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PM Modi inaugurates latest phase of RRTS corridor linking Delhi, Ghaziabad and Meerut

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated the latest phase of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor linking Delhi, Ghaziabad and Meerut. With the inauguration of the Delhi section of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor, Meerut city is now directly connected to Delhi and commuters can reach Meerut South in just 40 minutes. The section connecting Meerut South and Sahibabad is already operational. The newly opened section connects Delhi's New Ashok Nagar station to Uttar Pradesh's Sahibabad, which covers 13 km distance. This also includes a 6 km underground section, where the major hub of Anand Vihar station is also located. Anand Vihar links the Blue and Pink Lines of the Delhi Metro as well as the railway station and the bus terminal. During the inauguration of the Rs 4,600 crore project, Modi travelled on one of the trains from Sahibabad to New Ashok Nagar, which covers a distance of 55 km. This is going to further boost trade and tourism between

both the cities. Currently, a 42-km stretch of the corridor between Sahibabad and Meerut South, featuring nine stations, is operational. With this inauguration, the operational stretch of the Namo Bharat Corridor expands to 55 km, with a total of 11 stations. The Prime Minister took a ride on the Namo Bharat Train from the Sahibabad Station to the newly opened New Ashok Nagar Station. During his ride on the Namo Bharat train, PM Modi purchased a smart ticket, interacted with passengers, and engaged with schoolchildren who recited poems and presented sketches to him. He also viewed an exhibition detailing the construction of the train network, where he received a model of the train from the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC). He was also presented with an overview of NCRTC's cutting-edge Asset Management System, which highlights its role in ensuring operational efficiency and infrastructure sustainability. The corridor will connect Sahibabad RRTS station to New Ashok Nagar RRTS station, including two RRTS sta-



tions at Anand Vihar and New Ashok Nagar. Demonstrating the ease and accessibility of digital payments integrated into public transport services, the Prime Minister purchased an NCMC (National Common Mobility Card) using the UPI payment system. He then boarded the Namo Bharat train from Sahibabad and de-boarded at the New Ashok Nagar Namo Bharat Station. During the journey, the Prime Minister interacted with vari-

ous set travelers, showcasing the diverse social impact of the corridor. Women beneficiaries of NCRTC's vocational training program, supported by the JFPR (Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific) grant, shared their inspiring journeys of employment. Engineering students discussed their aspirations and the corridors technological advancements, while school students showcased their creativity through artwork, poetry, and songs

inspired by the project. Women trained in self-defense through the JFPR grant narrated how the training boosted their confidence and sense of security. Regular commuters shared their experiences of how the Namo Bharat trains have transformed their daily lives. The Prime Minister also interacted with women train operators and station controllers, commending their pivotal roles in operations. The newly inaugurated section connecting Sahibabad to New

Ashok Nagar is now operational. With this addition, Namo Bharat trains will arrive in Delhi, reducing travel time between New Ashok Nagar and Meerut South to under 40 minutes and significantly enhancing regional connectivity. Of the newly inaugurated 13 km section, 6 km is underground and includes a prominent station on the corridor, Anand Vihar. This marks the first time that Namo Bharat Trains will operate in an underground section. The other station on this stretch is an elevated station at New Ashok Nagar. Both stations are located in Delhi. Stations that will be operational are New Ashok Nagar, Anand Vihar (the only underground station of the corridor for now), Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Guldhar, Duhai, Duhai Depot, Muradnagar, Modinagar South, Modinagar North and Meerut South. To date, Namo Bharat trains have served over 50 lakh commuters, highlighting their popularity and impact. Further construction in other sections i.e. New Ashok Nagar-Sarai Kale Khan and Meerut South-Modipuram are progressing at a rapid pace.

First stretch of Phase IV metro also inaugurated

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated the Janakpuri West-Krishna Park Extension section of the Delhi Metro's Phase IV and laid the foundation stone of the Rithala-Narela-Kundli corridor. The Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, Manohar Lal, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Vinay Kumar Saxena, Chief Minister of Delhi, Atishi were present among other dignitaries at the event. With the addition of Krishna Park Extension station, the Delhi Metro network now comprises 289 stations spanning 394.448 km. This new section is an extension of the already operational Botanical Garden-Janakpuri West on the Magenta Line. With the addition of this section, the Magenta Line now

covers a distance of approximately 40 km. The Magenta Line will be further extended from Krishna Park Extension to R K Ashram Marg in phases by 2026. As part of the Phase-IV expansion, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) is constructing 86 kilometres of new lines across five different corridors in the national capital. Three corridors --- Janakpuri West to RK Ashram Marg, Majlis Park to Maujpur and Aerocity to Tughlakabad --- are under construction, the other two new corridors --- Lajpat Nagar to Saket-G Block and Indraprastha to Inderlok --- are in the pre-tendering stages. The first six-coach train for Delhi Metro's Phase-IV expansion arrived in the national capital in November last year. It was stationed at Delhi Metro's Mukundpur depot, where it had undergone a number of tests required for its statutory certification for revenue service as a part of established rules and protocols.

BJP's city president Sachdeva challenges Kejriwal to join open debate

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday challenged AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal to join an open debate against his party on the issue of development of the national Capital. Stating that the former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is an expert politician when it comes to diverting attention from real issues, Sachdeva asserted, "I have said before and repeated again, if Arvind Kejriwal believes his government has undertaken development work, we propose a public debate. He too can present his case." The state BJP chief mentioned, "The people of Delhi are witnesses to how the Modi government has gifted major projects to Delhi to combat pollution, including the East-West Corridor, nearly 1,200 electric buses, the expansion of the Dhaura Kuan-Airport road, the Akshardham-Meerut Highway, Delhi-Saharanpur Highway, UBR-2, Ring Road 3,



and the Pragati Maidan Tunnel. They also developed landmarks like Badarpur Eco Park, extended Kartavya Path from Rajpath, and created international-level facilities like Bharat Mandapam and YashoBhoomi." He emphasized that even though the Delhi government failed to release funds on time, the Modi government ensured the completion of projects like RRTS and the expansion of Delhi Metro. He remarked that in stark contrast, the Kejriwal government has provided Delhi nothing but deception and corruption from 2013 to 2024. Meanwhile, BJP candidate

from the New Delhi Assembly constituency Parvesh Verma wrote a letter to Chief Minister Atishi, urging her to open the former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's extravagant official residence, popularly known as 'Sheesh Mahal', for public viewing. Verma emphasized that the people of New Delhi, who voted for Arvind Kejriwal three times and sent him to the Vidhan Sabha, have every right to see the lavish residence where their elected representative lived during his tenure. "An audit report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) recently revealed that the cost of renovating Kejriwal's residence escalated threefold to Rs 33 crore, with substantial expenditures on luxury items such as carpets and curtains. The public, whose hard-earned money funded these extravagant renovations, deserves the opportunity to witness the opulence firsthand," Verma stated.

