginning of winter, ranked third among the world's most polluted capitals in Friday's live rankings by Swiss group IQAir. Meanwhile, over 500 flight services were delayed at Delhi airport and dozens of trains were affected across North India as the harsh winter chill has tightened its grip on north India, including Delhi, with dense fog blanketing the region and temperatures plunging further. According to Flightradar24 data, about 145 arrivals were delayed at

the national capital's airport. Moreover, about 394 departures were also delayed at this airport. The number of delayed flights is expected to increase further. The minimum temperature was recorded at 7 degree Celsius while the maximum temperature stood at 21.2 degree Celsius in Delhi. Palam recorded the maximum temperature of 17.2 degree Celsius while the minimum temperature stood at 6.6 degree Celsius. According to forecasts from the India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, the air quality situation is predicted to deteriorate further owing to unfavourable meteorological conditions.

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## CBI need not seek state consent: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a big win for Central Bureau of Investigation, the Supreme Court has said the CBI does not require the permission of State Governments to register an FIR against Central Government officials posted in the different jurisdictions of States. A bench comprising Justices CT Ravikumar and Rajesh Bindal on January 2 overturned the Andhra Pradesh High Court's order quashing the CBI investigations against two government employees over corruption. CBI is governed by Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act of 1946. According to this archaic Act, CBI needs "General Consent" from each State to start probe. Due to this provision, even in Central Government offices, CBI can't enter and many Opposition party ruled States denied "General Consent" to CBI, which is empowered to probe against corruption in Central Government offices. "Irrespective of the place of posting, the aforesaid factual position would go onto show that they were Central government employees undertaking government employees and allegedly committed serious offence under PC Act, which is a central act," said the Order of the top court, giving free hand to CBI. The case stemmed from the CBI FIRs against the Central Government employees



working in Andhra Pradesh. They had challenged the CBI's jurisdiction in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, arguing the general consent granted to the CBI under the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946 (DSPE Act), by the undivided state of Andhra Pradesh did not automatically extend to the newly formed state of Andhra Pradesh post-bifurcation. The High Court agreed with the accused, who were booked under the Prevention of Corruption Act, and quashed the FIRs insisting a fresh consent from Andhra Pradesh was required. Justice Ravikumar, who authored a 32-page judgment, differed with the High Court's interpretation, and ruled the latter had erred in asking for a fresh state consent for CBI's investigations. The top court framed a question -- if the CBI required the State Government's consent to register an FIR against a Central Government employee under a Central Act simply because the employee worked within the territory of a State -- as the central issue.

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PM Narendra Modi with beneficiaries of a housing scheme, during the foundation stone laying and inauguration ceremony of various development projects, in New Delhi. Photos: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## Modi kicks off Delhi election campaign, Kejriwal reacts

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a major push to Infrastructure ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday sounded the poll bugle for the BJP by inaugurating developmental projects worth of Rs 4500 crore including Economically Weaker Section (EWS) flats at Ashok Vihar, Sarojini Nagar government quarters, World Trade centre and new DU campuses and college. With this, the PM Modi has launched his model against the Kejriwal's model putting aside doubts about who would lead it. Winning Delhi is crucial for the BJP, which has now been out of power in the Capital for more than 25 years. Taking a jibe at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convenor Arvind Kejriwal without naming him, PM Modi said he could have built a Sheesh Mahal for himself but chose to prioritise the people. "Mai bhi koi 'sheeshmahal' bana



sakta that. Lekin mere liye toh mere desh wasiyon ko puca ghar mile, yahi ek sapna tha (I could have also built a sheeshmahal, but for me, it was a dream that my countrymen should get permanent houses). The country knows it well that Modi never built a home for himself but has built more than 4 crore houses for the poor," PM Modi said. The Prime Minister also coined a slogan 'AAPda ko hatana hai, BJP ko lana hai'. The Prime Minister said that by keeping Anna Hazare at the front, few 'kattar beimaan'

(bigoted dishonest) people have pushed the national capital towards the 'aapda' (disaster). "These people used to talk about Delhi's development...Ye AAP, ye 'aapda', Delhi par aayi hai, and hence the people of Delhi has waged a war against 'aapda'. Voters of Delhi have made up their minds to free Delhi from this 'aapda', the PM said while speaking at the event at Ashok Vihar's Ramlika Ground. Giving a call for AAP's defeat, Modi raised the slogan, "Aapda ko nahi sahenge, badal kar rahenge (we will not tolerate 'aapda', we will remove it)." "Yeh kattar beimaan log... Ek to chori upar se seena zori (These staunchly corrupt people... They steal and then defend themselves brazenly)... Dilli ke log keh rahe hain, aapda ki nahin sahenge, badal ke rahenge (The people of Delhi are saying they will not tolerate this disaster, but will usher in change)," PM Modi said.

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## Gifts to Biden family include \$20K diamond from Modi

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden and his family were given tens of thousands of dollars in gifts from foreign leaders in 2023, with Jill Biden receiving the single most expensive present: a USD 20,000 diamond from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 7.5-carat diamond from Modi was easily the most costly gift presented to any member of the first family in 2023, although she also received a brooch valued at USD 14,063 from the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States and a bracelet, brooch and photograph album worth USD 4,510 from the president and first lady of Egypt, according to an annual accounting published by the State Department on Thursday. The USD 20,000 diamond

was retained for official use in the White House East Wing, according to a State Department document, while the other gifts to the president and first lady were sent to the archives. The first lady's office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about the diamond's use. The US president himself received a number of expensive presents, including a commemorative photo album valued at USD 7,100 from South Korea's recently impeached President Suk Yeol Yoon, a USD 3,495 statue of Mongolian warriors from the Mongolian prime minister, a USD 3,300 silver bowl from the sultan of Brunei, a USD 3,160 sterling silver tray from the president of Israel, and a collage worth USD 2,400 from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

## Union Carbide waste disposal: Protests rock Pithampur, two attempt self-immolation

PTI ■ DHAR (MP)

Two men were hospitalised after they set themselves afire on Friday amid a bandh call in Madhya Pradesh's Pithampur against the planned disposal of 337 tonnes of Union Carbide waste in the industrial town, an official said. During one of the protests against the waste disposal in the town in the Dhar district, two persons poured some liquid on their bodies and set themselves on fire, according to eyewitnesses and a video shot at the scene. Eyewitnesses said the two men, both aged around 40, were rushed to a hospital in Pithampur, about 30 km from Indore. "From the local facility, they have been moved to a private hospital in Indore. Both were out of danger. The situation is under control but tense," Dhar Superintendent of Police Manoj Singh told PTI over the phone from a protest site near Pithampur bus stand. Protests were also held at other places in the town, he said. Shops and markets remained closed in the town amid the bandh call by Pithampur Bachao Samiti, which claims that the planned incineration of the Carbide waste in the local



area would harm the local people and environment. Pithampur has a population of about 1.75 lakh and its industrial area here has nearly 700 factories in three sectors. On the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984, methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal, killing at least 5,479 persons and leaving thousands with serious and long-lasting health issues in Bhopal. The authorities have shifted 337 tonnes of waste from the Carbide factory to Pithampur for scientific disposal, though the move has triggered protests. The material from Bhopal reached an incineration unit in Pithampur on Thursday. Amid the bandh call in Pithampur, which saw shops and markets remaining closed on Friday, a group of protesters blocked the road near Eicher Motors, but

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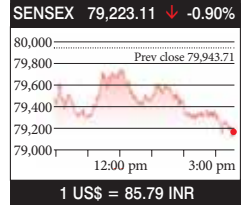
## MeitY Invites Objections on Draft Data Rules

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has asked the public to send objections and suggestions to the draft rules proposed for the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025. The public feedback can be submitted on mygov.in; the draft rules will be taken into consideration after February 18, the Ministry said in a notification on Friday. Some of the salient features of the draft rules include greater consumer control over data; users can demand deletion of their data; companies should be more transparent with him over his protest against the disposal of the Union Carbide waste in Pithampur. The Madhya Pradesh High Court had on December 3 rebuked the authorities for not clearing the Union Carbide site in Bhopal despite court directives, including that of the Supreme Court. It had set a four-week deadline to shift the waste, observing that even 40 years after the gas tragedy, authorities were in a "state of inertia". The high court had warned the government of contempt proceedings if its directive was not followed.

The draft, titled "Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025," applies to personal data processing within India and to entities offering goods or services to individuals in India. The rules encompass data fiduciaries, data processors, and consent managers, establishing detailed accountability measures. The rules are expected to provide clarity on various provisions of the law including notice by data fiduciary to individuals, registration and obligations of consent manager, processing of personal data of children and so on. The rules are also expected to provide clarity regarding the setting up of the Data Protection Board, appointment and service conditions of the chairperson and other members of the board. The regulations aim to address crucial aspects of data protection. These include how organizations must notify individuals about data collection, the framework for consent management, and safeguards for processing children's personal information. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 was passed by the Parliament in 2023. The draft rules, once finalised and notified, will come into force.

## MARKETS



## Sensex, Nifty tank, ahead of earnings season

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure to settle nearly 1 per cent lower on Friday as investors pared exposure to bank and IT stocks ahead of the earnings season starting next week. A depreciating rupee against strengthening US dollar overseas further weighed on sentiment, traders said. Despite a positive start, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 720.60 points or 0.90 per cent to close at 79,223.11. During the day, it slumped 833.98 points or 1.04 per cent to 79,109.73. The NSE Nifty tanked 183.90 points or 0.76 per cent to 24,004.75. On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark jumped 524.04 points or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 191.35 points or 0.80 per cent. "A sell-on-rally sentiment prevails in the market due to a strong US dollar, high valuation, and a shift towards a multi-asset investment strategy. Reducing US jobless claims and potential policy shifts in the US indicate that the Fed is not in a hurry to cut interest rates in the near term. "Looking ahead, the market is likely to focus on Q3 earnings, with expectations of improvement in earnings on a QoQ basis," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the Sensex pack, Zomato, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, ICICI Bank, Sun Pharma, Larsen & Toubro, HCL Tech and ITC were the major laggards. On the other hand, Tata Motors, Nestle, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the gainers.

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## From begging to manning traffic, inspiring journey of 39 transgenders

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

From seeking alms on city roads to managing traffic at the same places, it has been an incredible journey of empowerment for 39 transgenders in Hyderabad who have been inducted as traffic assistants to help the city police. The transgenders, who have been appointed on a pilot basis, say they now get respect from citizens in contrast to the severe discrimination and insults they faced in the past. "It is wonderful that we manage traffic at places where we used to beg in the past," Nisha, a transgender traffic assistant, told PTI on Friday. Nisha, who works at Patny Centre here, thanked Telangana Chief

Minister A Revanth Reddy for the opportunity given to the transgender community. Nisha, who studied up to Intermediate, recalled facing discrimination from society at large, in college, with friends and even parents. "My parents did not accept me. But, they accepted me now. My friends used to avoid me. But, now they message me and keep in touch. After I got the job, my relations and others are appreciating. It is a wonder. I cannot describe in words," Nisha said. Sana, another traffic assistant, said it is a matter of pride for them that they get respect from citizens, while people earlier used to hesitate to even speak to them. P Viswa Prasad, Additional



A transgender traffic assistant manages traffic, in Hyderabad

Commissioner of Police (Traffic), told PTI that the transgender traffic assistants are doing good and that there are no complaints or there is anything abnormal since they have been inducted about 10 days ago. It will take some time for them to get professional acumen. They want to get integrated with society and do well, he said. It all began when CM Reddy asked officials in November to appoint transgender persons as traffic volunteers at high-traffic areas in the city. During a meeting with officials, he said the services of transgenders should be utilised like home guards at traffic signals to prevent traffic violations. He told the officials to finalise a special dress code for

transgenders and also salary along the lines of home guards. While the CM on December 6, 2024, handed over 'enrolment papers' to the transgender persons who have been selected, they were formally inducted as traffic assistants on December 22. Hyderabad Police Commissioner C V Anand had earlier said transgenders face alienation even within their families and society. The state government had issued an order to inducting the transgenders as traffic assistants, he said. According to him, about 100 transgenders had applied for the posts and 44 of them were shortlisted after a selection process, including physical tests, while 39 successfully completed training.

PTI

## Health surveillance raised in India over HMPV concerns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the rising concerns over an outbreak of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in China, India has stepped up efforts to monitor the situation and is actively coordinating with international health agencies to assess potential risks. Sources in the Union Health Ministry said that the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has been entrusted with the task to closely monitor respiratory infections and seasonal influenza cases within India, ensuring that the situation is continuously evaluated. "We will continue to monitor the situation closely, validate information and update accordingly," according to a news agency, citing official sources. Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), belonging to the *Pneumoviridae*, Metapneumovirus genus, is an enveloped single-stranded negative-sense RNA virus, according to the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC). China CDC says that the incubation period after infection is about three to five days, and the immune protection induced by HMPV is too weak to curb repeated infection. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Human

Metapneumovirus (HMPV) can cause upper and lower respiratory disease in people of all ages. According to reports, in young children and the elderly, HMPV can be severe. Those with weakened immune systems, the virus can cause serious illness. Symptoms commonly associated with HMPV include cough, fever, nasal congestion, and shortness of breath. It most likely spreads from an infected person to others through secretions from coughing and sneezing, and close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands. Patients can help prevent the spread by washing hands often with soap; avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands, and close contact with people who are sick, as per the doctors. Several reports have suggested that due to the surge in respiratory illness, particularly HMPV, hospitals and crematoriums in China are struggling to deal with the situation. The situation has raised concerns among the healthcare facilities, especially children's hospitals, which are reportedly under stress due to a sharp rise in pneumonia and "white lung" cases, a term often referred to describe severe pneumonia symptoms, as per the reports.

## Kasganj violence: 28 to sentenced for life

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

A special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court on Friday sentenced all 28 convicted individuals to life imprisonment in the 2018 Kasganj communal clash case, which led to the murder of Chandan Gupta during a Tiranga Yatra. The court also imposed an additional seven years of rigorous imprisonment on Salim, one of the convicts, while acquitting two others, Nasiruddin and Asim Qureshi. District government counsel Manoj Kumar Tripathi said, "All the accused have been awarded life sentences. Two people were acquitted, and we

will appeal their acquittal. Salim has also been given an additional seven years of rigorous imprisonment." The special court found the 28 accused guilty under several sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder), as well as charges under the Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act, 1971. Those convicted include Salim, Wasim, Nasim, Jahid alias 'Jagga', Asiq Qureshi alias 'Hitler', and others. Among the 28, Munazir Rafi, already jailed for the Kasganj lawyer Mohini Tomar murder case, remains behind bars, while the remaining convicts, previously out on bail, surrendered over two days—26 on Thursday and Salim on Friday.

Chandan Gupta, an activist affiliated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), was killed during the January 26, 2018, Tiranga Yatra in Kasganj, Uttar Pradesh. The rally, organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and ABVP, featured participants on motorcycles carrying the tricolour and saffron flags. The rally's entry into the Baddunagar locality, despite administrative restrictions, led to communal clashes. Amid the ensuing violence, Gupta was shot dead, further escalating tensions. The unrest saw multiple shops, vehicles, and properties set ablaze. The case was initially tried in a district court in Etah before being transferred to the NIA court in Lucknow in 2022.