Police foils conspiracy bid by Kapil Nandu gang, seven held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has claimed to foil a major criminal conspiracy orchestrated by the Kapil Nandu gang and arrested seven of its members. According to police officials on Sunday, a targeted killing has been prevented with the arrests and they have uncovered a cache of illegal arms and ammunition. "The Crime Branch got to know that gang members were plotting to assassinate a rival in Delhi on the orders of Kapil Nandu, who operates from an undisclosed foreign location," a senior police officer said. He further said that the team got to know that the accused are hiding in a rented flat in Burari. A trap was set, and the team intercepted a suspicious Tata Tiago car. Upon interrogation, the occupants including 24 year old Suraj, 24 year old Jitesh alias Jitu, and 21 year old Anil Rathi admitted their connection to the gang. They revealed the location of the safehouse, prompting an



immediate raid. "During the operation, three more gang members, including 43 year old Pramod alias Modi, 35 year old Sunil and 33 year old Nitin, were arrested, along with another associate, Deshant Sharma (27), who arrived at the

scene during the raid," a senior police officer said. They recovered five semi-automatic pistols, a country-made firearm, ammunition, a knife, and Rs 2 lakh in cash from the hideout. "Nandu gang operates as an international syndicate,

with its leader controlling activities remotely. The gang recruits vulnerable youths, often between the ages of 15 and 25, from rural areas in Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi," the officer said. According to the police, the

gang members are using encrypted communication platforms. "The gang assigns tasks to recruits, ensuring minimal direct contact between operatives. Weapons are sourced through intermediaries, with collection points often disguised in remote locations to maintain anonymity. Recruits conduct reconnaissance of targets before executing violent crimes, such as murder, to establish dominance and weaken rival gangs," he said. Pramod is a life convict and parole jumper while Pramod is the brother of gangster Vicky Sanyashi and was in direct contact with Kapil Nandu, playing a key role in coordinating the plot. Deshant Sharma is a recruiter for the gang, Jitesh, Suraj and Anil Rathi, these recruits had no prior criminal records but were inspired by the gang's activities. Sunil and Nitin both are convicted murderers who were released after serving part of their sentences.

State-of-the art library inaugurated at Old Rajinder Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Sunday inaugurated "Aarambh," a state-of-the-art library in Old Rajinder Nagar, in a bid to benefit Delhi's student community. This is the first of several such libraries being developed by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to provide affordable and safe reading spaces for students. The inauguration ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj, DDA Vice Chairman Vijay Kumar Singh, and senior DDA officials. "Aarambh is designed to cater to students' needs around the clock. The library is equipped with multiple modern facilities, including high-speed WiFi, a cafeteria, personal lockers, power outlets at every seat, air conditioning during the summer months, and access to newspapers and magazines. Separate toilet facilities for men and women and outdoor



seating areas further enhance the library's amenities," a statement by the DDA said. It added that with a capacity to accommodate over 60 students at one time and nearly 200 individuals round the clock, "Aarambh" provides students with an affordable and conducive environment for studying. The library charges are set

at approximately one-sixth of the current market rate for private study spaces in the area. In his address, Saxena emphasized his commitment to providing a safe, secure, and affordable space for students. "This library will go a long way in helping students achieve academic success by providing them with a convenient, peace-

ful environment to focus on their studies," he said. The facility is under constant CCTV surveillance, ensuring safety for students who use the library at all hours. He also noted that nearly 85 per cent of the total seats had already been filled by students, reflecting the high demand for such facilities.

"The DDA is actively working to expand this initiative, with plans to open more libraries in various parts of Delhi," the LG said. The DDA, under the direction of the Lt Governor, has identified several under-utilized community centers across the city to be converted into libraries and reading rooms. Five new libraries are already in the pipeline at locations including Adhchini, Vikaspuri, Dwarka Sector 16B, and Rohini. These upcoming libraries will accommodate 40 to 60 students at a time and offer similar amenities to 'Aarambh'. The establishment of these libraries follows a tragic incident in July last year, when three students lost their lives due to drowning in the basement reading room of a private coaching center in Rajinder Nagar. Following the incident, Saxena visited the site and assured the protesting students that he would take immediate action to provide safe and affordable reading facilities.

Congress' Uttam Nagar candidate addresses Bindapur Mahapanchayat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Congress' Uttam Nagar candidate Mukesh Sharma on Sunday addressed a Mahapanchayat organized on Bindapur, Matiala Road, stating that it will not be shocking that BJP and AAP candidate put together will not be able to secure 50 per cent votes. Addressing scores of people present in the Mahapanchayat, Mukesh Sharma said that he had no intention of contesting the elections but Uttam Nagar has called him. "I have dedicated my entire life to take the Uttam Nagar Assembly constituency out of hell and develop it at par with Dwarka," he said. Challenging the elected representatives of BJP and AAP, he said that BJP ruled the MCD for 15 years and all four Councilors of the area were from BJP and MPs have been from BJP for 11 years while the MLA has been from AAP for the last 10 years.



"Together, they have not been able to create even one school in this area, the roads are dilapidated, sewers are overflowing onto the streets. Bindapur and Uttam Nagar wards are not getting water from Dwarka Kaman 2. Bindapur, the proposed UGR of DDA, has not been built and

the DTC terminal, which was built 11 years ago, has not been made operational till date," he claimed. Sharma claimed that in the upcoming assembly elections, the results of Uttam Nagar will not only be shocking but both BJP and AAP candidates together will not be able to get 50 per cent votes.

LG inaugurates Yamuna Vatika in an effort to enhance ecological and aesthetic beauty of Yamuna floodplains

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a stride towards enhancing the ecological and aesthetic beauty of the Yamuna floodplains, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Sunday inaugurated the 494-acre Yamuna Vatika, which is situated opposite the Rajghat Power Plant. The inauguration ceremony was graced by prominent dignitaries, including Minister of State for Corporate Affairs and Ministry of Road Transport & Highways Harsh Malhotra, Northeast BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, Delhi Chief Secretary Dharmendra, and Vice Chairman of the Delhi Development Authority

(DDA), Vijay Kumar Singh, among others. Spanning 494 acres (200 hectares), Yamuna Vatika focuses on restoring the Yamuna floodplains to their natural state. Designed in line with the directives of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), this space not only rejuvenates the region's ecology but also serves as a sanctuary for Delhi's residents to enjoy passive recreation in harmony with nature. Yamuna Vatika boasts native tree species, riverine grasses, and restored waterbodies, all contributing to a thriving floodplain ecosystem. In accordance with the directives of the National Green Tribunal



(NGT) and expert recommendations, the area along the existing embankments has been transformed into a vibrant 'Greenway'. This includes the restoration of waterbodies from existing depressions, alongside open spaces designed for various recreational activities, all interconnected by kachha trails. "The aim is to create a serene environment where residents and visitors can immerse themselves in nature and engage in passive leisure activities," a DDA official stated. Designed to cater to families and individuals alike, Yamuna Vatika features dedicated areas for children's play, equipped with eco-friendly structures.

Open-air seating is strategically placed along the slopes, providing visitors with picturesque views of the surroundings. A six-acre floral plantation, complete with seating shelters and winding pathways, invites visitors to explore the vibrant blooms and experience tranquility amidst nature. One of the park's most striking features is the newly installed 47.5-tonne Nandi statue near the Geeta Colony Bridge entrance. Carved from Bhainslana black marble in Kuthara, Rajasthan, the statue measures an imposing 18' x 6' x 11'. Completed in just eight months, the sculpture adds a unique cultural and aesthetic

dimension to the park's design, blending spirituality with the landscape. To strengthen the bond between Delhi and the Yamuna, a dedicated "Ecological Zone" has been established along the riverbank, stretching up to 300 meters. Earthen trails allow visitors to engage closely with the river, providing a serene and reflective space while promoting environmental consciousness. Since the start of the project, DDA has planted approximately 5,700 native trees and over 52 lakh riverine grasses at Yamuna Vatika, contributing significantly to the area's ecological restoration.



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INSIDE

MONEY 10
GOVT TO LAUNCH ANOTHER
ROUND OF PLI SCHEME FOR
STEEL SECTOR



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RRTS brings Meerut closer to Delhi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes a ride on a Namo Bharat train during the inauguration of the 13 km stretch of the Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor between Sahibabad and New Ashok Nagar PTI

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
The BJP AAP rivalries came to fore as the Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a 13-km section of the Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor from Sahibabad in Uttar Pradesh to New Ashok Nagar and the Janakpuri West-Krishna Park Extension stretch, the first section of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's Phase-IV network to open for public. Even before the Rapid Rail Transport System could open for public, the race to grab credit started full steam. Prime Minister Modi and

former chief minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal took cudgels at each other to win the brownie points. In a blistering attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government again during a massive rally in Rohini, PM Modi made a strong appeal to people to bring the BJP to power in Delhi, as he attacked the Arvind Kejriwal-led party with "AAP-da" and "Sheesh Mahal" jibes and assured Delhiites that no welfare scheme would be discontinued if the saffron party forms the government. AAP retorted saying that AAP believed in the service of Delhi and that it had the 'aashriwaad' of Delhiites.

Addressing a rally, the prime minister called AAP's Delhi government as "AAP-da government" (disaster government) that has stalled Delhi's progress. PM Modi said the AAP-da government does not have the vision to develop the national capital and the responsibility given to AAP-da means punishment for the people of Delhi. The prime minister appealed to voters to end the AAP's misrule and give the BJP a chance to lead Delhi towards a brighter future. Modi said every season in the city has turned into a period of "emergency," with drinking water shortages in the summer, water logging during

the monsoon and pollution during the winter. Highlighting the achievements of the BJP-led central government over the past decade, PM Modi pointed to landmark initiatives that have transformed India's infrastructure, connectivity, and global standing. He cited projects like the expansion of the Delhi Metro, the Namo Bharat Train, Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhooni, and the National War Memorial as examples of BJP's commitment to development. "In the last 10 years, the BJP government at the Centre has doubled Delhi's metro network, built world-class infrastructure, and prioritized public welfare. These are the actions of a government focused on progress, not excuses," PM Modi said. The prime minister accused Delhi's AAP government of wasting a decade fighting with the Centre and urged its people to give the BJP an opportunity to turn the national capital into a city of the future. PM Modi also accused the AAP government of spreading fear that a BJP government in Delhi would discontinue several welfare schemes launched by the AAP. Hours after Modi's accusation, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal held a press conference and said the BJP is seeking votes by abusing him. Reacting to PM Modi's attack, Kejriwal said that these projects wouldn't have been inaugurated had his party not cooperated with the Centre over alleged "atrocities" against the party's leaders. **Continued on page 4**

Bidhuri shoots from the hip; Cong fumes, BJP distances

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Not new to stirring a political uproar for his remarks, senior BJP leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji Ramesh Bidhuri has yet again created controversy by stating that he will develop smooth roads of his constituency if he wins like Congress Lok Sabha MP Priyanka Gandhi's 'cheeks'. "I assure you that just as we made the roads in Okhla and Sangam Vihar, we will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," Bidhuri is heard saying in the purported video, which went viral on social media. This comes at a time when the Delhi assembly elections are just a few weeks away with the AAP and Congress calling the statement 'anti-women and cornering the BJP over the issue. **Continued on page 4**



Speaking to The Pioneer, Bidhuri claimed that he made the statement with no intentions to hurt anyone's sentiment and both AAP and Congress should reflect on their own behaviour towards women before pointing fingers at anyone. "When it comes to Congress, they forgot what statement

former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Yadav made on BJP MP Hema Malini. Is she not a woman? He was in their cabinet. Did they ask him to apologise? Moreover, did AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal not insult women by calling Atishi a 'temporary' Chief Minister? Does he not trust that a woman can win the

elections on her name? Their MLA Naresh Balyan has also made similar statements but they did not have any problem with it," he remarked. Reacting to the AAP and Congress making this a poll issue, he said that their situation is best explained through a phrase 'khisyaanii billii khambaa noché' (an embarrassed or ashamed person tends to vent his/her feeling by quarrelling). "They have nothing else to do so they are making this an issue. Congress is engulfed in corruption while AAP has no vision for Delhi. What will Atishi say to the public that we will improve the dilapidated state of roads in Kalkaji and Govindpuri in the next five years when they have already ruled for a decade?" he questioned. **Continued on page 4**

Delhi LG relaxes job norms for 1984 riot survivors

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved full relaxation in required educational qualification and age relaxation up to 55 years for 88 applications for employment from victims of 1984 anti-Sikh riots. This relaxation has been approved for their appointment in Government Service to the post of Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS), a statement said. "Repeated representations had been made by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, public representatives and groups of victims, who had met LG recently, in this regard," the communiqué added. A Rehabilitation Package, including provision of jobs, was sanctioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India (GoI) on January 16, 2006, for victims of 1984 anti-Sikh



Delhi Lt. Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, inaugurates 'Yamuna Vatika', in New Delhi PTI

riots. "The Revenue Department in a subsequent special drive got 72 applications out of which appointment was given to 22 applicants by obtaining age relaxation from then LG," it said. In Oct 2024, LG granted full relaxation in required educational qualification to the post of MTS for leaving out 50 applicants out of the total 72 received

during the special drive. "Revenue Department was also directed to process the cases for granting employment to one of the children of the applicants wherein applicants have surpassed the age of employment," an official from Raj Niwas stated. He added that after directions, the Revenue Department organised special camps during November 28 to 30 last year and issued notices in leading newspapers, inviting applications for employment to family members of 1984 anti-Sikh riots victims. "Subsequently, a total of 199 applications, were received, of which 89 candidates were found eligible, but all these were above the age limit and a few also missed out on the required educational qualification," it said, adding that LG's approval for relaxation will clear obstacles of 88 applicants for their appointment as MTS in Government Service.

Coast Guard chopper crashes, three dead



Rescue work underway after a helicopter of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) crashed during landing at Porbandar airport. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMADABAD
Three crew members were killed after a helicopter of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) crashed and caught fire at an airport on the outskirts of Gujarat's Porbandar city, police said. The incident took place at 12.10 pm when the ICG's Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), which was returning from a routine sortie, crashed while landing on the runway of the Coast Guard airport, Porbandar Superintendent of Police Bhagirathsinh Jadeja said. The chopper crashed near the runway and caught fire. The blaze was later brought under control with the help of a fire tender, Jadeja said. The three crew members onboard were brought out of the chopper and rushed to a hospital in Porbandar in a severely burnt condition, he said. "While two of them were declared brought dead, one was alive when brought to the hospital and died later," Kamala Baug police station's inspector Rajesh Kanmiya said. Their identities were not yet known, he said. The incident comes four months after the ICG's ALH MK-III helicopter crashed into the Arabian Sea off Porbandar on September 2 last year, killing three crew members. The bodies of its pilot and a diver were recovered soon after the incident, while the body of the third crew member was found after more than a month.