## India and Maldives agree on local currency use for trade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Maldives have finalised a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border trade with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserting that New Delhi has always stood by the island nation. He made these remarks here on Friday at a meeting with his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Khaleel. He arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit to explore ways to bolster bilateral ties in several key areas including maritime security, trade and

investment. "I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border transaction has been signed," Jaishankar said. "We have increased our engagement in various sectors and I do want to say that India has always stood by the Maldives. You are a very concrete expression of our neighbourhood first policy," he added. The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an

upward trajectory under the previous government in Male. The ties between India and the Maldives came under severe strain after Muizzu, known for his pro-China leanings, took charge of the top office in November 2023. Within hours of his oath, he had demanded the withdrawal of Indian military personnel from his country. Subsequently, the Indian military personnel were replaced by civilians. However, there was a thaw in the relations as Muizzu vowed to boost the bilateral ties with India during his visit to Delhi in October.

## CBI need not seek state consent: SC

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It held no such consent was necessary as the offences in question were under a central legislation and involved Central Government employees. The consent regime under Section 6 of the DSPE Act was not designed to obstruct investigations into central offences only because they transpired within a state's territorial limits, said the top court. The bench said the 'General Consent' granted by a State under the DSPE Act was sufficient for the CBI investigations involving central offences and state-specific formalities, such as a fresh consent, was not required. "We are of the firm view that the impugned judgment where under subject FIRs and further proceedings in pursuance thereof, were quashed cannot be sustained," it said and allowed CBI's appeal.



## Tikait meets Kejriwal ahead of Delhi polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, farmer leader Rakesh Tikait met former Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Friday evening over the issue of welfare of advocates and farmers. Senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh was also present at the meeting,

who shared that a meaningful meeting was held between the AAP convenor and the national spokesperson of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). Sharing the photo of the meeting on X, Singh stated, "National Convenor of Aam Aadmi Party Arvind Kejriwal and struggling farmer leader Rakesh Tikait had a meaningful meeting where issues of farmers and lawyers were discussed."

Following the meeting, Tikait said, "There were some issues related to welfare of advocates, which he said will be resolved in the first Cabinet after the Delhi elections. He said that Advocates Protection Act will be passed in Cabinet meeting after the formation of new government." A special committee of the Bar Council of Delhi headed by Advocate KC Mittal finalized the Delhi Advocates

(Protection) Bill, 2023 for providing safety and security to lawyers from incidents of assaults, killings, intimidation and threats. The bill defines acts of violence, offenders, and punishment and provides for compensation as well as police protection to advocates in cases of threats. The bill also protects advocates from 'illegal arrest' and 'malicious prosecution'.

## Faiz Ahmed Kidwai becomes DGCA chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Senior IAS officer Faiz Ahmed Kidwai has been appointed the chief of Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) as part of a senior-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected by the Centre on Friday. The 1996-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre is currently Additional Secretary in the

Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. He has been appointed as Director General in the DGCA "in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the Government of India by keeping the Recruitment Rules of the post in abeyance", an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Ashutosh Agnihotri, Additional Secretary in the Home Ministry, has been named Chairman & Managing Director of Food Corporation of India (FCI), it said.

## Union Carbide waste disposal...

From page 1

Meanwhile, heavy police deployment has been made in Pithampur to maintain law and order. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday addressed doubters and said the issue should not be politicised. He asserted the waste comprised 60 per cent mud and 40 per cent naphthol used to make pesticide methyl isocyanate (MIC) and was "not at all harmful".

## GRAP III invoked

From page 1

"Accordingly, in an effort to prevent further deterioration of the air quality and in pursuance of the Supreme Court's directives, the sub-committee on GRAP hereby decide to invoke ALL actions under Stage-III ('Severe' Air Quality of Delhi) of the extant schedule of GRAP, with immediate effect in right earnest by all the agencies concerned in Delhi-NCR, in addition to the Stage-I and II actions already in force. Actions under stages-I II & III of the revised GRAP shall be implemented, monitored and reviewed by all the agencies concerned in the entire NCR to ensure that the AQI levels do not slip further." All implementing agencies shall

keep strict vigil and intensely measures of the revised GRAP schedule. Citizens are requested to strictly adhere to the citizen charter under GRAP Stage-III, it added. GRAP Stage 3, which was lifted last Friday, entails a ban on non-essential construction work. The stage 3 restrictions also include a ban on non-essential construction work, Classes up to grade V are required to shift to hybrid mode and parents and students have the option to choose online education wherever available. Stage 3 also bans non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards in Delhi. At Delhi's India Gandhi International Airport, over 500 flights were delayed as

visibility came down to zero. At 8 am, the Palam airport in Delhi reported a 0 m visibility, while the Safdarjung Airport in New Delhi reported a 50-metre visibility. Both the airports are not used for commercial flight operations. Due to heavy fog conditions, Delhi airport issued an advisory stating that non-CAT III compliant flights would be affected. Taking to social media X, the Delhi Airport wrote in a post "While landing and take offs continue at Delhi airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected." The airport management asked passengers to check with their respective airlines for updated flight information, expressing regret for any inconvenience.

"Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information," the post further read. The inconvenience caused to passengers is regretted. Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," the post further read. Flights of many airlines, including SpiceJet, Indigo and Air India, were affected even as the Delhi airport reported an average delay of six minutes for arrival flights and 47 minutes for departure flights, as per FlightRadar24. At Kolkata airport, 17 departing flights were delayed, one was cancelled, and 36 arriving flights were also delayed. At least 24 trains, including several long-distance services, are running late due to the foggy conditions, the Railways said.

## Sensex, Nifty tank, ahead of earnings season

From page 1

"Despite the short recovery in the past two sessions, markets lost the momentum as there is still a lot of pessimism due to slowing growth, higher domestic valuations, foreign fund outflows, and uncertainty over US trade policies post Trump's resumption as the country's president. Hence, markets may see bouts of correction, and investors will continue to maintain caution while keeping an eye on global developments," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. The BSE midcap gauge fell 0.33 per cent, and smallcap index dipped 0.02 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE

Focused IT declined 1.42 per cent, IT (1.31 per cent), teck (1.13 per cent), bankex (1.07 per cent), capital goods (1.06 per cent) and financial services (0.87 per cent). BSE energy, telecommunication, consumer durables, utilities, metal and oil & gas were the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. Japanese markets were closed for the New Year holiday. Markets in Europe were trading lower. US stocks were in the negative territory on Thursday. "In the near term, we expect markets to witness stock/sector specific action on the back of pre-quarterly business updates

released by companies, ahead of their Q3 results," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday after remaining net sellers in the recent past. They bought equities worth Rs 1,506.75 crore, according to exchange data. The rupee dropped 4 paise to close at a record low of 85.79 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.43 per cent to USD 75.60 a barrel. In the previous session, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,436.30 points or 1.83 per cent -- its best single-day gain in

more than a month -- to settle at 79,943.71. The Nifty surged 445.75 points or 1.88 per cent to 24,188.65. "Reflecting on 2024, the year emphasised the importance of discipline over speculation. Despite pockets of volatility, markets did not see dramatic deviations. As broad-based rallies give way to more selective opportunities, the focus will shift to individual stock picks. "Moving forward, staying disciplined about valuations and adhering to well-defined strategies will be crucial in navigating the ever-changing market landscape," Krishna Appala, Senior Research Analyst, Capitalmind Research, said.

## Modi kicks off Delhi election campaign, Kejriwal reacts

From page 1

He accused the AAP of being involved in scams across sectors including education and health. In a sharp response to Modi's accusation that Aam Aadmi Party is an 'aapda' (crisis) for Delhi, Kejriwal said the BJP-led Centre has not done any development work in Delhi or else, Prime Minister Narendra Modi would not have had to spend 39 minutes of his 43-minute speech cursing the people of the capital and the government they elected with the largest mandate. "PM Modi gave a speech of 43 minutes today. For about 39 minutes he abused people of Delhi and the elected

government. Had Modi government performed in ten years, he would not have needed to abuse people of Delhi," Kejriwal said. He pointed, "It took BJP as much time to lay foundation stones for three colleges as it took AAP to build 22,000 classrooms, three new universities, six university campuses, and 11 new vocational colleges." "PM Modi for abusing people of Delhi and the majority government elected by them. AAP chief claimed that PM Modi would not need to abuse him, had his government performed in ten years of power at the Centre since 2014," he added. In a veiled attack on AAP which

"used Anna Hazare as its face" to come to power, PM Modi accused the party of having become "a disaster" for the people of Delhi, and urged voters to take steps to "liberate" themselves from the incumbent "Aapda", or disastrous, government. "If highways are being built in the capital and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has been able to make houses for the poor, it is because 'aapda' does not have much role in these sectors, he added. He said 2025 would bring many new possibilities for India, asserting that the country had become a symbol of political and economic stability in the world. India will rise to become a

big manufacturing hub in the new year in which new records in the agriculture sector and women-led development will be registered as well, he said. The prime minister asserted India's global standing and image would also be strengthened in 2025. Earlier, taking to his X handle, PM Modi earlier said this was an important day for Delhi's development. "Today is an important day for Delhi's development. At a programme in Ashok Vihar, will be inaugurating and laying the foundation stones for a wide range of development works which will boost 'Ease of Living' for the people of Delhi," he

said. PM Modi handed over the keys to eligible beneficiaries of EWS flats at Swabhimana Apartments in the Ashok Vihar area. The rally in Ashok Vihar is strategically planned to target the AAP's stronghold among slum dwellers in areas like Wazirpur, Model Town, and Shalimar Bagh. These neighbourhoods, part of the Chandni Chowk parliamentary constituency, have previously seen AAP dominate despite being a BJP bastion in the past. According to estimates, roughly 20 lakh people live in Delhi's slums. Though they were traditionally Congress supporters, especially during the tenure of ex-CM Sheila Dikshit,

the AAP won them over during the 2013 and 2015 assembly elections. After Ashok Vihar, PM Modi's second rally will be held on January 5 at Rohini's Japanese Park. The event will include the foundation stone laying of a metro project connecting Rithala to rural areas, addressing a longstanding demand of rural voters. The rally will focus on consolidating support in rural regions where AAP has performed strongly in past elections. The Prime Minister is expected to inaugurate Section 4 of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) Corridor on Sunday which connects Sahibabad to New Ashok Nagar. Currently,

the 42km functional portion of the RRTS is entirely located in Uttar Pradesh. Sources in the party said the rally, planned for 29 December, was postponed after former PM Manmohan Singh died on 26 December. According to the BJP's internal surveys, Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) currently has a 'slight' edge. However, the BJP believes the trend will start to reverse once Modi kickstarts the campaign for Delhi. Apart from that, the Delhi BJP unit has been organising 'pravas (night stay)' involving BJP leaders and workers staying in slums and interacting with people to understand their problems.

# PM Modi lays foundation stone for two new DU campuses

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday virtually laid the foundation stones for two new Delhi University campuses and a college named after BJP ideologue Veer Savarkar. The project, with an investment of over Rs 600 crore, aims to boost educational opportunities and modernise facilities. The foundation-laying ceremony was held at Ashok Vihar where the prime minister also launched a slew of other infra projects for the national capital.

The Prime Minister underscored that in the field of higher education, the reputation of Delhi University is continuously growing stronger. "Our effort is to provide more opportunities for higher education to the youth of Delhi right here. Today, the foundation stones for new campuses have been laid, which will allow hundreds of students to study at DU annually. The long-awaited Eastern and Western campuses will now be developed in Surajmal Vihar and Dwarka, respectively," Modi added. Additionally, a new college in the name of Veer Savarkar ji will also be built in Najafgarh. The East campus at Surajmal Vihar and the West campus at Dwarka Sector 22 are being



Ranjan Dimri

added to the existing North and South campuses as part of DU's efforts to expand its presence across the city.

The East Campus, spanning 15.25 acres, is being developed at an estimated cost of Rs 373 crore. It will offer LLB, LLM and an integrated five-year LLB programme, alongside other multidisciplinary courses.

The campus will feature state-of-the-art facilities, including 60 classrooms, 10 tutorial rooms, six moot courts, four computer labs, two cafeterias and two common rooms, spread across a built-up area of 59,618 square metres.

The West Campus, being built at Rs 107 crore, will be a new

academic block in the first phase. Covering 19,434.28 square metres, it will have 42 classrooms, two moot courts, a digital library, conference rooms, seminar halls and separate common rooms for boys and girls. In addition to the campuses, Modi laid the foundation stone for Veer Savarkar College at Roshanpura, Najafgarh, just a five-minute walk from the West Campus.

The college, with a built-up area of 18,816.56 square metres and an estimated cost of Rs 140 crore, will offer modern facilities, including 24 classrooms, eight tutorial rooms, 40 faculty rooms, department libraries, conference rooms and a canteen.

Modi virtually inaugurated the CBSE's integrated office complex at Dwarka built at around Rs 300 crore. It includes offices, an auditorium, an advanced data centre and a comprehensive water management system, among others.

On the education front, the Prime Minister reiterated the government's focus on improving access to quality education and opportunities for all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. "Every family dreams that their children will receive the best education, and the Central government is working towards providing top-tier schools, colleges, and universities across the country," he stated. The

Prime Minister also praised the National Education Policy (NEP), which emphasizes teaching in mother tongues to ensure that children from all backgrounds, including marginalized communities, have the opportunity to succeed. "Under the new National Education Policy, children from poor families now have a clearer path to becoming doctors, engineers, and professionals," he noted.

Modi also acknowledged the crucial role of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in improving India's education system. He announced the construction of a new CBSE building to support the expansion of modern educational practices. "The new CBSE building will help expand modern education and the adoption of advanced examination methods," he said.

The Prime Minister highlighted that the Central Government is handling major projects in Delhi like roads, metro systems, hospitals, and college campuses. However, the state government has failed to fulfill its responsibilities, especially in areas like the cleaning of the Yamuna River. Neglecting the Yamuna River has led to a crisis where people are left with dirty water, he added.

## Kejriwal has done no real work in city: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Friday attacked the AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, stating that he has done no real work in Delhi and has been involved in numerous corruption scandals over the past 10 years.

"While the central government has developed significant landmarks in Delhi such as Yashobhoomi, Bharat Mandapam, Eco Park, Banera Park, Pragati Maidan Tunnel, UBR-2, Ring Road-3, East-West Corridor, Delhi-Meerut Highway, and Alipur Bypass, along with the revitalization of landmarks like Ambedkar Memorial, Birsa Munda Chowk, and Kartavya Path, Kejriwal has done little for Delhi's growth," he asserted. Responding to AAP Conventor's claim that BJP has not done any work for the people of Delhi in the last 10 years, Sachdeva said, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has provided quality housing to over 5,000 slum residents in Delhi. The PM's visionary schemes have also created bet-



Virendra Sachdeva

ter employment opportunities for Delhi's youth, especially in Delhi-NCR, along with new prospects as gig workers." "Conversely, Arvind Kejriwal has given Delhi several scandals, including the liquor policy scam, spying scandal, panic button scam, ration card scam, hospital construction scam, neighborhood medicine and diagnostics scam, and the classroom construction scam, among others. The list of his corruption cases is endless," he alleged.

Sachdeva accused Kejriwal of depriving the poor of Delhi of the benefits of transformative schemes like the PM Awas Yojana and Ayushman Bharat. "While the Prime Minister provided homes for millions, Kejriwal focused on building a luxurious Palace for himself and failed to allocate the 40,000 flats in Narela meant for the underprivileged, leaving them to become ruins," he said. He added that while Kejriwal talks about education, his government did not open a single new school or college in ten years, while the central government opened seven Kendriya Vidyalayas, constructed the East Delhi Campus of Delhi University, and laid the foundation for two new colleges and university projects. The Delhi BJP chief demanded answers from Kejriwal regarding the stalled progress of his promised Sports University and Military Training School due to alleged corruption. Additionally, he urged Kejriwal to explain Delhi's poor public transport system, his failure to purchase even one new bus for the DTC, and the terrible state of Delhi's roads.