Strict anti-spam norms on anvil

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

TRAJ will start, this month, a pilot to onboard paper-based and past permissions given by customers for receiving commercial communications onto its digital distributed ledger technology (DLT) platform, a process that in the long-run would include scrubbing and verifying their current validity and offering opt-outs to those keen on it, Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti said, adding offer separate special tariff vouchers (STV) for voice calls and SMS. Lahoti told PTI in an interview that while consumers can be encouraged to use data, they cannot be "compelled" to do so. TRAJ's focus is to protect not only the interest of the industry, but also the interest of the consumer, who must have the option to pay only for services they need, he said. The regulator is also all set to initiate a massive revamp of its IT system, a move, it expects, would lead to rationalisation and reduction in multiple instances of filings by telecom companies and other industry stakeholders. Deloitte which has been roped in as a consultant is on the verge of submitting its report on revamp of its IT systems. The regulator will thereafter appoint an agency for the revamp and the entire exercise will be prioritised and completed this year, Lahoti said. On TRAJ's list of priorities for 2025 are recommendations on satellite communications spectrum — arguably one of the most keenly watched events in a high-stakes game involving telcos like Jio, and Airtel on one side and Elon Musk's Starlink pitted on the other. Lahoti declined to comment on the specifics or timeline for release of the recommendation except to say "all comments are being examined on their merits and we will take a balanced view". **Continued on page 4**

that tighter regulations on curbing spam as well as new consultation examining an authorisation framework for telemarketers can also be expected in coming weeks. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAJ) has also ruled out any rethink on its latest regulation that mandates service providers to



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

GRAP III revoked following marginal improvement in AQI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi can now breathe a sigh of relief as the pollution levels have eased and GRAP III has been revoked from immediate effect. The restrictions on BS 3 petrol and BS 4 diesel cars were officially lifted on Sunday night. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for Delhi and its adjoining area has decided to revoke the Stage-III ('Severe' Air Quality) measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for Delhi-NCR with immediate effect. This comes after an improvement in the Air Quality Index (AQI) levels in the region, driven by favourable meteorological conditions. The decision was taken during a meeting held on January 1, 2025, following a downward trend in the AQI levels, which had breached the 350-mark earlier, prompting the initial invocation of Stage-III actions on January 3. The CAQM has confirmed that the

WEATHER

AQI	339
MAX	18.6°C (-0.7)
MIN	9.4°C (+2.5)

actions under Stage-I and Stage-II of the revised GRAP will remain enforced. These measures will continue to be implemented, monitored, and reviewed by the relevant agencies in the entire NCR to prevent any further deterioration in air quality. In light of this improvement, the sub-committee decided to revoke the Stage-III measures, based on both the real-time AQI data and forecasts from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM). These forecasts indicated that while the AQI could remain in the "Very Poor" or "Poor" category, it was not expected to deteriorate further. **Continued on page 4**

Special category visas for international students

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

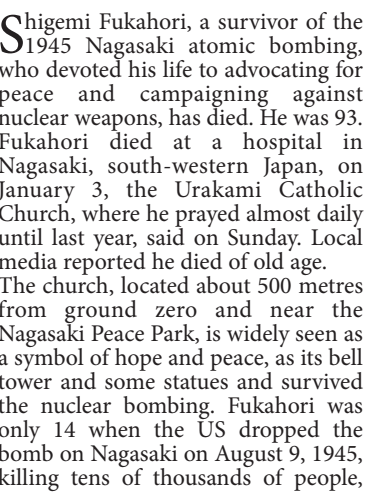
India has launched two special category visas for international students intending to pursue higher education in academic institutions in the country. The 'e-student visa' and 'e-student-x' visa have been introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs and all applicants will have to use the 'Study in India' (SII) portal launched by the government, officials said. The e-student visa facility can be availed by eligible foreign students registered on the SII portal while e-student-x visa is offered to the dependents of those holding e-student visas, they said. The SII portal facilitates the admission process of international students who wish to pursue either long-term or short-term courses in India. Students will need to apply for a visa separately on the portal https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/ but the authenticity of their application will be checked by SII ID. Hence it is mandatory for students to apply to Indian higher educational institutions through SII website, the officials said. Students may apply for the visa after receiving an admission offer letter from any of the SII partner institutes. The e-student visa will be granted to such foreign



nationals who obtain admission to studying in India and who wish to pursue such studies, regular, full-time, courses of undergraduate, post graduation, PhD and such other formal programmes at educational institutes duly recognised by the statutory and regulatory body in India, the officials said. Student visas are issued for up to five years, depending on the duration of the course. They can also be extended in India. Further, those having valid e-student visas can enter India from any desired port of immigration check post, the officials said. The SII is a flagship project of the Ministry of Education which hosts international students seeking higher education through its 600+ partner institutes offering more than 8000+ diverse courses in disciplines such as engineering & technology, management, agriculture, sciences, arts and humanities, language studies, commerce, law, paramedical sciences covering pharmacy, nursing, and select niche courses like Buddhist Studies, Yoga, etc. **Continued on page 4**

Fukahori, the Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor dies at 93

PTI ■ TOKYO



Shigemi Fukahori, a survivor of the 1945 Nagasaki atomic bombing, who devoted his life to advocating for peace and campaigning against nuclear weapons, has died. He was 93. Fukahori died at a hospital in Nagasaki, south-western Japan, on January 3, the Urakami Catholic Church, where he prayed almost daily until last year, said on Sunday. Local media reported he died of old age. The church, located about 500 metres from ground zero and near the Nagasaki Peace Park, is widely seen as a symbol of hope and peace, as its bell tower and some statues and survived the nuclear bombing. Fukahori was only 14 when the US dropped the bomb on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, killing tens of thousands of people,

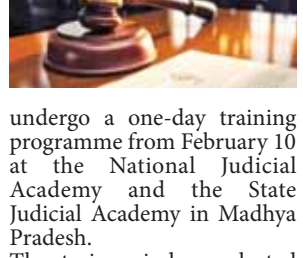
including his family. That came three days after the nuclear attack on Hiroshima, which killed 140,000 people. Japan surrendered days later, ending World War II and the country's nearly half-century of aggression across Asia. Fukahori, who worked at a shipyard about 3 kilometres from where the bomb dropped, couldn't talk about what happened for years, not only because of the painful memories but also how powerless he felt then. About 15 years ago, he became more outspoken after encountering, during a visit to Spain, a man who experienced the bombing of Guernica in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War when he was also 14 years old. The shared experience helped Fukahori open up. "On the day the bomb dropped, I

heard a voice asking for help. When I walked over and held out my hand, the person's skin melted. I still remember how that felt," Fukahori told Japan's national broadcaster NHK in 2019. He often addressed students, hoping they take on what he called "the baton of peace," in reference to his advocacy. When Pope Francis visited Nagasaki in 2019, Fukahori was the one who handed him a wreath of white flowers. The following year, Fukahori represented the bomb victims at a ceremony, making his "pledge for peace," saying: "I am determined to send our message to make Nagasaki the final place where an atomic bomb is ever dropped." A wake is scheduled for Sunday, and funeral services on Monday at Urakami Church, where his daughter will represent the family.