Sachdeva also asked Kejriwal to address why Delhi's public health system collapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic and why a massive scam occurred over oxygen allocation during the crisis.

## Congress fields AIMC President Alka Lamba from Kalkaji constituency

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In what promises to be one of the most closely watched contests in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, the Congress has fielded All India Mahila Congress President Alka Lamba to contest from the Kalkaji constituency.

Lamba will be pitted against senior AAP leader and current Delhi Chief Minister Atishi. In an official statement, the Congress on Friday announced "The Central Election Committee has approved the candidature of Alka Lamba as Congress candidate to contest the forthcoming general election to the Legislative Assembly of Delhi from 51 - Kalkaji constituency."

She began her political journey as a student leader, joining the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the student wing of the Congress party. After one year in 1995, she contested the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) election for the post of President and won by a huge margin.

In 2002, she was appointed the General Secretary of All India Mahila Congress and un-



successfully contested Delhi Assembly elections from Moti Nagar Constituency against the senior BJP leader Madan Lal Khurana a year after.

In 2006, she became a member of All India Congress Committee (AICC) and was appointed General Secretary of Delhi Congress. At the same time she was also appointed Vice Chairperson of National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD), an autonomous body of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

She served as the Secretary of AICC from 2007 to 2011. In a dramatic turn of events, she parted ways with the Congress

in December 2014, making a bold leap to join the AAP. Lamba went on to represent the Chandni Chowk constituency from 2015 to 2020, solidifying her position as a key figure in Delhi's political landscape. However, she again rejoined Congress in September 2019 as she was disenchanted for quite some time with the AAP leadership.

Congress has already announced the names of 47 candidates including Devender Yadav from Badli, Sandeep Dixit from New Delhi, Ragini Nayak in Wazirpur, Jai Kisan from Sultanpur Majra and Haroon Yusuf from Ballmaran. On contesting the upcoming Delhi state elections against Chief Minister Atishi, Lamba said, "They should first clarify if she is a Chief Minister or a 'temporary' Chief Minister since AAP supremo has himself called her that, insulting the constitutional post as well as the woman sitting on that post. Moreover, I don't consider this as a fight against an individual rather against the hazardous air, polluted Yamuna and crime in Delhi."

## No hike in electricity bills of consumers in NDMC zone

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid speculations of hike in electricity bills of the consumers in the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) zone, the NDMC Chairman Keshav Chandra on Friday clarified that people in the area need not panic as the council will not allow any increase in the electricity bills of consumers, irrespective of the orders of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC).

In a statement, Chandra said, "The NDMC has decided to appeal against the DERC's order proposing to increase the Power Purchase Cost Agreement (PPCA) in electricity bills for the quarter January to March 2025. This hike was to increase the electricity bills of consumers in the NDMC area."

He assured the consumers that NDMC will not allow any increase in the electricity bills of consumers, irrespective of the order of DERC. Currently, there are around 55,000 electricity connections in the NDMC area, of which more than 60 per cent are domestic consumers. The Chairman informed that



verification of accounts has not been done in the absence of tariff order. "In this context, the PPAC order of DERC, which proposes an increase in the cost of electricity, has caused unnecessary panic among consumers. NDMC does not accept this current PPAC and will seek a reduction in the proposed rates from DERC," he said. He clarified that PPAC is a surcharge imposed by the DERC to meet the fluctuations in the cost of electricity purchased by distribution companies.

Speaking to the media, Vice-Chairman Kuljit Singh Chahal informed that DERC has allowed the increase of PPAC from 38.75 per cent to 54.52 per cent, which would lead to an increase in electricity bills in the quarter of January to March 2025.

He assured the consumers that under the leadership of the Prime Minister and Home Minister, NDMC is working for their welfare and no consumer will be charged extra. He also informed that in 2017, the Government of India had

issued guidelines to NDMC to move towards green power and promote renewable energy. Despite this, NDMC had requested the Delhi Government to de-locate two expensive plants—Bawana and Pragati—but no action was taken.

"The cost of electricity from Bawana is Rs 18 per unit, which is the most expensive in Delhi, while NDMC provides electricity to consumers at between Rs 3 to Rs 8 per unit. NDMC has to bear an additional burden of about Rs 150

crore every year from the Delhi Government," he said, adding that despite this burden on the Council, we will not pass on these additional costs to his consumers.

He also informed that under the PM Surya Ghar Free Electricity Scheme led by the Prime Minister, a subsidy of up to Rs 30,000 is given for installing 1 kW Rooftop Solar System. "NDMC is considering increasing this subsidy and is working on a plan to provide free solar energy to consumers," he said.

Chahal said that with the work being done towards making NDMC self-reliant in the field of solar energy, we are moving towards "ZERO metering" in NDMC.

Slamming the Delhi government and its people for trying to harass the citizens of Delhi, he confirmed that NDMC has already filed a petition with DERC stating that they will not follow the DERC order and will not impose any surcharge on consumers. "We will not let Arvind Kejriwal's anti-people plans succeed and will not burden the public with any kind of additional charge," he claimed.

## Over 1,000 questions listed for Question Hour in Seventh Vidhan Sabha: Ram Niwas Goel



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Assembly speaker Ram Niwas Goel on Friday said that over 1,000 questions were listed for Question Hour in the 7th Vidhan Sabha.

During a press conference, Goel said that the first meeting of the 7th Vidhan Sabha was held on February 24, 2020, and the 74th meeting was held on December 4 last year.

"A total of 1,095 questions were listed for Question Hour in the seventh Vidhan Sabha and members were given ample opportunity to ask supplementary questions. Under Rule-208, 702 matters of special mention were raised and members were given full opportunity to express their views," Goel said. "A total of 28 bills were passed. Four government resolutions and 14 other resolutions, along with 13 motions were passed. A total of 39 short-term discussions were held and 13 matters of attention were raised," Goel said.

The 7th Vidhan Sabha also did important work in the field of committees. Goel said that 19 reports from various committees were presented and accept-

ed. He emphasized that despite being the Vidhan Sabha of a union territory and having limited powers, the work done was remarkable.

During 2020-21, arrangements for COVID tests were made on a large scale in the Assembly premises for its employees. The corona warriors' memorial was also unveiled on August 9, 2022, he said.

Ashoka Pillar was installed in the Vidhan Sabha on January 25, 2021. On January 3, 2022, the murals of Jallianwala Bagh and Rani Laxmibai were inaugurated, he said.

The second Delhi Youth Parliament was organised between 23 and 25 January 2023. On December 6 and 7, 2024, Delhi Yuva Samvad 2024 was also organised in which students from various schools and colleges of Delhi participated and expressed their views, Goel said.

"As the speaker of the assembly, I performed my duties impartially and gave equal importance to both the ruling party and the opposition. I considered it my main responsibility to make maximum use of the time of the House," he added.

## Police claim to identify, deport seven illegal Bangladeshi immigrants



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Friday claimed to identify and deport seven Bangladeshi nationals residing illegally in different parts of the national Capital in a bid to address rising concerns over the unauthorized stay of migrants including Bangladeshi nationals in the capital.

In Southwest district, the police identified and deported two illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who had been residing in Safdarjung area of southwest Delhi. The husband-wife duo, identified as 54 year old Liyacad and 39 years old Nasreen, had been living in Delhi since 2012 and were native of Bangladesh's Bagaerghat district. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Chaudhary said, "The police team was systematically briefed for day and night patrolling, ensuring effective vigilance and proactive measures against illegal activities. Team's dedication and efforts have led to the successful apprehension of two illegal

Bangladeshi national husband-wife." He added that January 2, during patrolling, on the basis of secret information two illegal migrants were detained from Shamsham Ghat road in Green Park and their documents were collected and verified. "On interrogation, they revealed that both have been residing at different places in Delhi-NCR capital since 2012 and at present they were residing in Old Seelampur in Gandhi Nagar. Following thorough verification and interrogation, the necessary legal formalities were completed resulting in their deportation through the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO)," the officer said.

In another case in southeast district, the police identified five Bangladeshi immigrants residing illegally in Sarita Vihar. The accused has been identified as Sheikh Sofiul Alam Sabbir, Md. Takdirul Khan, Bijoyohmod Sahi, Habibur Rahman and Md. Musa Miah Khan who had been arrested by the Illegal

## Bharadwaj's claims regarding 'Farishtey Scheme' against LG's office baseless: Raj Niwas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The withdrawal of the writ petition filed in the Supreme Court by Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj regarding the 'Farishtey Scheme' against the Office of the Lt. Governor is an admission that all the claims that he made against the LG Office in his petition were baseless, false and done with an intent to malign the Office of the Lt. Governor, Raj Niwas said on Friday.

Making this assertion, officials said fearing that the AAP government's lies will be exposed in the Supreme Court, Bhardwaj did not press for the petition on Thursday.

As per the affidavit submitted by the LG office, "the writ petition, was unfounded aimed at maligning the Office of the Lt. Governor, stemmed from concealment of material facts and had been filed without any cause of action only to build up a narrative against the Office of the Lt. Governor. The withdrawal of the writ petition by Bhardwaj, in the Supreme Court vindicates what the LG Office had said and proves that all along, Bhardwaj had been indulging in pointless and malicious blame game and was a 'classic example of dragging politics into the Court.' The claims made by Bhardwaj in his petition that LG Office had rendered his government incapable of implementing the 'Farishtey Scheme', have been exposed. It vindicates the stand taken by



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

the LG Office and the Secretary, Health, GNCTD that 'Farishtey Scheme' had never been made infructuous, as alleged by Bhardwaj.

The total number of beneficiaries under the scheme during FY 2022-2023, was 3698 and the same stood at 3604 till October in FY 2023-2024, when the writ petition was moved. Bhardwaj lied to the Court in his writ petition. Also, contrary to claims made by Bhardwaj in his writ petition that payments were not being made under the scheme, a payment of Rs 4.85 crores during FY 2022-2023, and a payment of Rs 4.98 crores till February 12 in FY 2023-2024, were made to private hospitals under the scheme. These figures prima facie neither indicate a "halt" in the 'Farishtey Scheme' nor do they support allegations of "non-payment" made by Bhardwaj, officials said. The implementation of Farishtey or any other scheme of the Health Department was done by the Health Department itself, with financial allocations made by the

Finance Department, both of which are transferred subjects totally under the control of respected Ministers and any failures thereof are the sole responsibility of the Ministers. Moreover, Minister Health, Saurabh Bhardwaj is himself the Chairman of Delhi ArogyaKosh and it is him, who clears every file submitted directly by Director General of Health Services (DGHS), to him and the question of Secretary of the Health Department or the LG Office being anywhere in the picture does not arise. Meanwhile, the AAP said that this is shameful, as the LG stooped to such lows that he did not even bother to respond to the letters of the Chief Minister of Delhi until he received notice from the Supreme Court. "After the Supreme Court issued notice to the LG, the funds of Rs. 29 crore were immediately released to DAK (Health Department), and payments could be made to private hospitals, allowing the scheme to become operational," the party said in a statement.

# Bangla infiltration: BJP whitewash Didi 'blueprint' claim

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

As Bengal politics sparked over Bangladeshi infiltration the State BJP on Friday hit back at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee after she accused the Centre and BSF for encouraging infiltrations. The State BJP said the infiltrators were Banerjee's vote bank. Launching a scathing attack on Banerjee for her 'malicious campaign' junior Union Minister and Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar said that all those who were entering Bengal illegally and settling down in the border districts constituted the vote bank of Chief Minister's Trinamool

Congress. "It is an open secret ... everyone knows who these infiltrators are ... they are the vote bank of Mamata Banerjee which is why they are given grand welcome by the Trinamool Congress government," Majumdar said wondering how she was unaware of the large scale infiltration that has been taking place on daily basis --- if the Chief Minister's claim that nothing that happened escaped her knowledge was true. Incidentally the Chief Minister is also in charge of the Home of the State. The BJP's counterattack came a day after Banerjee charged the Centre with preparing a 'blueprint' in connivance with the

Border Security Force to aid infiltration so as to "destabilize" Bengal. Alleging that the Bangladeshi infiltrators that settle in Bengal promptly acquire the voter and aadhar cards as also the membership of the TMC, Majumdar said these illegal immigrants "work in the elections to garner vote for Mamata Banerjee," Majumdar said that the Chief Minister was not interested in the future of the people and her State rather "she is interested about winning elections only ... she is not interested about the future of the country." Even as a section of the BJP condemned the Chief Minister for making "seditious" state-



ments by implicating the BSF and the Centre and accusing them of making a "blueprint" to engineer infiltration Majumdar said "today she is making reckless remarks to save her face but" during 2021 Assembly elections she had instigated people to attack Central forces... If it would have been Pakistan forces then she would have welcomed them. Majumdar's statements came amid the present volatile situation in Bangladesh and regular arrests made by the Indian security forces of people who had infiltrated into India and had been working as terror modules of Ansar ul Bangla

and JMB Bangladesh. The State BJP president's statements also came within hours of the Chief Minister making an aggressive statement accusing the Centre and the BSF of aiding infiltration. In apparent bid to shift the blame on the Centre's doors Banerjee on Thursday alleged that BSF was which responsible for guarding the borders, was allowing Bangladeshis to cross into India from Islampur, Sitai, and Chopra in North Bengal. "Border is guarded by BSF and not the TMC," Banerjee said adding how the BSF was aiding infiltration "to destabilize Bengal" as a part of a blueprint

prepared by the Centre and the BSF. "It is an inside job of the BSF, and it is a blueprint of the Central Government. If there was not any blueprint from the Central Government, then it would not be possible... I have repeatedly spoken to the Central Government that what they decide will be our path, but we will protest against them if they facilitate militants to disrupt the state... We will send a protest letter to the centre also for this," Banerjee said drawing instant criticism from Union Minister Giriraj Singh who said that Bengal during her rule had become a breeding ground of infiltrators.

## India protests China's creation of two new counties in Hotan, asserts area part of Ladakh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday said it has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over creation of two new counties in Hotan prefecture, asserting that such moves will not lend legitimacy to Beijing's "illegal and forcible" occupation in the region. In a strong reaction, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said parts of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh and that the Chinese action will have no bearing on New Delhi's consistent position regarding its sovereignty. China's announcement on establishing the two counties came days after Special Representatives of the two nations resumed boundary talks that was stalled for almost five years. "We have seen the announcement pertaining to the establishment of two new counties in Hotan Prefecture of China. Parts of jurisdiction of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh," Jaiswal said. "We have never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation of



Indian territory in this area," he said. "Creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's long-standing and consistent position regarding our sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's illegal and forcible occupation of the same," Jaiswal added. He further said: "We have lodged a solemn protest with the Chinese side through diplomatic channels." The latest irritant in ties came weeks after India and China ended an over four-and-a-half-year border standoff and announced steps to reduce mistrust. Following an understanding reached on October 21, the two sides completed the disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang. Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks on the margins of the BRICS Summit in Russia on October 23 and agreed to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling an intention to normalise the relations. In the nearly 50-minute meeting, Modi underscored the importance of properly handling differences and disputes and not allowing them to disturb peace and tranquillity in border areas. Nearly four weeks later, the Special Representatives on the border issue -- India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's foreign minister Wang Yi held talks in Beijing. It was the first dialogue under the framework of Special Representatives in nearly five years. In the talks, Doval and Wang focused on "positive" direction for cross-border cooperation including resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, river data sharing and border trade. Moreover, days after China announced its plan to build a mega dam on Brahmaputra river in Tibet, India on Friday said it will continue to monitor

and take necessary measures to protect its interests. In its first reaction to the proposed dam, New Delhi urged Beijing to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas. "We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests," Jaiswal said. There have been apprehensions that the dam will have adverse impact on Arunachal Pradesh as well as Assam. "As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert-level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory," Jaiswal said. "These have been reiterated, along with the need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries, following the latest report," he said. "The Chinese side has been urged to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas," he added.

## SC to devise effective mechanism to combat caste-based discrimination in educational institutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Termining it as a sensitive issue, the Supreme Court on Friday said it will devise an effective mechanism to combat caste-based discrimination in educational institutions in the country. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the University Grants Commission (UGC) to notify draft regulations to ensure no caste-based discrimination happened with students in the Central, State, private and deemed universities. The Bench directed the UGC to furnish data on the number of institutions which had established equal opportunity cells in compliance with the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions Regulations) 2012, popularly called "UGC equity regulations". "We are equally conscious of this sensitive issue. We will do something. We will have to find out some effective mechanism and modalities to see that the 2012 regulations are translated into reality," the bench said.

The top court sought Centre's response on the issue and asked the UGC to furnish data within six weeks on the complaints over such discrimination among students in all universities and higher education institutions besides the consequent action. Senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for the mothers of students Rohit Vemula and Payal Tadv, who allegedly died by suicide after facing caste-based discrimination, said from 2004 till now over 50 students (mostly from SC/ST) had killed themselves in IITs and other institutions after facing such discrimination. While Vemula, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad Central University died on January 17, 2016, Tadv, a student at TN Topiwala National Medical College, died on May 22, 2019, after she was subjected to purported discrimination by three doctors in her college. The bench said a PIL was filed in 2019 but no substantial hearing had taken place on the issue so far. "From now on we will list this petition periodically so that some effective solution could be found in the

matter as since 2019 nothing much has happened," said Justice Surya Kant. The UGC counsel submitted a committee constituted by it gave recommendation and the commission drafted new regulations to stop caste-based discrimination. "The draft regulations need to be put on the website to invite objections and suggestions from the public in a month's time and thereafter it will be notified," he said. The bench questioned the UGC over the delay and said it had been sleeping all this while and not come up with new regulations. "How much time is needed to notify the new regulations? You do it in one month and place it on record," the bench said and posted the matter after six weeks. It sought the assistance of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta on the matter along with the response of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, an autonomous institution under the UGC which assesses and accredits higher education institutions. On September 20, 2019, the top court issued notice on the

PIL which also sought to enforce the fundamental rights, particularly the Right to Equality, Right to Prohibition of Discrimination against caste, and the Right to Life. The plea alleged "rampant prevalence" of caste-based discrimination in higher educational institutions throughout the country. The petitioners sought directions to the Centre and the UGC to strictly ensure the enforcement and compliance of the 2012 regulations. Seeking directions to the Centre and the UGC, the plea asked to ensure all the educational institutions, complied with the regulations in "letter and in spirit" apart from establishing equal opportunity cells on the lines of similarly existing anti-discrimination internal complaints mechanisms, and have representation from the SC/ST, NGOs or social sector to ensure objectivity and impartiality. Further, a direction was sought to all universities to take strong disciplinary action against victimisation of students or staff over caste-based discrimination and protecting students from any hostility in campuses.

## Right to property a Constitutional right, says SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court has said that the right to property is a constitutional right and an individual cannot be deprived of his property without him being paid adequate compensation in accordance with the law. A bench of justices BR Gavai and KV Viswanathan said the right to property ceased to be a fundamental right due to the Constitution (Forty-Fourth Amendment) Act, 1978, however, it continues to be a human right in a welfare state and a constitutional right under Article 300-A of the Constitution. Article 300-A of the Constitution provides that no person shall be deprived of his property, save by authority of law. The apex court delivered its verdict on Thursday on an appeal challenging a November 2022 judgment of the Karnataka High Court in a matter pertaining to land acquisition for the Bengaluru-Mysuru Infrastructure



Corridor Project (BMICP). "As discussed hereinabove, though the right to property is no more a fundamental right, in view of the provisions of Article 300-A of the Constitution of India, it is a constitutional right," the bench said. "A person cannot be deprived of his property without him being paid adequate compensation in accordance with law for the same," it said in its verdict on the compensation related to the infrastructure corridor project.

The bench noted that in January 2003, a preliminary notification was issued by the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) for acquiring lands for the project and in November 2005, the possession of land of the appellants was taken over. The top court said the land owners, who were appellants before it, were required to knock at the doors of the courts on a number of occasions during the last 22 years and they have been deprived of their property

without any compensation for the same. The top court noted there was no delay which could be attributed to the appellants in not getting compensation, but it was on account of the "lethargic attitude" of the officers of the State/KIADB that the appellants were deprived of compensation. The bench said that only after notices were issued in contempt proceedings, the compensation was determined by the Special Land Acquisition Officer (SLAO) on April 22, 2019, taking guideline values prevailing in 2011 for determining the market value of the acquired land. The judgment said if the compensation to be awarded at the market value as of 2003 was permitted, it would amount to permitting a travesty of justice and making the constitutional provisions under Article 300-A a mockery. It was a fit case for the apex court to exercise its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution and direct the shifting of the date for determination of the market value of

the land of the appellants. "We, therefore, in exercise of power of this court under Article 142 of the Constitution of India, find it appropriate in the interest of justice that the SLAO be directed to determine the compensation to be awarded to the appellants herein on the basis of the market value prevailing as on April 22, 2019," the bench said. The top court directed that the SLAO shall pass a fresh award taking the market value prevailing as on April 22, 2019 within two months after hearing the parties. "The rights of parties to challenge the award in reference, if they are aggrieved by it, shall remain open," the bench said. It noted the appellants have been deprived of their legitimate dues for almost 22 years. "It can also not be controverted that money is what money buys. The value of money is based on the idea that money can be invested to earn a return, and that the purchasing power of money decreases over time due to inflation," said the judgment.

## SC agrees to examine CBI's plea against acquittal of Ram Rahim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine the CBI's appeal against the acquittal of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and four others in the 2002 murder of Ranjit Singh, a former manager of the sect. The Punjab and Haryana High Court on May 28, 2024, acquitted Singh and others in the case, observing the probe was "tainted and sketchy". Sira-based sect leader Singh, who is serving a 20-year jail term for the charges of raping two of his disciples, is currently lodged in Sunaria Jail in Rohtak, Haryana. He was also awarded life-term imprisonment for the murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati, which will commence after the completion of his current sentence. Singh in the past grabbed headlines for securing parole many times. On Friday, a bench comprising

Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar issued notices to the five acquitted persons including Singh. The bench took note of the submissions of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, that a bench headed by Justice Bela M Trivedi had issued notices to the acquitted persons on a separate plea filed by the deceased's father against the High Court verdict. "Our attention has been drawn to the office report dated September 9, 2024 regarding the order passed by the bench of Justice Bela Trivedi. Issue notice... Matter is to be listed before the bench presided over by Justice Bela Trivedi," said the top court. Ranjit Singh was fatally shot at by four unidentified assailants at Khanpur Kolian Village in Haryana's Kurukshetra on July 10, 2002. The murder was allegedly orchestrated by Singh, who suspected the deceased of

being behind the circulation of an anonymous letter accusing him of sexually exploiting his women followers. The CBI, which took over the probe in November 2023, said there was a clear motive behind the crime. A division bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, however, acquitted Singh observing the prosecution's failure to conclusively establish the motive and said the case was "shrouded in doubts". Those acquitted include Avtar Singh, Krishan Lal, Jasbir Singh, and Sabdil Singh whereas another accused Inder Sain, died during the pendency of the trial in 2020. A special CBI court in Panchkula, Haryana, convicted all the accused in October, 2021 and sentenced them to life-term imprisonment in the murder case. Singh was held guilty of hatching a criminal conspiracy with the co-accused persons.

## SC upholds order saying Haryana Congress MLA Panwar's arrest illegal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has observed ED's "high-handedness" and "inhuman conduct" during an almost 15-hour long interrogation of former Haryana Congress MLA Surrender Panwar and upheld an order saying his arrest was illegal. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih said it was an "inhuman conduct" on part of ED officers as the case was not related to some terror activity but of an alleged illegal sand mining. "This is not the way to treat people in such a case. You have virtually forced a person to make a statement," it said. Dismissing the Enforcement Directorate (ED)'s plea against the high court order, the bench held, "We are not inclined to interfere with the finding of the high court that the arrest of the



respondent was illegal." The High Court's findings, it said, were only for deciding whether Panwar's arrest was illegal. "These findings will not affect the merits of the pending complaint under Section 44 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002," said the bench in its order on December 2. The court said the ED's approach in

conducting the probe was a "shocking state of affairs" where a person was virtually forced to make a statement. ED's counsel Zohab Hussain said the High Court had erred in its finding that Panwar was continuously quizzed for 14.40 hours, pointing to a dinner break during the interrogation. The lawyer said ED in a 2024 circular asked its officials

to maintain certain standards of interrogations and to ensure people were not interrogated during late night and in early hours of the day. Panwar, 55, was taken into custody in the wee hours of July 20, 2024, in Gurugram and produced before a special PMLA court in Ambala which sent him to the custody of the ED till July 29, 2024 in an illegal mining-linked money-laundering case. The agency raided the premises of the former Sonepat MLA in January, 2024, on charges of "large-scale illegal mining" in the Yamunanagar area of the state. The money-laundering case stems from several FIRs registered by the Haryana Police for probing alleged illegal mining of boulders, gravel and sand that took place in the past in Yamunanagar and nearby districts despite a ban imposed by the NGT.

## MEA rejects Washington Post report linking New Delhi to plot against Muizzu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday rejected two recent reports published by the Washington Post -- one linking New Delhi to a failed plot to impeach Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and another on Indian agents allegedly attempting to eliminate certain terror elements in Pakistan. Dismissing the reports, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a "compulsive hostility" towards India. In its report on the Maldives, the Washington Post, citing a document titled "Democratic Renewal Initiative", claimed that opposition politicians proposed bribing 40 members of Parliament, including those



from Muizzu's own party, to vote to impeach him. After months of secret talks, the plotters failed to gather enough votes to impeach the president, it said. "Both the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a compulsive hostility

towards India. You can see a pattern in their activities. I leave you to judge their credibility. As far as we are concerned, they have none," Jaiswal said. "As regards (the report on) Pakistan, I remind you of what Hillary Clinton said -- 'You cannot keep snakes in your

backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbours,'" he said. Clinton had made the comments in a blunt message to Pakistan in 2011, when she was serving as the US secretary of state. She had also said that Washington intended to "push the Pakistanis very hard" to remove militant safe havens and tackle groups like the Haqqani network that are responsible for cross-border strikes. In its report on India's "shadow" operations in Pakistan, the Washington Post, quoting unnamed Pakistani and western officials, claimed that the Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), is carrying out a programme since 2021 to "kill at least a half a dozen people" inside Pakistan.

# Protests intensify in Bihar over BPSC exam controversy, rail and road traffic disrupted



**PTI ■ PATNA**  
Protests intensified on Friday over the demand for cancellation of the recent Bihar PSC exam, as agitators disrupted rail and vehicular movement in Patna, while police stopped a few Left-leading students' organisations from marching to the CM's residence. A day ahead of fresh tests for a select group of candidates, Independent MP Pappu

Yadav led his supporters in blocking rail and road traffic in several areas of Patna as well as other parts of the state, including Araria, Purnea and Muzaffarpur, officials said. The protesters gathered at Sachiwalay Halt Railway Station and squatted on the tracks for a brief period, causing a delay in the train movement, they said. Yadav's supporters also burnt tyres on roads in Purnea and

Patna, the officials said. "The agitators stopped the Buxar-Fatua passenger train at Sachiwalay Halt Station around 9 am. The train was stopped for 20 minutes," East Central Railway Chief Public Relation Officer Sarwati Chandra told PTI. Members of some Left-leaning students' organisations also clashed with police upon being stopped from marching towards the chief

minister's residence in the state capital, the officials said. Meanwhile, Jan Suraj founder Prashant Kishor continued with his fast-unto-death that he began on Thursday to press the demand for cancellation of the 70th Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) conducted by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) on December 13. Mocking Kishor, Yadav likened the

former political strategist to well-known coman 'Natwar Lal'. "He is 'Natwar Lal', who sits on fast-unto-death in the evening after having lunch. Please don't talk about him," Yadav told reporters. The Independent MP, along with his supporters, also took out a march from Sachiwalay Halt Railway Station to JP Golumber, where police stopped them from proceeding further.

# Top leaders pay tribute to former PM Manmohan Singh at prayer meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Several top dignitaries paid tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at a prayer meet organised in his memory at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj here. Among the top leaders who attended the prayer meeting (Kirtan and Antim Ardas) included Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. Former SGPCC president Bibi Jagir Kaur, Leader of Opposition in Punjab assembly Pratap Bajwa and former deputy chairperson of the then Planning Commission Montek



Singh Ahluwalia also attended the prayer. Others who attended the ceremony included Congress leaders Jaresh Ramesh and Pawan Khera, former Union ministers Salman Khurshid and Ajay Maken, and Sukhjinder Randhawa. BJP's Praneet Kaur and Manjinder Singh Sirsa were also present. Earlier, former vice-president

Hamid Ansari, Sonia Gandhi and Kharge were among the dignitaries who attended the 'Akhand Path' at the ex-prime minister's residence on Friday. Former prime minister's wife, Gursharan Kaur sang a 'shabad (verse)' from the Sikh holy scriptures during the 'Akhand path (continuous recitation of Guru Granth Sahib)' at his residence.

# Gurugram traffic police to wear body cameras to enhance road safety and transparency

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram traffic police will soon be equipped with body-worn video cameras to catch traffic violators on vital roads of Gurugram like MG Road and Golf Course Road. The cameras are expected to enhance road safety for both the traffic police and the residents of Gurugram. "All traffic inspectors and zonal officers were given instructions to use body-worn cameras while challaning and were also instructed not to argue with any driver while



challenging and to do their work with pleasant behaviour," Virender Vij, DCP (traffic), said. While challaning, the activities of the driver and the intersection will also be

recorded with the use of these body-worn cameras. All these recordings will be kept safely so that in future if required, these body-worn camera recordings can be used for any evidence," he said.

# Manipur CM clarifies apology, says opponents seeking unrest amid ethnic conflict

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Friday claimed that those who are indulging in politics over his apology to the people on the 20-month-long ethnic conflict are seeking unrest in the north-eastern state, and said his government's priority is to restore peace. Claiming that "past is past", he appealed to communities to sit together and find a permanent solution to the conflict that has plagued the northeastern state since May 2023. "Those who are indulging in politics over my statement are seeking unrest.

The opposition has no ideology. What I said was an expression of sadness and grief. My apology was to those who have been suffering and have lost their loved ones. Why should I say sorry to terrorists? I am saying sorry to the innocent people and those who were displaced from their homes," Singh said. The chief minister had on Tuesday apologised for the ethnic conflict in the state, which claimed more than 250 lives and rendered thousands homeless and appealed to all communities to forget and forgive past mistakes and start afresh.