Bangladesh cancels training of judges in India

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's interim government on Sunday cancelled a planned training programme for 50 judges and judicial officers in India, scrapping a previous notification. "The notification has been cancelled," a law ministry spokesman said without elaborating. The Daily Star newspaper, however, reported the cancellation came in compliance with a directive from Bangladesh's Supreme Court. The cancellation order came a day after the state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported that 50 lower judiciary judges would



undergo a one-day training programme from February 10 at the National Judicial Academy and the State Judicial Academy in Madhya Pradesh. The trainee judges selected under the programme were district and sessions judge or its equivalent officers, additional district and sessions judge, joint district judge, senior assistant judge and assistant judge. The Indian government was supposed to bear all the

expenses for the training programmes. India and Bangladesh have witnessed strained ties since the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to New Delhi on August 5 last year following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime. There have been a series of attacks on Hindu community members and their places of worship after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus came to power on August 8. New Delhi has already raised concern with Dhaka, especially after a Hindu monk was arrested in a sedition case and put in jail after he was denied bail last month.

Delhi fog disrupts trains, delays flights for third consecutive day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A thick blanket of fog covered Delhi on Sunday morning, disrupting flight and train schedules in the national capital for the third consecutive day in a row. The city also witnessed a dip in temperature, accompanied by cold wave conditions. However, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast light rain for Monday bringing a likely respite. "Dense fog conditions during late night to early morning hours is likely to continue over parts of North India till 09th January 09," it added. According to the flight tracking website, Flightradar24, over 200 flights have been delayed and

30 flights have been cancelled. The visibility at Palam was zero for 3.5 hours from 4 am to 7.30 am on Sunday. This was better than the nine hours of zero visibility conditions on Saturday, said the IMD. The visibility improved over Palam to 100 m at 8.30 am as the wind speed increased from 10 kmph to 13 kmph. At Safdarjung, minimum visibility of 50 m was reported at 5.30 am. The dense fog conditions lifted and moderate fog was later reported at 8.30 am as the wind speed picked up from 4 kmph to 6 kmph, said the IMD. "Compared to Saturday's 9-hour zero visibility spell, Palam experienced a relatively shorter duration of 3.5 hours of zero visibility on Sunday,"

the IMD added. According to Delhi airport officials, no flights were diverted on Sunday. The Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport issued a passenger advisory at 12.10 pm. "Low visibility procedures are still in progress at Delhi Airport. However, there has been no impact on flight operations. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information," the advisory reads. Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) operates around 1300 flight movements daily. "Due to adverse weather conditions, flights to/from Delhi, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Kolkata and Lucknow are impacted," IndiGo said in a

post on X at 12.59 am. Several trains at New Delhi Railway Station were also delayed due to the dense fog conditions. Meanwhile, the air quality in Delhi remained in the 'very poor' category for the fourth consecutive day on Sunday. Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) reading at 1 pm was 339 ('very poor' category). The air quality is generally impacted when the smog thickens and temperatures dip, along with reduced wind speeds. The minimum temperature on Sunday was 9.4 degree Celsius, which is above normal by 3 notches. The maximum temperature was stood at 18.6 degree Celsius, which is below normal by one notch. Palam was the cold area which recorded 7.8 degree Celsius.

Villages in Lakhimpur Kheri gripped by tiger fear

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LAKHIMPUR KHERI

Panic is spreading across Lakhimpur Kheri after a tiger mauled two people in back-to-back attacks, leaving a teenager dead and a man critically injured. With six deaths reported in six months due to tiger attacks, residents are demanding urgent action from the forest department. In the most recent attack on Sunday morning, Rozali (45), a resident of Baba Purwa village in the Tikunia Kotwali area, was attacked while working in his fields. The tiger pounced on him, tearing into his face and ears. Startled by his cries, nearby farmers rushed to his aid, armed with sticks, and managed to scare the tiger away. Rozali was rushed to the district hospital, where doctors say his condition remains critical. "We are living a nightmare," said Shakir Ali, a village elder.

"Every step outside feels like stepping into a predator's territory. The forest department told us this is a danger zone, but where are the warning signs or patrol teams? They seem to be waiting for more lives to be lost." Just a day earlier, Parasram, a 14-year-old boy from Padhua village, was fatally attacked while grazing cattle. The tiger dragged him nearly 500 meters into the forest before villagers' loud cries forced it to flee. Parasram could not be saved. His grieving mother collapsed upon hearing the tragic news, and the village mourns the young boy's loss. Adding to the string of attacks, a woman in Karibaredi village was ambushed on Friday while working in a sugarcane field. illagers managed to chase the tiger away, and she is currently undergoing treatment at the Mitauli

Community Health Center. Sugarcane fields in the area, known for their dense cover, have become a haven for tigers, creating a deadly overlap between human activity and wildlife. Residents feel abandoned by the authorities, accusing the forest department of negligence. "Every attack is met with the same response: paperwork and no action," said Mukesh Verma, another farmer. "We've asked for patrolling teams and proper safety measures, but nothing concrete has been done. How are we supposed to protect ourselves with just sticks?" The forest department has yet to comment on the recent attacks or announce any new measures. In the meantime, fear continues to loom large over these villages as residents face the grim reality of venturing into their fields amidst an ever-present danger.

Delhi Police deport illegal migrant from Palam village

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Bangladeshi man living illegally in south west Delhi's Palam area was identified and deported. According to the police, the accused has been identified as Mohammad Shahidul Islam who had been living in Palam village for three years. He was deported through the Foreigners Regional Registration Office. Deputy Commissioner of Police (South-west) Surendra Choudhary said, "During routine patrolling in the jurisdiction of Palam Village police station, the staff received information from a secret informer about an illegal migrant seeking accommodation in Manglapuri. The individual was pointed out by the informer."

BJP leaders' car hit by dumper in Sambalpur, two killed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SAMBALPUR

Two BJP leaders were killed after a dumper hit their car in Odisha's Sambalpur district in the early hours of Sunday, police said. The deceased were identified as Debendra Nayak and Muralidhar Chhuria. Nayak was BJP's Goshala mandal president, while Chhuria is a former sarpanch. Both of them were close to senior BJP leader Nauri Naik.

The incident happened around 1.30 am on NH 53 in the Burla police station area. There were six people in the car, including the driver, and they were returning home in Kardola from Bhubaneswar, police said. All six persons were taken to a nearby hospital where doctors declared two of them dead. The injured were undergoing treatment there. Suresh Chanda, who was injured in the accident, alleged, "The vehicle hit our car from behind twice. Suspecting

someone trying to hit our vehicle intentionally, the driver turned the car towards a rural road from the highway near Kantapalli Square. Still, the dumper chased our vehicle and hit it badly. As a result, the car overturned." Chanda said he was conscious till the dumper hit their car twice on the highway, but lost sense when it hit the third time. "I am sure that someone intentionally caused the accident. By mistake, one can

hit a vehicle once. Why would someone be hit thrice from behind?" asked the injured BJP worker. After visiting the injured persons, Naik, a former MLA of Rengali, alleged that it was not an accident but a deliberate collision. "Someone has deliberately hit their vehicle thrice," he claimed. SP Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo said, "We have seized the dumper and detained its driver.