# President Droupadi Murmu hails NIMHANS as model for integrated medicine services

PTI ■ BENGALURU

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday hailed NIMHANS for its integrated medicine services as she considered it as a model for all. According to her, the application of Yoga and Ayurveda in the promotion of mental health and well being is worth emulating. "The integrative medicine services of NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) has been a model for all to examine the applications of Yoga and Ayurveda in the promotion of mental health and well being, and in that treatment of psychiatric and neurological disorders," Murmu said during the



Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Institute here. On the occasion, she inaugurated the Psychiatry Specialty Block, Central Laboratory Complex and

Bhima Hostel at NIMHANS. The President also dedicated state-of-the-art diagnostic facilities - the advanced 3T MRI Scanner and DSA System to the nation.

She said different kinds of meditations are also useful in countering negative mental forces, and added that they are being integrated in the Mental health care models.

She underlined the importance of using traditional approaches that are beneficial for all. Murmu said, "Our scriptures tell us that the mind is at the root of everything we perceive in the world." She underlined that greater focus on mental health promotions will become even more important in the years ahead. In the past, issues and concern of mental health had not received enough attention in some societies, the President said, adding that in recent times, awareness about mental health has been rising. She further said that the unscientific belief and stigma associated with mental illnesses are a matter of past, making it easier for those

suffering from various ailments to seek help. "This has been a welcome development, especially at this juncture, because a variety of mental health issues are taking epidemic proportions around the world. The COVID 19 pandemic in particular led to a spike in such concerns," Murmu pointed out. According to the President, working professionals face more stress, and a large number of the elderly people suffer from loneliness due to social challenges. However, it is truly heartening to note that the rising awareness has made it possible for patients to open up and share their problems," she said.

# Former union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla takes oath as 19th Governor of Manipur

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Former union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla took oath as the 19th governor of Manipur during a function at the Raj Bhavan here on Friday. Bhalla was administered the oath of office by Manipur High Court Chief Justice D Krishnakumar in the presence of Chief Minister N Biren Singh. He inspected the guard of honour by Manipur Rifles personnel. Speaking on Bhalla's swearing-in as the governor, the chief minister said, "He is a dynamic person who knows the ground reality and the situation of the state very well. He is a very committed person. I wholeheartedly



welcome him. With his appointment as the governor of the state, I believe that normalcy and peace will be restored at the earliest." The former union home secretary took oath as the governor at a time when strife-torn Manipur has been witnessing periodic ethnic clashes between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

"Appointing one of the intelligent and competent persons as the governor of the state during these trying times shows that the central government is serious about solving the problems of Manipur," Singh said. Bhalla, who has the rare distinction of being the longest-serving union home secretary, completed his five-year tenure in August last

year. He is a 1984-batch retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre. President Droupadi Murmu appointed Bhalla the governor of Manipur last month. "I know Bhalla ji. He is a well-experienced person and held many important posts. He held posts in the home department. We appreciate his appointment as the governor of Manipur. I thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for Bhalla's appointment," the chief minister said. Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya was holding the additional charge of Manipur.

# Police constables arrested for hotel manager's death in new year's party brawl

PTI ■ SHIMLA

A police constable was arrested and another placed under custody for allegedly killing a hotel manager at a New Year's party in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district, officials said on Friday. The accused, Anoop Kumar and Amit Kumar were posted as constables in the Chamba district while the victim was identified as hotel manager Rajinder Kumar. According to police, the incident occurred during a New Year's party when three police personnel visited a hotel in Bankhet, Chamba. Anoop and Amit got into a

heated argument with Rajinder and Sachin, a hotel employee. In the heat of the moment, Rajinder, Anoop and Sachin fell from the hotel's elevated parking space and suffered injuries. While Anoop and Sachin suffered fractures, Rajinder Kumar succumbed to injuries. Superintendent of Police (SP) Abhishek Yadav said that Amit has been arrested while Anoop will be formally placed under arrest after getting discharged from the hospital. The involvement of the third police personnel is under investigation. Rajinder's family members earlier held a protest and

demanding action against the accused. They blocked the Pathankot-Chamba National Highway for a few hours which disrupted vehicular movement. They withdrew the protest after the SP assured them of stern action. Yadav said that the accused were posted in Chamba and were sent to Dalhousie for duty. "While they were returning from their duty, they headed up to the hotel where the incident took place. We have also checked CCTV footage in which we can see that a scuffle had taken place" he said. Further investigation into the matter is underway, he added.

# Odisha CM declares unseasonal rain as natural calamity

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Friday declared the unseasonal rain in December last year as a natural calamity to facilitate disbursement of compensation from the state disaster response fund (SDRF) to farmers for crop damage due to the untimely weather event. Addressing the 'Krushi Odisha Conclave' 2025 here, he said farmers who have lost 33 per cent or more crops due to the unseasonal rain, would be provided assistance as per the provisions in the relief code. The assistance of around Rs 291 crore will be given from the state disaster response fund (SDRF), he said. "Unseasonal rain was not on the list of natural calamities in the state. However, keeping in view the crop damage and plight of farmers, our government today declares the unseasonal rain as a natural calamity in the state to facilitate the disbursement of compensation from the state disaster response fund," he said. According to district collectors, 6,66,720 farmers have so far reported 33 per cent or more crop loss due to rain between December 20 and 28, the chief minister said. "These cultivators are entitled to get financial assistance of about Rs 291.59 crore as compensation," he said. Crop on around 2,26,791 hectares of agricultural land has been damaged by the untimely weather event, he added.

# 2013 to 2025, Maha Kumbh grows threefold in 12 years

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

As the sacred city of Prayagraj prepares to host the Maha Kumbh 2025, an air of excitement envelops the region, promising a spiritual gathering unparalleled in scale and splendour. This iteration of the Kumbh Mela surpasses the grandeur of 2013, showcasing transformative progress in infrastructure and amenities, making it a hallmark of modern governance and cultural heritage. The event's ₹5010 crore budget, bolstered by ₹2010 crore from the central government, marks a monumental rise from the ₹1214 crore allocated for the 2013 Kumbh. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi



Adityanath remarked, "This year's Kumbh is not just a religious event but a global spectacle. The increased budget reflects our dedication to creating world-class

infrastructure for devotees from around the globe." The Maha Kumbh grounds have expanded from 16 square kilometers in 2013 to a sprawling 40 square

kilometers, accommodating an estimated 40 crore pilgrims over 45 days. Mahakumbh Nagar, a temporary district with 25 sectors and 56 police stations, exemplifies meticulous planning. "The scale of Maha Kumbh 2025 is unprecedented. This transformation highlights how far we have come in managing such a massive event," said Dr. Shailendra Singh, a senior official overseeing preparations. For devotees, the improvements are palpable. The number of toilets has surged from 33,903 to 1.5 lakh, complemented by 300 portable units, while change rooms have increased fourfold to 10,000. "Our aim is to provide not just a

spiritual experience but also a safe and hygienic environment for everyone," said Ramesh Tiwari, sanitation head of Mahakumbh Nagar. Naval Raghuvanshi, a regular pilgrim from Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, shared his experience: "I also came to the Maha Kumbh in 2013. There is a lot of difference between that system and today's system. Facilities have increased. Earlier, we had three toilets in our camp; this time, we have 11. We used to get two taps; now, we have six taps." Transportation facilities have also undergone a remarkable upgrade. Over 7,000 buses, including 200 air-conditioned ones, and more than 200 charter flights will

complement regular flights from 23 cities, while 3,000 special trains will ensure seamless connectivity. The infrastructure is geared to handle the daily influx of approximately 5 lakh passengers. Lighting and energy have seen significant advancements, with ₹391 crore allocated to power the Kumbh area. The setup includes 1,532 kilometers of wiring, 67,000 streetlights, and 170 substations. "Illuminating the Kumbh is as symbolic as it is practical, embodying the light of spirituality that guides millions," observed A.K. Mishra, Chief Engineer for Maha Kumbh 2025. Technology will play a vital role, with drones, AI-powered

cameras, and face-recognition systems ensuring security and efficiency. Visitors can also access real-time assistance via a dedicated Google Chat feature. The event is expected to break records, with peak attendance on Mauni Amavasya, January 29, anticipated to exceed 4 crore devotees, surpassing the 3 crore recorded in 2013. Swami Anand Giri, a noted spiritual leader, expressed, "Maha Kumbh 2025 is not just an event; it is a phenomenon that unites humanity in faith and devotion." With its fusion of tradition and modernity, Maha Kumbh 2025 is set to redefine spiritual gatherings, serving as a beacon of India's rich cultural legacy and innovative capabilities.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## America under attack

A series of seemingly unrelated attacks highlight a troubling pattern of violence that has become a daily occurrence in the US

It is not a good beginning of the new year for the United States. The United States witnessed a series of attacks that shook it to core: a truck-ramming incident in New Orleans, a shooting incident in New York and a shooting spree in Las Vegas. These events, happening in quick succession, underscore an alarming pattern of violence that warrants deep analysis into their causes and potential implications. In New Orleans, a truck driven by Shamsud Din Jabbar plowed into a crowd, killing 15 and injuring 30. The truck, bearing an ISIS flag, was found to contain weapons and potential improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Jabbar was killed in a shootout with law enforcement and the FBI is treating the incident as an act of terrorism. Several people were injured after a mass shooting incident at the Amazura nightclub in Queens, New York late on Wednesday. Meanwhile, one person was killed and seven were wounded when a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a hotel belonging to US President-elect



Donald Trump in Las Vegas. Motives remain unclear, but early investigations point to ideological influences. The attacks share a few commonalities. All incidents targeted densely populated, high-profile locations to maximise casualties and media coverage.

In New Orleans and potentially Las Vegas, ideological motives appear central, with Jabbar's ISIS affiliations highlighting international terrorism's persistent threat. The use of a vehicle, explosives, and firearms demonstrates the adaptability of attackers, making prevention increasingly complex. The motivations behind these attacks stem from several intersecting factors. Jabbar's case exemplifies how individuals, even the US citizens, can become radicalised through extremist propaganda, facilitated by online networks. The New York incident is case in point of hazards of allowing free gun culture and resistance to any law on gun control. Early reports from Las Vegas suggest mental health challenges combined with ideological leanings may have fueled the attack, a trend increasingly observed in lone-wolf attackers. The growing threat of extremism, combined with unchecked emotions and easy access to firearms, continues to claim innocent lives. The implications of these attacks call for enhanced surveillance, with increased monitoring of online platforms and extremist networks. The gun control is the need of the hour. Though the US is divided on the gun control, it is high times at least some initial steps were taken in this direction. The recent spate of attacks underscores a volatile and evolving threat perception in the US. While law enforcement's swift action has mitigated further tragedy, addressing the root causes of such violence requires a multifaceted approach. From tackling radicalisation to bolstering community resilience, the nation must remain vigilant and united against the forces that seek to sow fear and division.

## PICTALK



A worker plucks chrysanthemum flowers at a farm, in Nadia

## A legacy of leadership, humanity and service



SANTOSH MATHEW

Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States, leaves behind an extraordinary legacy as a leader, peacemaker and humanitarian



Jimmy Carter, was one of the oldest living American presidents. Along with being the individual who has lived the longest after serving as president in American history, he is also distinguished for spending the most extended post-presidential period alive. Jimmy Carter, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his efforts in promoting human rights and conflict resolution, passed away in 2023. He was the 39th President of the United States, and he outlived many of his contemporaries, including George H.W. Bush, who he defeated in the presidential race in 1980. Born James Earl Carter Jr. on October 1, 1924, he has made a significant mark on American history. From 1977 to 1981, Jimmy Carter served as the President of the United States. Before becoming president, Jimmy Carter served as the Governor of Georgia in 1971. Despite running for president again in 1982 (Democrat) and competing against Ronald Reagan, he faced defeat. After leaving the presidency, he, along with his wife Rosalynn Carter, established the Carter Centre in 1982 in pursuit of helping the disadvantaged. Rosalynn Carter became the first lady and the first woman to serve as a board member of the

Carter Centre. In 2002, Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards peace and his exemplary actions in promoting human welfare. Despite reaching the age of 90, he remained active in various fields. Carter continued his philanthropic work, including building houses for low-income families through Habitat for Humanity, reducing diseases and elevating the quality of life for the underprivileged. His advocacy for human rights, international conflict resolution, presidency, human rights, and socio-economic development reflects his dedication to humanitarian causes. Carter's dedication to peace and social justice, as well as his active involvement in public service, sets him apart among U.S. presidents. Carter played a key role in mediating international conflicts, notably contributing to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. His post-presidential activities, including receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and actively participating in various humanitarian initiatives, showcase his commitment to making a positive impact on the world. However, his attempt to rescue



IN 2002, JIMMY CARTER WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR HIS EFFORTS TOWARDS PEACE AND HIS EXEMPLARY ACTIONS IN PROMOTING HUMAN WELFARE. DESPITE REACHING THE AGE OF 90, HE REMAINED ACTIVE IN VARIOUS FIELDS

American hostages in Iran, known as Operation Eagle Claw, failed. In his personal life, Jimmy Carter married Rosalynn in 1946, and their marriage lasted more than seven decades. They have four children: Jack, James, Donnel, and Amy. Rosalynn "Rosallynn" Carter, actively participated in various activities, including writing, activism, and advocacy for different causes. She was born in 1927. Rosalynn was actively involved in various meetings and discussions as the First Lady. She faced controversies, engaged in foreign trips, and represented her husband in diplomatic roles. In 1978, the then-American President Jimmy Carter visited India. Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister at that time. He had a meeting with 500 media persons. Carter visited the village of Chumukedima. The purpose of his visit was to revitalize the village where his mother, Lillian Peace, had served in the Peace Corps. During his journey, Carter distributed a considerable amount of money and television to the villagers. The village was later renamed as Carterpuri. In 2015, Jimmy Carter was diagnosed with

cancer, and in 2019, he faced health challenges related to multiple falls. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Carter, at the age of 96, stayed at home due to the pandemic's circumstances. Despite facing challenges and controversies, Jimmy Carter remained an active and influential figure in national and international affairs throughout his life. His contributions to diplomacy, human rights, and conflict resolution earned him recognition and respect. Even though his time as the American President failed, he left the White House and continued his work as a global advocate for human rights. He established the Carter Presidential Foundation to protect human rights globally, helping those in need and experiencing hardship. The organization has grown globally, assisting those in distress in Africa, Latin America, and other societies. Carter's compassionate activities in these regions included health-care services and other humanitarian initiatives. Today, he remains one of the eminent figures among the great presidents of America. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

## Balancing dreams and parental aspirations: A dilemma for students

In a society deeply rooted in tradition and shaped by economic uncertainty, parents often tread cautiously when guiding their children's career paths

We tend to be over-cautious when we guide our children in their professional choices. I realised this only after I had cajoled my children into studying sciences till their class 12. My rationale was that they could always switch to any other course for graduation, but the reverse was not possible. They are now happily pursuing their non-science professions, often ribbing me about how much better they could have done in their Board examinations had I not insisted. Many parents from my social circle still struggle to resolve the conundrum.

A senior colleague faced such a dilemma for his daughter two decades back. My daughters were by now happily pursuing their dreams. I freely dispensed my wisdom to let the young lady pursue whatever she wanted. He was contemplative for some time before agreeing. He remembered his school friend, the son of a famous medical doctor. The friend was pushed into a medical college sometime in the late sixties. He quit after a couple of years, joined a



course in liberal arts, and was a contented leading artist. I was born a few years after independence. I believe our parents were excited about freedom but were equally apprehensive about the future for the next generation. They opted for the more secure government jobs for us through engineering or medical studies. Children from families who had already seen enough government jobs through second-generation elders started moving to other options in the nineties. The liberalisation of the Indian economy opened professional choices hitherto unknown to children and parents alike. But it was still not the same across the entire spectrum. A junior colleague sought my advice regarding his son's admission to an engineering course. The child had not performed well in the competi-

tive examinations. The fee charged by the available lower-rung colleges was exorbitant, necessitating the father to take a loan. It was tragic as he came to me after five years, a year after the young man had completed his graduation and had been unable to secure a job, requesting if I could arrange a job even at a measly monthly salary. I witnessed several similar cases and wondered about the strange phenomenon even half a century after independence when several better-paying career options were available.

An improved economy has resulted in a continuous upward movement of people financially from the below-poverty line to the lower class to the lower-middle-class to the middle-middle-class, and so on. However, an increasing population also ensures a part of the population remains in the lower financial strata. These parents are insecure about the future leading them towards the perceived safer educational courses for children to pursue. We read about senior leaders exhorting young people to become job providers instead of job

seekers. Not many talk about the ways to achieve this or the alternate career options. Engineering and medical colleges keep mushrooming without the government and the leaders pausing to reflect upon the implications of unplanned growth. This will continue for a few more generations till the population stabilizes. I narrate experiences from my life when interacting with the young in college.

I tell them to pursue their dreams. A few of them invariably ask me whether to follow the courses that their parents have chosen for them or if they should follow their dreams. It is a difficult question to answer. I draw upon my life when I respond, "Follow your parents today, they only want the best for you. But do not let your dreams die. Life gives enough opportunities for you to pursue your dreams - if not today, certainly sometime in the future."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

## ENSURE WORKERS' SAFETY

Madam — This refers to the editorial, 'Save Priya' (January 3). It is indeed the responsibility of the Indian government to ensure the safety and security of millions of Indian nationals who choose to avail the employment opportunities extended in other countries. When the government is not able to provide employment in India, it is but natural that helpless people venture going abroad seeking livelihood means. Had the government provided jobs they would not have thought of going abroad. Therefore, the government should negotiate with the countries employing Indians to ensure the safety and security of the employees.

In case any of them are found guilty of any crime, they should be sent back to face legal proceedings in the home country. This is not new. In the case of Abu, the extradition is agreed to with the condition of not awarding him capital punishment. Above all, it is time to rethink awarding capital punishment. Let us imagine a scene of punishing all those involved in various crimes, those who instigated and promoted them in Manipur in the recent months. An individual killing another individual is a crime to be punished by awarding death sentences, but mass killing and raping go unpunished and even if punished, enjoy remission and paroles. Review is imminent.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

## ISIS STRIKES AGAIN

Madam — Apropos of the headlines 'Terror Strikes United States' (January 3), the ghastly terror strikes before Donald Trump swears in his second term as president are ominous for his upcoming tenure and may influence and harden his policy on terrorism throughout the world. The army veteran Shams Ud Din Jabbar, swayed by ISIS, can't be alone in executing the terrorist attacks killing 14 people and fatally injuring several citizens. In fact, he got the advanced arms training and technology from the US army itself. The police investigation may unearth the

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Sports award winners announced



The list of sports award winners is finally made public now, and the names of those who received the government nod for the Dhyani Chand Khel Ratna Award include D Gukesh, Harmanpreet Singh, Manu Bhaker and Praveen Kumar. Also, there is a long list for the Arjuna Awards, Dronacharya Award and the others. Although every recipient is worthy of receiving the honours for doing exceptionally well in their respective sports field. But D Gukesh is worthy of receiving extra appreciation for clinching the

title at such an early age of 18. He excellently carved out his own space for the national sport honours by becoming the winner of the FIDE World Chess Championship, beating Ding Liren most recently last December 2024.

His calmness, grit and sacrifices on personal grounds, as well as his patience for his sports category, made him the utmost deserving candidate for this very honour. He has taken chess to new heights for being a cynosure in the Indian sports history. Today chess has become a popular mind-game among the youth, especially Gen Z & Gen Alpha. All credit goes to the young aspirations & zeal of D Gukesh, R Vaishali and Praggnandhaa who have made this 6-century-based, Indian-origin game called Shatranj reach the epitome of sports craze among players of every generation. He is in true sense, India's Khel Ratna (Sports Gem).

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

deep conspiracy, but the vulnerability for terror attacks is conspicuous.

Islamic fundamentalism has already destroyed Islamic countries where nationality and geographical boundaries are deeply divided among ethnic groups. Islamic terrorism has gripped Asia, America and Africa and the peace is unsustainable. Let Islamic countries settle their own nationalities and borders without foreign intervention and fight internecine wars among themselves. There is a need to adopt a policy of keeping away from Islamic fundamentalist countries from all diplomatic channels, trade and security agreements. The extremist and fundamentalist leadership of all those countries are inflicting gruesome attacks in the US, Europe and India. The diplomatic channels in the Islamic countries are failing. It may be recalled that in the past, the US had to abandon Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan after decades of feeding them and strengthening them. The world needs to rethink fighting terrorism.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

## SOLAR POWER FOR RESIDENTS

Madam — It is an excellent initiative by the UT Administration of Chandigarh to provide solar plants to the residents of the 'City Beautiful' under the RESCO (Renewable Energy Service Company) scheme at no cost, inviting the tapping of solar energy and savings for every household. The sun is available in plenty in northern India, which will make the scheme very successful. This scheme needs to be promulgated rapidly in other cities of the nation too, with the initiative of the Union government, to benefit the maximum number of people.

It will help in saving natural energy, a privilege available in abundance to only a few select countries. The government should ensure that benefits are given only to those holding authorised infrastructure duly registered to discourage further unauthorised constructions and ensure correct utilisation of government funds.

R S Narula | Patiala

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## FIRST COLUMN

## OVERCOMING JEALOUSY AND POSSESSIVENESS

In a world driven by competition and material aspirations, they become the silent tormentors



RAVI VALLURI

The world has become exceedingly ruthless and is not populated by monks and sages. Renunciation today is seen as an act contemptibly performed by someone lacking in courage. Competition fuels the aspiration to launch territories and enlarge the area of dominance. Companies, countries and communities have all become wary of the material success of their 'competitors' and in the process compromise with their goals and objectives. Consequently, they resort to shortcuts to emerge triumphant and victorious. The attribute of jealousy arises in an individual when the mind is possessive of certain belongings.

They fail to appreciate it is primarily inadequacy and deficiency in the personality that triggers this kind of capricious and mercurial behaviour. Interestingly, envy in many also arises out of shortages. There can be a lack of aptitude, talent, resources, connections, opportunities or because of unfavourable outcomes. This engenders negative feelings towards perceived competitors, which culminates in jealousy and other negative feelings. Individuals subsumed by jealousy build walls of false security walls around their personalities.

Such minds feel cheery about their possessions. They attach importance to this property, clinging on to it. This could be a physical property, position, power and pelf, pleasure or sex. As per the Mahabharata, Karna was extremely jealous of Arjuna, which eventually proved to be his nemesis. Similarly, Dev Dutt remained extremely envious of his enlightened



cousin, Buddha, which only led to his downfall. The jealous and possessive mind is acquisitive by nature, taking both animate and inanimate objects for granted and getting attached to things, like an addiction to alcohol or marijuana.

Additionally, such a mind is perpetually petrified at the prospect of losing acquisitions. Fear in such minds harbours negative tendencies such as hatred, greed and ruthlessness. For instance, an artiste aspiring to be a lead artiste in a drama plays foul with a more talented actress becoming fearful and gripped with hatred and greed. Her ruthless mind kept conjuring tricks, trying to outsmart the second lead and in the bargain lost the plot. Jealous and envious minds have become laboratories of antagonism that spew hatred. How do we overcome attributes such as jealousy, envy, and possessiveness? At one end of the spectrum are organisations and authorities which need to take up this responsibility. This includes proper parenting, where children are brought up on ideals of inherent goodness, an effective educational system that imparts values as part of their pedagogy, governments that take up the responsibility of providing equal opportunities to the citizens and try to carve out an egalitarian system and a society that addresses the core issues of humanness amongst its citizenry. Vasudeva Kutumbakam (or what is termed one world family) is the net result. The spiritual touch is an important colour in the rainbow of goodness. One can practice any faith, but we need to be tolerant of other peoples' points of view. Spirituality succeeds where religions draw the fault lines and wave red flags. Globalisation has made the world flat, but has resulted in an exponential increase in crass commercialisation and human minds have fallen prey to antipathetic traits such as jealousy, envy, attachments, entanglements, greed and possessiveness. The vicious tendencies of jealousy and possessiveness can be tackled by following the two-fold approach highlighted so that the chasm between individuals diminishes. "Manifest plainness Embrace simplicity Reduce selfishness Have few desires." — Lao Tzu

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

## How waterways shape global dominance



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Beyond the rhetoric of ideologies and resources, history reveals a stark reality: whoever commands the strategic arteries of global trade rules, the world



Have you ever wondered why the world's most significant conflicts haven't often been about land or wealth, but about water—specifically, the narrow, strategic passages that govern the flow of global commerce? What if the true history of power isn't written in the conquest of continents, but in the manipulation of these invisible arteries that sustain entire civilisations? We've been conditioned to believe wars are fought over ideologies, religions, or resources, but in reality, the greatest power struggles have always boiled down to one thing: who controls the waterways. In the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), Athens fought for dominance over the Aegean Sea, while the Punic Wars (264–146 BCE) saw Rome and Carthage clash over Mediterranean trade routes. The Viking Invasions (8th–11th Century) leveraged rivers and coastal routes to expand across Europe. The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) revolved around control of the English Channel, vital for military and trade access.

The Spanish Armada (1588) attempted to invade England via the Channel, only to fail, marking the rise of English naval power. The Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652–1674) pitted England against the Dutch for supremacy over global trade routes. The Opium Wars (1839–1860) saw Britain assert control over Chinese trade routes, while the Crimean War (1853–1856) focused on access to the Black Sea and key straits. History teaches us one undeniable truth: whoever controls the waters, controls the world. So, are today's tensions over waterways merely the latest chapter in an ongoing imperialist saga, where the West fights to preserve its dominance, regardless of the cost? Consider the Suez Canal, that artificial marvel that stitched together the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

To the naked eye, it may appear as nothing more than a lifeline for global trade, but dig deeper and you'll find it at the heart of Western exploitation. When the British seized control in 1882, under the convenient pretext of 'protecting their investments,' they didn't just shorten maritime routes; they solidified their chokehold on the world's shipping routes, ensuring that they would remain the dominant force in global com-



THE PANAMA CANAL EXISTS BECAUSE THE UNITED STATES ORCHESTRATED THE DISINTEGRATION OF COLOMBIAN SOVEREIGNTY IN 1903. THIS WASN'T A MOMENT OF ENGINEERING BRILLIANCE, BUT A CALCULATED EXERCISE IN IMPERIALISM

merce. When Egypt's Nasser attempted to break this grip in 1956, his actions sparked the Suez Crisis, where Britain, France, and Israel launched a military intervention to maintain their control. As US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles famously quipped, "The United States will not tolerate the use of force to interfere with the free flow of commerce." And yet, isn't it glaringly obvious that this was never about commerce at all—it was about the West's attempt to secure its monopoly, at any cost? In the same vein, the Panama Canal stands as a bold symbol of imperial manipulation. The US didn't merely 'build' the canal—it stole it.

The Panama Canal exists because the United States orchestrated the disintegration of Colombian sovereignty in 1903. This wasn't a moment of engineering brilliance, but a calculated exercise in imperialism. With the canal, the US secured its unchallenged control over the Atlantic and Pacific, guaranteeing military and economic supremacy for the century to come. Even when Panamanian discontent festered, and the CIA's once-trusted ally Manuel Noriega threatened the established order, the United States responded with military force under the guise of 'fighting drug cartels.'

To the naive, it was a noble cause. To the cynical, it was a ruthless move to preserve a stranglehold over one of the world's most critical arteries. The canal may have technically been handed back to Panama in 1999, but let's not fool ourselves—it remains an essential tool of Western control, albeit one with a new face.

Let's not forget the Strait of Hormuz, a sliver of water that handles a quarter of the world's oil. The British recognised its significance early on, securing their dominance over it through protectorate agreements in the 19th century. By the time of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s,

Hormuz had become the beating heart of the global oil trade, and any attempt to disrupt its flow was met with swift intervention.

Both sides sought to shut it down, understanding that control over Hormuz meant control over global energy. Yet, even today, with Iran flexing its military muscles, Western powers continue to police this waterway as though it were their birthright, ensuring that the oil flows uninterrupted, no matter the cost of human lives. Now, as the world shifts into a new era, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is emerging as the latest theatre of power.

Stretching along Russia's Arctic coastline, this passageway promises to bypass traditional chokepoints like the Suez and Panama Canal, opening up a new frontier for global shipping. With the ice caps melting, climate change has inadvertently opened a new battlefield for dominance. The West, for all its talk of climate change solutions, is deeply uneasy about the NSR. For centuries, the Western maritime powers have been used to dictating global trade, yet now they face the challenge of a new route that circumvents their long-held control. And then there are the Turkish Straits—where the promise of control has always been laced with deception.

In World War I, the Entente powers offered Russia control over the straits in exchange for military support, only to revoke that promise after the Bolshevik Revolution. Since the Montreux Convention of 1936, Turkey has held sway over the straits, but with conditions that serve the interests of the West. These waters remain a hotbed of tension, especially now, as the Russia-NATO conflict forces us to re-evaluate the importance of these narrow waterways.

Yet, in all of these conflicts, one fact is clear: Western powers have never relinquished their thirst for control. Look at the Malacca Strait, the life-

line for Asia's maritime trade, and the silent battlefield of geopolitical manoeuvring. In the 16th century, the Portuguese recognised its importance as the gateway between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and later, the Dutch would follow. During World War II, Japan's occupation of Malaya underscored the strait's value, as it was the critical supply line for its imperial ambitions.

Today, China's dominance of the strait has triggered an uneasy response from the United States, which seeks to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Malacca Strait is as vital as it is contested, and its importance will only increase as the world edges closer to a new era of Cold War. Donald Trump's re-emergence as a political force serves as a blunt reminder that these conflicts are far from distant.

His comments on Greenland—a land abundant in resources and strategic significance—and on seizing Panama if needed, are not just idle musings. The United States' thirst for the Arctic has always been driven by the same imperial instincts that have defined its foreign policy for over a century. His fixation on the Panama Canal reveals the same ambitions, albeit with more brash rhetoric.

While many dismiss his comments as the reckless utterances of a man out of touch with the world's realities, those who know history understand that this is how empires operate: through calculated moves disguised as political theatrics. The bottom line is this: the manipulation of waterways remains an open secret, and the struggle for control is as intense as ever—whether by the West or any power with imperialistic and hegemonic ambitions.