BJP leaders target Kejriwal, Atishi at rally

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Sunday launched a scathing attack on AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi, comparing them to Mughal rulers and Britishers and stated that they have looted the Capital for the past 10 years. In a public rally in Rohini, Bidhuri said, "The truth is that Delhi was looted by Ghorri, Ghazni, Nadir Shah, Timur Lang, and the British while in the last 10 years, Arvind Kejriwal and Atishi have plundered Delhi. These looters have to be thrown out of Delhi." He added that the crowd gathered at the rally is a testament to the fact that at least 60 candidates from the BJP will win the Delhi elections and form BJP government in the national Capital. Further, in his address, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "Today, at this rally, I feel the wave of transformation that

will not only give Delhi but the entire country a new direction. A new hope has been born in Delhi." New Delhi BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj said, "Just as Delhiites gave all seven parliamentary seats to BJP in the Lok Sabha elections and made Narendra Modi the Prime Minister for the third time, this time, the public is determined to bring BJP to power in the Assembly." Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Atishi congratulated the people of Delhi and said, "Today, the RRTS line is being inaugurated in Delhi. The RRTS, a joint effort of the Central Government, Delhi Government, UP Government, and Haryana Government, is connecting the NCR region with Delhi. The first RRTS stretch from Sahibabad to New Ashok Nagar is being inaugurated today. The Delhi Government has also invested Rs 1,260 crore in the RRTS line being built from Delhi to Meerut, as it will boost the economic development of Delhi."

Punjab officials face SC over Dallewal's health

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear Monday a contempt petition against the Punjab chief secretary and director general of police for non-compliance of an order directing medical aid to farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite hunger strike. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh is scheduled to hear the matter. The top court had earlier pulled up the Punjab Government and said its officials and some farmer leaders were making irresponsible statements in the media over attempts to break Dallewal's indefinite fast. The court had come down heavily on the Punjab

Government for not moving Dallewal to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader. On December 20, the apex court put the onus on Punjab government officials and doctors to decide on his hospitalisation. The court said Dallewal, 70, could be moved to the makeshift hospital set up within 700 metres of the protest site at Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana. Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri protest site since November 26 to press the Centre to accept the farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops.

Special category visas for international students

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Furthermore, they are available in different levels, from Undergraduate (Bachelors), Post-graduate (Masters), Doctoral level (PhD) and certification-based courses. Due to the availability of an array of options (in courses), the students have the flexibility to choose the course of their interest and study in premier Indian institutes. Furthermore, the process to get on board with SII is relatively easy and can be done through its online application submission, seeking admission to students' choice of programmes and further processing of applications for seeking

admission, the officials said. Students can get started right away by completing the Registration, by clicking on the 'Register Now' tab. The students are required to fill in simple details such as name, country, date of birth, mobile number and email ID. Every student aspiring to complete their higher education in India and applying to study in India must have their unique student SII ID as this ID is what will help them to access their dashboard, track the progress of college and course applications, visa/e-visa, and other higher education in India-related processes. No student SII ID means no chance of studying or moving to India, the officials added.

GRAP III revoked following marginal improvement...

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"Delhi's average AQI has been consistently improving as at 2PM it clocked 348, at 3PM it recorded 343, which further improved to 339 in the 4PM AQI Bulletin provided by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), and again improved to 335 at 5PM, clearly indicating a downward trend. Keeping in view the disruptive nature of restrictions under Stage-III of GRAP impacting a large number of stakeholders and public as well as considering the trend of improvement in the average AQI of Delhi, the GRAP Sub-Committee unanimously decides to revoke Stage-III of revised GRAP in the entire NCR,

with immediate effect," it said. "Construction & Demolition project sites and industrial units etc. which have been issued specific closure orders on account of violations/non-compliances of various statutory directions, rules, guidelines etc. under no circumstances shall resume their operations without any specific order to this effect from the Commission," read the order. While Stage-III measures are no longer in effect, the CAQM has urged the public to continue adhering to the citizen charter under Stage-II guidelines, especially considering the ongoing winter season when meteorological conditions can vary unpredictably.

Bidhuri shoots from the hip; Cong fumes, BJP distances

From page 3

"Some people are making statements on social media for political gain with a wrong perception based on a statement given by me in some context. My intention was not to insult anyone. But still if anyone has been hurt then I express my regret," Bidhuri also said in a post on X. However, even Bidhuri's party members are trying to distance themselves from the controversial remarks with Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva asking BJP leaders to keep a control on their language. "I have not heard the entire statement of Ramesh Bidhuri but I think that all the women, who are in politics, face a lot of difficulties. So, we should not use such statements and keep control on our language," he said.

The BJP leader added that he would also tell Congress that when such remarks are made against BJP's MP Hema Malini, they don't stop it. "Having said that, respect for women and control over our language is our duty and such statements are not welcomed by us," he stated. Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi strongly criticized Bidhuri for his 'sexist' remarks, calling it a 'reflection of the BJP's anti-women mindset'. She also questioned the BJP's ability to ensure women's safety in Delhi, given the attitudes and behavior displayed by its leaders. The Kalkaji MLA further expressed her confidence in the people of Delhi, particularly women, to respond to such actions in the upcoming elections. "I believe that not only the people of Kalkaji but also the citizens of

Delhi, especially the women, will give a fitting response to the BJP for these comments and this mindset in the upcoming elections," she added. Congress candidate from Kalkaji and Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba lashed out at Bidhuri and accused him of "insulting" women once again in his "usual indecent language". "Will the public in Kalkaji have such (a person) who cares neither for the dignity of the House (Parliament) nor respects the women," she said in a post on X. She demanded Bidhuri to tender a public apology for his statement and asked the senior BJP leaders to clear their stand on the issue. The Mahila Congress workers led by Lamba also torched an effigy of Bidhuri over his alleged statement against Gandhi.

The statement was made by Bidhuri during campaigning in Kalkaji constituency on Saturday, one of his aides said. Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav said that Gandhi has stood for women empowerment and Bidhuri's objectionable statement reflected BJP's anti-women attitude. "If BJP respects the women of the country, it should ask Bidhuri to tender a public apology forthwith," he said. The former two time Lok Sabha MP from South Delhi and three time MLA from Tughalqabad constituency is not new to controversies surrounding his public statements. Earlier last year, Bidhuri invited widespread condemnation over his outburst during a Lok Sabha session, targeting then BSP MP Danish Ali. His behaviour was referred to the Privileges Committee of the Lok Sabha.

Strict anti-spam norms on anvil

From page 3

TRAI's 2025 to-do list also includes framing recommendations for network authorisation, new authorisation framework for broadcasting, and revamp of national numbering plan for fixed line, while work will continue on combating and curbing spam calls and pesky messages. TRAI is in the process of operationalising system of separate 160 series for service or transactional calls by principal entities (say banks, insurance companies or other service providers) to differentiate them from promotional calls. Currently, both types of calls are being routed under 140 series, which will henceforth be used only for promotional calls. Lahoti said the regulator will firm up its recommendations on millimetre wave spectrum band (auction of spectrum in 37-37.5 GHz, 37.5-40 GHz and 42.5-43.5 GHz bands) in about a month's time and also bring out a consultation paper on backhaul spectrum by March this year. "Another thing which we will be working on is the digital

consent acquisition. Although the provision for this exists in the regulation (TCCCPR), the practical constraint has been the legacy consents... Because there are volumes of consent which have been acquired on paper or reside in the past systems of principal entities, the challenges has been about how to take those consents onboard to the DLT, because you cannot completely discard them," Lahoti said. TRAI plans to work with all stakeholders to find a workable solution, to ensure such onboarding and scrubbing does not cause any disruptions. "Presently, if you receive message or a call from a particular service provider or seller and you complain that this is spam, they are able to say that no, we have the consent of this particular subscriber on paper. Still, this is not on record, on the system, but with the principal entities. So we want to move to a system where all these consents come on the DLT platform," he said. "The problem is how to onboard the consents which are already there and how to provide the consumer an

option that if he/she has not given that consent, they should be allowed to exit," he said, adding TRAI's pilot, which starts in January, will rope in select service providers and principal entities to devise and test a mechanism by which the past consents, can be migrated onto DLT. There should be a cut-off date beyond which legacy and paper-based consents would no longer be valid but that is a massive time-consuming exercise, he said. TRAI will also bring-out new, tighter regulation for spam control in a month, he said referring to August discussion paper on 'Review of the Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference Regulations, 2018' where the regulator among other issues had sought stakeholder view on whether a higher tariff should be introduced for calls and SMS-es beyond a certain limit in a graded manner. The regulator in the consultation paper mooted that telecom subscribers making over 50 calls or sending out even 50 SMS a day, along with certain other markers, should be

scrutinised as a potential pesky callers. About recent reports of Department of Telecom (DoT) seeking clarity from TRAI on telcos' bank guarantee encashment to recover fines against violation of regulatory provisions related to anti-spam norms, Lahoti said, "after the DoT asked this question to us, we already identified the particular licence clauses which were violated, and informed the DOT that these are licence conditions which were violated, and now they have to take action, including the amount of financial disincentives which is outstanding against them." On the industry pushback on the voice-only STVs, Lahoti said that the regulator has to take a balanced view after taking all aspects into consideration. "We have to take a balanced view, after taking the interest of both sides into consideration....You cannot compel the consumer to buy data, unless they want to. You can encourage them to buy data, not force them to buy data....Do your marketing, education, we are not stopping you..."

RRTS brings Meerut closer to delhi

From page 3

He said, "Projects launched by PM joint venture between Delhi govt, Centre; reflects AAP's commitment to city's development." Those who say that the AAP keeps fighting; today's inauguration is an example that shows that AAP only works for the people of Delhi. Jo log ye aarop lagate hain ki AAP ladti bahot hai, ye joint udghatan un logon ko jawab hai (Those who accuse AAP of always being confrontational, this joint inauguration is a response to them)," Kejriwal said in a press conference. Referring to the challenges

faced by his party, he claimed AAP leaders were imprisoned and tortured but maintained their focus on governance. They sent our top leadership to jail - but the atrocities that happened against us, we didn't make that an issue - otherwise these projects would not have been inaugurated. Agar apne par huye atyachaar ko hum dil pe le lete toh aaj ye dilli metro ki line nahi banti, iska udghatan nahi hua hota (If we had taken the injustices done to us to heart, this Delhi Metro line would not have been built, and its inauguration would not have happened today)" he said. In a veiled attack on Modi,

Kejriwal said "PM Modi in 2020 had promised repeal of Section 81 and Section 33 of Delhi Land Reform Act along with land ownership rights & alternative plots for farmers. "Only Centre can repeal Section 81 and Section 33; Delhi Assembly has passed resolutions twice and sent them to Centre demanding it. The prime minister must answer why Delhi Master Plan 2041 hasn't been notified & why Delhi Land Pooling Project hasn't been notified?," Kejriwal said. PM Modi also assured that no public welfare scheme would be discontinued if the BJP assumed power but the party's

government would weed out the corruption in their implementation. He asserted the BJP would usher in change. "Only when this 'aapda (disaster)' is gotten rid of in Delhi, the double-engine of development will come in," Modi said. "In the past 10 years, Delhi has witnessed a state government that is no less than an 'aapda (disaster)!' Delhiites have realised this. Only one voice is reverberating in Delhi - 'Aapda nahi sahenge, badal kar rahenge (will not tolerate disaster, will bring change),' Modi said. The prime minister said when the people of Delhi were grappling with

COVID-19, struggling to find oxygen and medicines, the entire focus of the 'aapda people' was on building their 'Sheesh Mahal'. "They made a huge budget for the 'Sheesh Mahal'. This is their truth... They do not care about the people of Delhi. That is why every Delhiite today is saying... 'we will not tolerate aapda, we will change'," he said. The AAP has so far not reacted on the CAG report on Sheesh Mahal and the PM's attack - with Kejriwal not speaking about the controversy when he addressed the press to respond to the Prime Minister's

speech. The prime minister said the Centre had been expanding highways in Delhi, expanding the Metro network, starting the Namoo Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System, and running big moments."However, the moment you step out of a Metro station, you can see potholed roads, overflowing sewers. Some areas are such that even auto and cab drivers refuse to ply due to long traffic jams," he said. Modi also accused the AAP government of spreading fear that a BJP government in Delhi would discontinue several welfare schemes implemented by it. The prime

minister asserted a new BJP government would implement central schemes that, he claimed, had been stalled by the AAP government with renewed vigour. "For Delhi, these people have made every season, every weather, 'aapda kaal'. The energy of Delhiites is spent in dealing with 'aapda' throughout the year," he said. "Aapda" turned every season into an emergency, with water shortages, waterlogging and pollution, the prime minister alleged. "Therefore, only if AAP is removed from Delhi, the double-engine of development and good governance will come."

"We are in the 21st century and 25 years have passed. Two or three generations have entered their youth. The next 25 years are very important for Delhi. The next 25 years will see India emerging as a developed nation before their eyes. We all will be stakeholders in this journey," Modi said. The national capital should be a part of this glorious journey, he added. "In Delhi, people blessed the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections and now, in the assembly polls, are set to bless the BJP. This is a golden opportunity to win the heart of Delhi and free it of disaster ('aapda')." he said.

Stay vigilant against anti-national forces: VP Dhankhar to youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday urged the country's youth to "stay vigilant" against "anti-national forces", saying it alone will secure India's democratic values.

In his address at a ceremony at the Delhi Cantonment here to mark the formal inauguration of the NCC Republic Day Camp, he also said "nationalism has to override all other interests, personal or organisational".

The vice president said the foundation of "our national transformation" rests on five basic pillars and these include social harmony, environmental protection and adherence to civic duties.

"Our Constitution gives us fundamental rights and we are conscious of those fundamental rights but there are fundamental duties also. Nations blossom, nationalism is nurtured, growth is secured, harmony is stabilised when every

citizen of the country believes and subscribes to fundamental duties. For civic duties, you as a disciplined members of the force can really be torch-bearers," he added.

A total of 2,361 NCC cadets from around the country are taking part in the month-long Republic Day camp, which began on December 30, and will culminate with the PM's rally on January 27.

The annual event is also witnessing the participation of 917 girl cadets, the largest contingent so far.

"The organisation instills nationalism and nation-first approach. No nation in the world can grow unless its citizens are deeply committed to nationalism," Dhankhar told the gathering.

"Nationalism has to override all other interests, personal or organisational. Nation first approach has to be our only approach, maintain these qualities as a tribute to our motherland," he said.

In his address, the vice president also emphasised that



India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047 is no longer a dream but a "certain destination".

He praised the National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets for being a section of the country's youth known for fostering unity and discipline with a sense of service to the nation.