(The writer is a journalist and a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

## Dalal Street ends 2024 on a bearish note: Rs 9.65 trillion investor wealth eroded

A focus on earnings growth and moderation in valuations will be critical for sustaining long-term market performance in 2025

The absence of new year cheer was evident as Dalal Street continued crashing in the last week of December leading to 2025, in the process eroding investors' wealth to the tune of Rs 9.65 trillion as Sensex tanked by 2,915 points. The bear run at a time when the market was already grappling with thin year-end volumes was made worse by a weakening rupee as it slid towards the 86-per-dollar mark. This further dampened the appeal of Indian equities for foreign institutional investors (FIIs) leading to robust FII outflows. The prevalence of this phenomenon was worldwide with Japan's Nikkei 225, China's Shanghai Composite, Australia's ASX 200, India with the world's Germany's DAX, France's

CAC 40 and NASDAQ Composite showing similar bearish sentiments. The current stock market meltdown is influenced by several factors. Not only in India, but global markets are witnessing this trend particularly due to profit-taking, and tax-loss harvesting focussing on year-end tax strategies, giving a miss to the traditional 'Santa Claus rally'. Institutional and retail investors alike booked profits and rebalanced their portfolios, particularly in large-cap stocks which posted strong growth in 2024, leading to selling pressure across the board and a broad-based correction. As economic interlinkages of India with the world have deepened, so has the integra-



HIMA BINDU KOTA

tion with global stock markets. The uncertain global economic conditions, particularly in countries like the United States, coupled with fears of a global recession fuelled by weak manufacturing data from China, have dampened investor sentiment both worldwide and in India. A decline in the demand for Indian exports, mainly in the IT and manufacturing sectors

further led to the market's downward spiral. Geopolitical tensions including regional wars, ambiguous crude oil prices and subsequent disruptions in supply chains have impacted the markets and sector-specific tragedies like the Jeju Air crash in South Korea contributed to the overall bearish sentiment. Weaker than expected third quarterly results, particularly in the banking and consumer goods sector, dampened the confidence displayed by the markets due to the resilient first two quarters showed by the Indian economy. This reduced the conviction further as the banking and consumer goods sectors were considered growth engines since the beginning of the year.



Stock market valuations in India and around the globe were elevated in 2024. In India, the higher valuations were fuelled by strong domestic economic growth and robust corporate earnings, leading to sustained investor confidence. Several companies ranging across industries were trading at premium P/E ratios, like Infosys (28-30x); HUL (55x); Bajaj Finance (40x); and

Zomato (10-12x) to name a few. However, since the question of sustaining the overvalued stocks in the backdrop of weak quarterly earnings is difficult, it led to the year-end market corrections that we are experiencing at the end of December 2024. Although the aggressive monetary policy by the Reserve Bank of India was able to combat inflation during the year, high interest rates negatively affected the borrowing costs of businesses and retail investors. This led to increased interest in investments in fixed-income securities instead of finding equity markets attractive. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) who were attracted to the Indian growth story and wanted to be its

integral part also turned into net sellers in December 2024. A risk-averse stance and a strong USD value made emerging nations like India less attractive during the year-end, leading to capital outflows, which in turn led to a weakening rupee again. Overall, the bearish stock market sentiment in December 2024 was a combination of year-end profit-taking strategies, global economic outlook, high stock valuation concerns, weak sectoral performance and outlook and several international events. However, all is not bleak. These fluctuations are a part of the larger economic cycle and the markets will see an upward cycle with a long-term focus on the fundamentals and relevant steps at

the policy level. The resilient Indian economy and its economic growth will be the key driver for renewed opportunities for growth and investment in 2025. This economic growth will be supported by increased investments in infrastructure, boosting the manufacturing environment to improve the industrial output, a burgeoning middle class and a revival of the rural economy may increase the demand for automobiles, FMCG and consumer durables in 2025. In addition, India's rapidly growing digital economy will continue to support new-age companies and sectors. (The writer is Associate Professor at Amity University, Noida. The views expressed are personal)











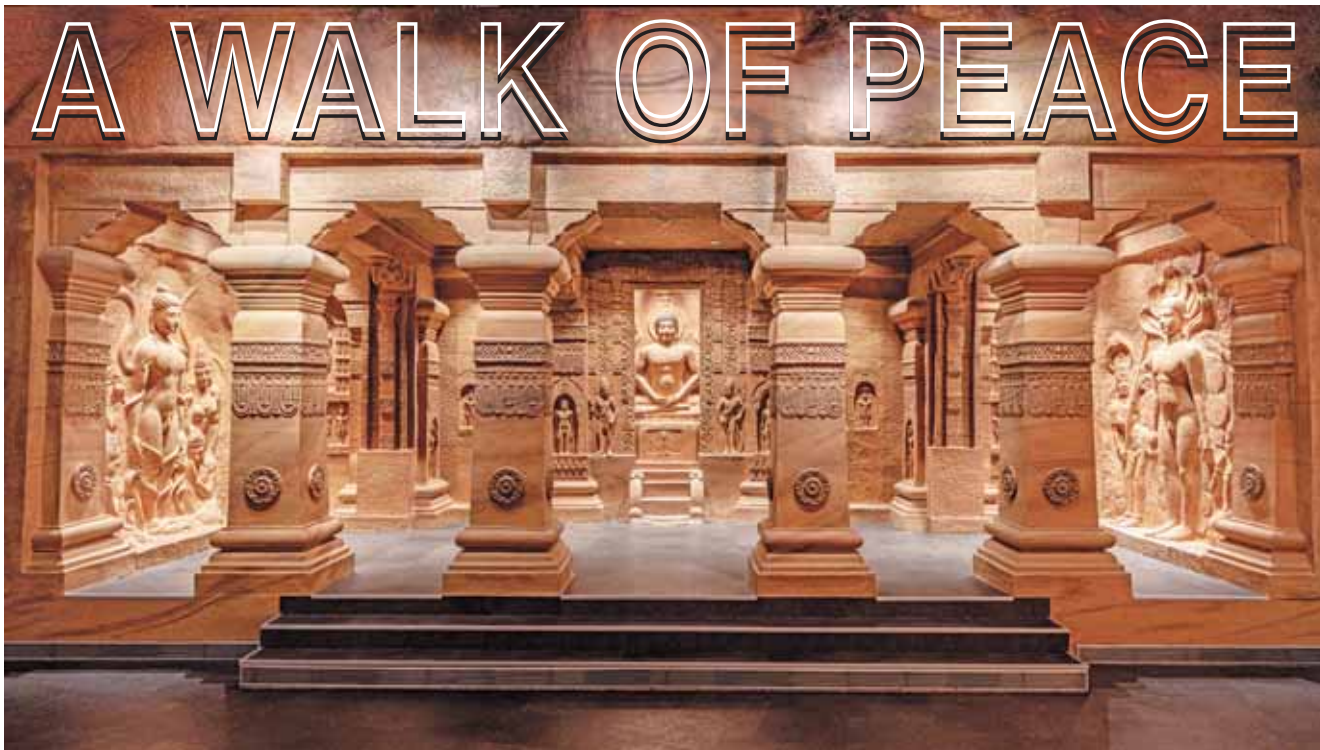
At every turn, the museum tells a story – one not just of artifacts, but of ideas that have lasted through time. This thought constantly comes to my mind as I walk through the calm halls of the *Abhay Prabhavana* Museum in Pune. As I move through the calm, serene halls, it's as if the museum itself transports me into the heart of India's spiritual history, inviting me to reflect on values that have stood the test of time. Located near the peaceful Indrayani River, the museum is not just a collection of objects, but a deep journey into Indian values, brought to life through Jain philosophy.

The *Abhay Prabhavana* Museum, hailed as one of the largest "Museums of Ideas," offers a unique experience. With its perfect blend of ancient wisdom and modern technology, it brings the teachings of Jainism to life. The museum stands as a tribute to the timeless values of compassion, non-violence and tolerance, which form the core of Jainism. Spearheaded by Mr. *Abhay Firodia* and the *Amar Prerana Trust*, the museum captures the essence of these principles, making them accessible to everyone.

As I journey from Pune to the museum, the road winds through hills and the city fades away. It feels like entering another world, one where nature, history and spirituality come together. The moment I set eyes on the museum, I am drawn to its striking modern architecture, set against the backdrop of tranquil nature. It's a visual representation of the museum's core: a living tribute to India's spiritual and cultural roots.

Covering 3.5 lakh square feet, the museum is divided into 30 galleries, each offering a deep dive into different aspects of Jain philosophy and culture. The exhibits go beyond showcasing objects; they tell immersive stories using modern technology. Audio-visuales, interactive kiosks and even virtual reality are used to engage visitors in a multi-sensory experience, making it feel like I am experiencing the teachings of Jainism firsthand.

One of the most wonder-inspiring features is the towering 60-foot statue of Rishabhdev, the first Tirthankar. Standing in a meditative pose, the statue symbolises the foundation of Indian civilisation. Murals at its base explore the contributions Rishabhdev made to Indian society, such as introducing agriculture, trade and professional skills. The statue is not just an artistic marvel but also a visual journey that connects the ancient wisdom of Jainism to the modern world. As I explore the galleries, the museum's message becomes clearer: Jainism's core principles – Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) and Anekantvad (acceptance of multiple perspectives) hold immense relevance today. These values have the potential to



## A WALK OF PEACE

### EXPLORE THE RICH HERITAGE AND SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF JAINISM AT THE ABHAY PRABHAVANA MUSEUM IN PUNE, WRITES SAKSHI PRIYA



address contemporary issues like environmental sustainability and social harmony. Walking through the exhibits, I find myself reflecting on how these teachings can guide us in our daily lives, encouraging me to adopt a mindset rooted in compassion, non-violence and understanding. A visit to the *Abhay Prabhavana* Museum is incomplete without experiencing its

serene outdoor spaces. The museum offers a tranquil nature walk along the Indrayani River, spanning 8 hectares of beautifully landscaped grounds. As I walk, I'm surrounded by monumental modern sculptures and replicas of Jain monuments that blend seamlessly with nature. This open-air heritage walk is a perfect example of how the museum connects Jain philosophy with the natural



world, offering visitors a unique opportunity to witness India's spiritual geography. The 320-metre heritage walk showcases miniatures of Jain monuments from across India, offering a cultural journey through Jainism's rich legacy. The Plaza of Equanimity, with a 57-foot tall Sarvatobhadra statue, brings a modern interpretation to the traditional

Chaturmukh Temple. The calm and spiritual atmosphere of this space encourages introspection and peace. In the tranquil Garden of the Revered, miniature trees dedicated to the 24 Tirthankars create a serene and contemplative environment. This peaceful setting adds another layer to the museum's ability to connect visitors with the timeless values of Jainism.



The *Abhay Prabhavana* Museum is a place for everyone, not just those with an interest in Jain philosophy. It's a destination for anyone looking to understand the spiritual and cultural roots of India. The museum offers a rare chance to connect with the wisdom that has shaped Indian society for centuries, reminding us of the values of compassion, non-violence, and tolerance. The museum is a tribute to their dedication to preserving Jain teachings. After over ten years of research and collaboration, the museum has become a unique cultural landmark, continuing to inspire visitors with its powerful message.

Walking through the museum takes time and to fully understand its meaning, you need to immerse yourself in every path. The more time you spend here, the more you realise how much thought and care have gone into every detail. The lessons I've learned are more than just intellectual; they are deeply personal. As I leave, I feel a sense of peace that stays long after I've walked through the museum's doors. The *Abhay Prabhavana* Museum is not just a place to visit, it's a journey into India's spiritual heart, a living reflection of the values that unite us all.



## THE ART OF REVERENCE

By SAKSHI PRIYA

'सुरदास जी के भक्ति में जो रंग है, वही रंग जीवन में बस जाता है।'  
(Just like the devotion in Surdas Ji's poetry, it fills our lives with love and meaning)

In the soft glow of the spotlight, where music casts its magic and dance flows with the rhythm of devotion, the *Sant Shriromani Surdas Mahotsav* unfolded as a rare gem, shimmering with the glow of India's classical arts and spiritual heritage. It was an invitation to step into a world where time slows and the sacred words of Sant Surdas meet the expressions of dance and music.

The Geetanjali International Foundation proudly presented the 5th edition of the *Sant Shriromani Surdas Mahotsav*. This grand celebration paid tribute to the 16th-century Bhakti poet Sant Surdas, alloying Indian classical dance and music to showcase the spiritual and artistic heritage of the revered saint. As the opening notes of the tabla reverberated through the C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium, it was clear that the evening was destined to be something extraordinary. There's something deeply moving about watching dancers embody poetry, not just through their steps, but in their very being. This was evident from the moment *Diksha Rawat* and *Karthika Umikrishnan*, disciples of the esteemed *Vidushi Uma Dogra*, took the stage. Kathak, often described as a dance of storytelling, was brought to life in the most vibrant and energetic



manner. With each swirl, each beat of the ghungroo, they seemed to move beyond just physical steps, offering a glimpse into the soul of Surdas's poetry, which itself was steeped in devotion and longing. And then came *Rani Khanam*, whose Kathak solo performance was nothing short of enchanting. The bhajan she performed, "सुंदर बदन सुख सदन श्याम को," translated into a visual display of grace, passion and beauty. One could almost see the words of Surdas materialise as her feet danced in rhythm, each step echoing the love and longing of a devotee gazing at Krishna. What struck the audience the most was the emotional charge she brought to her performance. It was as though she wasn't simply dancing, she was telling a story that resonated deeply with everyone present. Equally captivating was *Rama Vaidyanathan's* Bharatanatyam performance. There's something inherently powerful about the way Bharatanatyam

communicates emotion. In her portrayal of the Nayika's yearning for Lord Vishnu, *Vaidyanathan's* expressions were a masterclass in silent storytelling. Her eyes, her hands, every angle of her body spoke volumes, capturing the delicate interplay of longing and love in a way that words could scarcely do justice. True dance is never just about physical movement, it's about the silent dialogue between the dancer and the audience, a dialogue that connects deeply and unspoken.

But what truly made the evening unforgettable was the duet between *Rani Khanam* and *Rama Vaidyanathan*. As they danced together, interpreting a playful poem by Sant Surdas, it was as if the very essence of Krishna's mischievous nature danced through them. Watching these two talented artists, each representing a different classical tradition, merge their energies was a moment of pure magic. The chemistry between them was visible and the playful interaction between Krishna and his devotees came to life through their expressions, perfectly capturing Surdas's wit and deep devotion. The performance left the audience reminded once again of the power of classical arts to evoke deep emotions and connect people to something greater than themselves. The *Sant Shriromani Surdas Mahotsav* was a celebration of a poet's legacy, of India's soul and its arts, an experience that connected everyone in attendance to something much larger than themselves.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

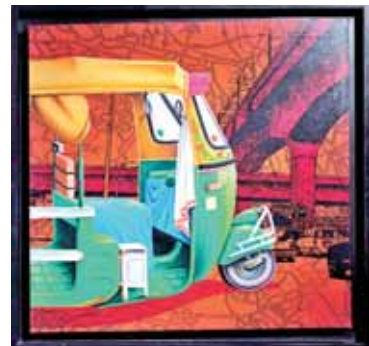
## Canvas of Emotions

By TEAM VIVA

Art has a way of speaking to the parts of us that words often cannot reach.

*Visions Unveiled*, an exhibition at the Open Palm Court, India Habitat Centre, is a vivid reminder of this power. From the moment you step inside, the space transforms into a sanctuary of colours, textures, and emotions, inviting visitors to pause and truly feel. Organised by *Happy Strokes* and curated by *Dr Mandakini Devi*, the exhibition presents 30 pieces that are as diverse in medium as they are in message. The works, ranging from the vivid energy of *Flame of Himalaya* to the intricate lines of *Focus Series*, are not just to be seen, they are to be experienced. Each artwork is an intimate exploration of identity, resilience, and emotional growth, speaking volumes about the deeply personal journeys of the artists. Highlights include the delicate *Blooming Innocence*, which captures the essence of youthful wonder and *Joy in Her Arms*, a tender portrayal of maternal love. The bold strokes of *Grace in Motion* convey the elegance of movement, while the subtle details in *The Portrait of an Elderly Man* evoke a quiet dignity. Pieces like *Gulabo*, with its vibrant palette and *Beauty Within Series*, rendered in acrylic, further showcase the versatility of artistic expression. Each work invites viewers into a different narrative, offering a fresh perspective with every glance.

What makes this exhibition stand out is its human touch. It doesn't aim to overwhelm with grandeur but instead creates an inviting atmosphere for quiet reflection. The curation reflects a keen understanding of art's ability to connect with its audience on an emotional level. Pieces like *Dehleez* and *The Blue Ivy* capture life's fleeting, fragile moments with raw honesty, making them especially striking. Interactive sessions, including art talks and workshops, add another layer to the experience. These events break down the often-intimidating barriers of the art world, encouraging visitors to engage directly with the themes on display. It's a refreshing approach, one that turns spectators into participants and deepens their connection to the art. This exhibition isn't about showcasing perfection but about embracing the imperfect beauty of human experience. It's a poignant reminder that art is more than just decoration, it's a bridge to understanding and introspection. Every



brushstroke, every line and every shadow carries the weight of stories untold and emotions unspoken. *Visions Unveiled* doesn't just leave an impression, it leaves you thinking about how art mirrors life in all its complexity. It's a show that resonates long after you've left the gallery, reminding us why creativity matters in an increasingly chaotic world. Through its thoughtfully curated works and sincere execution, it becomes a celebration of art as a reflection of humanity's most meaningful truths.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

# India all out for 185 on day one of fifth Test against Australia

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Rohit Sharma "opted to rest" in the team's interest but the same old script unfolded on a new day for Indian batters as they surrendered meekly for a paltry 185 in the face of some hostile seam bowling from Australia on the opening day of the fifth and final Test here. Virat Kohli (17 off 69 balls), whose form and technical weaknesses are also under the scanner, was for the seventh time dismissed in the corridor of uncertainty in the tour, a problem that seems incurable at the moment. At stumps, Australia were 9 for 1 with stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah sending the woefully out-of-form Usman Khawaja (2) back in the hut. Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was unbeaten at 7 after hitting Bumrah for a first-ball four. The 19-year-old also had an animated exchange with the Indian star. Bumrah opted to bat under overcast conditions and the ultra-defensive

approach by Indian batters only compounded their problems with Scott Boland's (20-8-31-4) immaculate length and tremendous discipline leaving them in a disarray. Mitchell Starc (18-5-49-3) and Pat Cummins (15.2-4-37-2) were equally relentless giving the Indians no room for release shots. Rishabh Pant top-scored for the visitors with a 98-ball 40, going against his grain to battle it out, taking painful blows to his body in the process. If Rohit's decision to "rest" was a forward thinking move, the persistence with Kohli is proving to be detrimental and the celebrated batter might just have one more Test innings left to save his place in the traditional format. "I wouldn't say it's a par score but still a competitive score," said Pant, admitting that the pitch is not easy to bat on. If one takes away the second innings hundred at Perth out of his last 20 Test innings, Kohli has managed an average of 17.57.



He could have been out off Boland's first delivery but tried to battle hard. However, it has always been that one moment in which his hands and the willow magnetically follow a delivery in the corridor of uncertainty. Pant curbs natural instincts for a session Having copped criticism from all quarters for his bizarre shot selection in Melbourne, Pant, for a change, copped body blows, trying to curb his natural game. The big-hitter in him came out only on a couple of occasions with one of them fetching him a straight six off Beau Webster. Pant put his head down and endured nasty blows on his bicep, helmet and twice in the sensitive abdominal area. He and the dogged Ravindra Jadeja (26 off 95 balls) defended doggedly as they added 48 off 151 deliveries for the fifth wicket. Only 50 runs were scored in the second session and trying not to be adventurous proved counter-productive with most batters

retreating in a shell letting Boland and company dictate the terms of play. Finally, Pant's patience ran out and one pull shot too many became his undoing. India realised they haven't scored enough runs and lost a lot of wickets. The defensive tactic in the second session when the ball got old ended up costing them dearly. There wasn't much swing on offer despite cloudy conditions but a decent grass cover ensured that Boland's back-of-length deliveries proved enough. As far as Pant was concerned, the "honest conversations" with head coach Gautam Gambhir seemed to have worked with the southpaw respecting the game situation for most part. If Pant was disciplined, Shubman Gill's judgement on the last delivery before lunch did cause trouble for India. Gill (20 off 64 balls) did all the hard work for close to couple of hours before stepping out to Nathan Lyon on the last ball of the session only to be caught at first slip.



## Facing Jasprit Bumrah will be challenging on this track: Beau Webster

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Debutant all-rounder Beau Webster feels facing ace India pacer Jasprit Bumrah will be an enormous challenge on the SCG pitch which is helping seamers, and the Australian did not place his finger on an ideal first innings score. India were all out for 185 and then Australia lost Usman Khawaja off the last ball of the day to Bumrah to end at 9 for one. "Think there's definitely a method to go about batting on this wicket. But Jasprit is a world class bowler and no doubt he's going to challenge our whole batting group. He's phenomenal with his lengths and lines, it is going to be tough on a wicket that will offer a fair bit for him," Webster said in the post day one press conference. He said getting India out for a total less than 200 on a seamer friendly track was a commendable effort. "It was a pretty seamer-friendly track and most of the day the ball stayed pretty new with the grass coverage. It is not an abrasive square either. So, the plan was to bowl a little bit fuller and entice those front foot defences and front foot drives. "Thought Scotty (Boland) was excellent, he's been unbelievable since he came back into the team and saw why he's a world class bowler. Thought all the bowlers were really good today to bowl

them out for 200." Webster said the degree of seam movement for a few deliveries was way more pronounced and hence they beat the bat regularly. "There were a couple of unplayable balls, when it seems that much it can be hard to get a wicket at times. We saw a nice-ish partnership (Jadeja-Pant), where we struggled to get a breakthrough through the sheer seam movement. We beat the bat a lot but couldn't find the edge." The 31-year-old was all praise for Boland and said the pacer can find a way to get wickets on any surface and when there is help on offer, he is on par with the best in business. "If there's anything in the wicket he finds it and if there's nothing in the wicket he still manages to find a way through," the lanky Tasmanian said. "He's been fantastic this whole series when he's got his chance, he's relentless. I think it's his line and length and his natural angle that makes it really hard for right-handers, but when we see him go round the wicket to left-handers it's impressive stuff." Webster caught the great Virat Kohli at third slip and he found Boland's bowling enjoyable. "It's great to watch from the third slip today, the amount of movement he gets and how accurate he is and how challenging he is for both left and right handers.

## We have probably seen Rohit Sharma for last time in Test cricket: Gavaskar, Shastri

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former India cricketers Sunil Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri feel that the Boxing Day Test might have been Rohit Sharma's final appearance in Test cricket, following his bold call to rest himself for the series finale that began here on Friday. The 37-year-old chose to sit out with the series on the line, having scored only 31 runs in five innings across three Tests. "I think it probably means that (if) India don't qualify for the WTC final, the Melbourne Test will be Rohit Sharma's last game," Gavaskar said during the lunch break on day one. "The WTC cycle will start with the England series, and the selectors would likely want someone available for the 2027 final. Whether India gets there or not is another matter, but that's what the selection committee is likely to do. "We have probably seen Rohit



Sharma for the last time in Test cricket," he added. Shastri echoed the sentiment, predicting that Rohit would "pull the plug" on his Test career after the series. "At the toss, Jasprit [Bumrah] mentioned it before I could ask," Shastri said during commentary. "He said the captain opted to sit out and said the team would be stronger if Shubman

Gill plays. "It can happen when you're out of sorts, you're mentally not there, you don't have the runs under your belt. It still is a brave call for a captain to own up and say, 'I'm prepared to take the bench in this game,'" he added. Rohit has struggled in Test cricket recently, breaching the 20-run mark only twice in his last eight matches.

With India trailing 1-2 in the series, they must win the final Test to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, which they've held for a decade, and remain in contention for a spot in the World Test Championship (WTC) final against South Africa. If India fail to qualify, their next Test series will be a tour of England starting mid-June. "If there was a home season coming up he might've thought of carrying on, but I think he might just pull the plug at the end of this Test," Shastri said. "He's not getting younger ... it's not that India don't have youngsters. There are very, very good players in the wings and it's time to build. "Tough decisions, but there is a time for everything," Shastri added. At the toss, stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah said "our captain has shown leadership by opting to rest in this game."



## I wasn't in frame of mind to take charge because of nature of wicket: Pant

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant said he batted with restraint on the opening day of the fifth Test against Australia because character of the SCG pitch and the game situation did not allow him to be his customary aggressive self. Pant, who copped severe criticism from all corners for his callous approach to batting during the previous Test at Melbourne, made a 98-ball 40 in India's 185 all out here on Friday. "I think in this innings, I was not in a frame of mind where I wanted to take charge of the game because the wicket was doing too much and the kind of situation we were in," Pant said in the post-day press meet. "I would say there might be a 50-50 chance which I could have taken early on in this innings but sometimes you have to play more secure cricket especially the way, wicket was behaving. "We knew that if we lost one more wicket here, we might lose 2-3 in quick succession. So that was the idea behind the way I was playing," he added. Pant's falling pull in Melbourne had prompted legendary Sunil Gavaskar to call the shot "stupid" and in the second innings, he slogged a half-tracker from Travis Head to find the only fielder in the deep when the Test match could have been saved.

"Yes, there is a time to attack, but when you have to feel that from inside. I can't just premeditate that I'm going to play this way. Whatever the game asked me to do on a given day, that's what I tried to do and that is the mindset." For Pant, the equation is simple - everyone has learnt their own way to skin a cat but also need to learn the other way. "It is a natural habit to back whatever the way you have played the game. But eventually you got to keep on evolving and, that is, I feel there is not one way to play cricket. "But whatever comes more naturally is always better but you got to find that balance between playing aggressive cricket and having that balance when you play all those shots. That's what I'm trying to do," he explained his rationale. "Just trying to make the most out of whatever the way I'm playing and just keep it simple, and not to overthink because you know when you're not having the best of the tours you might overthink." He agreed that blows that he received, one on the left bicep and few in the abdominal area, were painful but that was the need of the hour. "I mean definitely it's painful but you know sometimes you have to do the hard work for the team and that's okay. Not thinking about where I got hit but just playing the ball to the best of my abilities."

## Biggest achievement of life but plenty more to come: Harmanpreet on Khel Ratna award

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Elated to become a Khel Ratna awardee after his career-defining Olympic performance, Indian men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh said the honour is a recognition of his "fascinating" journey in which he still has plenty more to achieve. Double Olympic-medallist shooter Manu Bhaker, chess world champion D Gukesh, Harmanpreet and Paralympic high jump gold-winner Praveen Kumar were finalised for the 2024 Major Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna award by the sports ministry on Thursday. "(It's the) biggest recognition of my life. It's a big achievement for me. I am really very happy. I think it's the best part of my life that I am getting such a huge award



and recognition," the 28-year-old Harmanpreet, who was India's top goal-scorer in the Paris Games with 10 strikes, told PTI in an interview. The ace drag-flicker has won most of the prominent awards and accolades in his career, including back-to-back Olympic bronze medals, a junior World Cup gold in 2016, a

Commonwealth Games silver, an Asian Games gold and bronze besides two silver medals in the Champions Trophy. Harmanpreet has also claimed the FIH Player of the Year award three times, including the year gone by. But he is far from satiated. "Throughout my journey I have learnt a lot, I have seen a lot of ups and downs

including wins and losses. But I think you only learn from those experiences. From day one, my mindset has been how to improve myself," said the star player who was born into a family of farmers in Amritsar's Timmowal village and whose international career began in 2014. A team-man to the core, Harmanpreet credited his fellow players for making it possible for him to shine individually. "Whatever we are achieving we are achieving as a team. The journey has been very fascinating, I am getting individual recognitions and awards but only because of my teammates. "I have enjoyed my journey a lot till date. I have put on a lot of hard work and I am happy with what I have achieved till date," he said.

## I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out': Ponting says of Rohit's absence

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian batting great Ricky Ponting on Friday said he was "surprised" by the Indian camp's wording around Rohit Sharma's absence from the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy but admitted that the move was on expected lines. The match started here on Friday with the visitors eyeing a win to level the series and retain the trophy. However, Jasprit Bumrah, who walked out for the toss, said Rohit has "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test. "I think the reaction has been that they all sort of expected that it might happen," Ponting told The ICC Review.

"The chat's been for the last couple of days that everyone expected that Rohit would not play this game, that Shubman Gill would come back in and that (Jasprit) Bumrah would probably take over the captaincy again and that's the way it's turned out." Given the circumstances, Ponting was totally in agreement with the woefully out-of-form Rohit skipping the decider at SCG but the former Australia captain was surprised by the wording of the news that came from the India camp. "I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out' coming into such an important game," Ponting said. "We know he's been a great stalwart for Indian cricket

over a long period of time. So the way that they've actually worded it, you can only take it on face value. "We've got to believe what we're hearing coming out of the Indian camp, but being such a big game, knowing that they have to win this one to retain the trophy, it was an interesting time for one of their more experienced players to opt out." The 37-year-old white-ball great looked like a pale shadow of himself in the ongoing series Down Under, struggling to execute even his bread and butter shots including the trademark front foot pull. During the customary pre-match warm-up session, Rohit was seen playing football with Virat Kohli,



Rishabh Pant and Sarfaraz Khan, who along with Abhimanyu Easwaran will end the series without getting

an international game. Ponting did not say it in as many words but he very well understands that it could be

the end of road for Rohit in the game's traditional format. "You'd think it's probably a long way back for Rohit Sharma now in this format of the game," Ponting said. "India don't play a Test match, I believe, until the middle or late June, which is a long way away when you're sort of coming to the back end of your career. "I think he's been a terrific player for India so with those sort of guys, you wish them all the best and hope to see them back out there again, but as I said, I think it will be a long - and probably difficult road - back for him." Catch off Kohli's bat was clear. Ponting had no doubt that the attempt made by Steve Smith at second slip off

Kohli's blade was a clean take. Kohli edged a length delivery from Scott Boland to second slip, where Smith was positioned. Smith dived low to his right, seemingly catching the ball near the ground before flicking it upward toward gully, where Marnus Labuschagne completed the catch. However, the decision was referred to the TV umpire, who ultimately ruled Kohli not out. "I was in the back of the (commentary) box as it happened and from what I saw, and what I believe to be the interpretation of the rules, that seemed to be out to me," Ponting said. "The ball may have touched the ground. It may not have

touched the ground, but the fact that his right index finger was still underneath the ball, I thought it was a clear catch." The incident took place in the eighth over, off the first ball Kohli faced and Ponting admitted the limited angles available did not help. "It might be one of those ones that depends which dressing room he's (Kohli) sitting in as well. "Every Indian fan and Indian player will say that's not out as it clearly touched the ground, but you could tell by the reaction of the Australians when it happened and even when they saw the replay on the big screen that they were all pretty confident that it was out."