"My dear cadets, stay vigilant against anti-national forces because that alone will secure our democratic values. Our dedication to motherland has to be the foremost. It has to be steadfast, it has to be unflinching, it has to be unshakable because it is bedrock and foundation of our existence," Dhankhar said.

The vice president further said the "challenges are emanating" because the nation is witnessing a rise which is "globally acclaimed".

"A rise that is incremental for last decade or so, a rise that is envy of the world, a rise that is positively impacting every person in this country," he said.

Dhankhar said the month-long camp, with convergence of

over 2,000 cadets, is bound to be "remarkably rewarding".

Of the 2,361 cadets at the camp, 114 are from Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and 178 from the northeast region.

"Boys and girls, you represent our youth demographic dividend. This is envy of the world, our developed nation vision at 2047 is no longer a dream. It is our certain destination," the vice president said.

"You all are crucial to Bharat's development at 2047," he stressed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government has envisioned becoming 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 when the nation completes 100 years of independence from colonial rule.

"Boys and girls, you are fortunate to be living at a time when India is no longer a nation with a potential. It is a nation rising with unmatched infrastructure growth," Dhankhar said.

He cited various infrastructure projects, including new airports and metros, to emphasise his point.

"To reflect on our digital pen-

etration, technological advancement that has been accented by the world, we have 6.5 billion monthly digital transactions. Boys and girls, we are living at a time when national optimism prevails as we approach to becoming the world's third largest global economy," he said.

The vice president underlined that youth opportunities expand as "global institutions hail Bharat as favourite prime investment destination".

The government has taken much-needed initiatives and policy decisions. Now there is "transformation from discriminatory to merit-based mechanisms all over," he said.

Emphasising the five-point mantra, Dhankhar said, "I urge all citizens and particularly the youth and more particularly the NCC cadets to practise these in all earnestness, in letter and spirit because subscribing to these, adherence to these, will be game changer and game changer for the better for Bharat, that is home to one-sixth of humanity."

VHP says acquittal of Nanded blast accused 'tight slap' on Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The VHP on Sunday termed the acquittal of the 2006 Nanded blast accused a "tight slap" on the Congress' face and asked the party's top leadership to apologise to Hindu society. The reaction came after a sessions court in Maharashtra's Nanded acquitted on Saturday all nine surviving accused in the 2006 blast case.

"The Congress' dream of proving Hindus to be terrorists in the 2006 Nanded blast case stands exposed, with the court acquitting all the persons made accused in the case during Congress rule," Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said. He claimed the Congress and the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had already been "exposed" in the Malegaon blast case.

"After 19 years, the Nanded court acquitted all the accused and slapped the Congress hard on its face for its anti-Hindu misdeeds," Bansal said. "At



least now, the top leadership of the Congress should apologise to Hindu society," he added.

The case pertains to an explosion at the home of Laxman Rajkondwar -- allegedly a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) worker in Nanded city -- on the intervening night of April 4 and 5, 2006. His son Naresh Rajkondwar and VHP activist Himanshu Panse were killed in the blast, allegedly while assembling an explosive device, the investigators had claimed.

The case was initially investi-

gated by the Maharashtra ATS before being transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). According to defence lawyer Nitin Ruwal, 49 prosecution witnesses were examined during the trial.

However, the prosecution could not prove that the incident was a "bomb blast" and not the explosion of a gas cylinder or some other inflammable object, he told PTI on Saturday. The Congress was in power at the Centre and in Maharashtra at the time of the incident.

Three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention to be held in Bhubaneswar from January 8

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Indian diaspora's achievements and contributions across the world and ways to further deepen their engagement with India are set to be the key focus at the three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention to be held in Bhubaneswar from January 8. India's economic growth, policy reforms and developmental trajectory in several key sectors are also likely to be showcased to woo overseas Indian investors at the convention.

A large number of overseas Indians, including top businessmen, entrepreneurs and economists, from over 50 countries are expected to participate in the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention.

The PBD is celebrated on January 9 to mark Mahatma Gandhi's return to India on that day in 1915.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will formally inaugurate the high-profile event on January 9.

It will feature a virtual address by chief guest Christine Carla Kangaloo, President of Trinidad and Tobago, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.



The theme of the convention is 'Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat'.

President Droupadi Murmu will deliver the valedictory address on January 10. She will confer the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards 2025 on select members of the Indian diaspora to recognise their achievements.

India's economic growth, pol-

icy reforms and the country's developmental trajectory in several key sectors will be showcased at the convention with an aim to strengthen the country's connect with its diaspora, people familiar with the preparation for the event said.

The country will also be showcased as an attractive investment destination, they said.

This year, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention is being organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in partnership with the Odisha government.

Prime Minister Modi will also inaugurate four exhibitions at the PBD convention, including one titled 'Vishwaroop Ram - The Universal Legacy of Ramayana'.

This exhibition would present the timeless epic of Ramayana through a curated juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary art forms, the MEA said on Sunday.

The second exhibition will be on the diaspora's contribution to technology and Viksit Bharat. It will acknowledge the contributions of the Indian diaspora to the development of technology in the world.

Another exhibition would be on the spread and evolution of the Indian diaspora in the world. It will showcase rare documents of people who migrated from Mandvi in Gujarat to Muscat in Oman.

The PBD convention will have five thematic plenary sessions including one on 'Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers: Stories of Migrant Skills' and another titled 'Beyond Borders: Diaspora Youth Leadership in a Globalised World'.

The third plenary will be 'Green Connections: Diaspora's Contributions to Sustainable Development'.

Another will be 'Diaspora Divas: Celebrating Women's Leadership and Influence -- Nari Shakti'.

The MEA said the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will also be held on January 8.

Former CRPF DG Prakash Mishra pens 'humorous' memoir

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

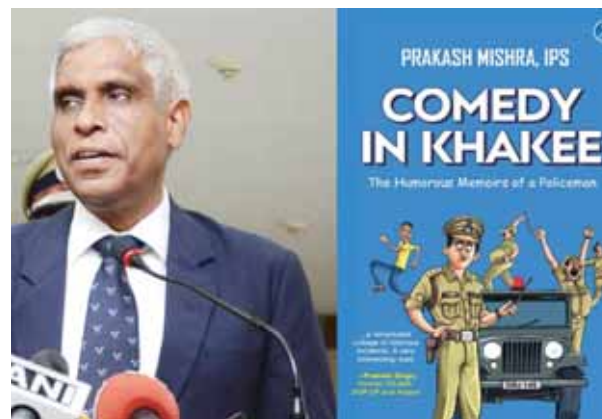
Former IPS officer Prakash Mishra spent his career dealing with dangerous situations such as protests and violence. Now, nine years after he retired, he is ready to offer a glimpse into the lighter side of the life in uniform in his soon-to-be released memoir.

"Comedy in Khakee: The Humorous Memoirs of a Policeman" has anecdotes of an "uncanny boss" frowning at pink napkins in a meeting and how a young Mishra played pranks on friends and teachers during school and training.

The book, of course, does not name anyone.

The memoir recounts how the son of a district magistrate in Odisha "loved to laugh, even at silly things, much to the annoyance of others".

Mishra, a 1977-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, retired in 2016 from the post of director general (DG) of



the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the world's largest paramilitary force with over three lakh personnel.

He also served as director general of police (DGP) in Odisha, apart from heading the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and having stints at the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Union home ministry while on central deputation.

"In an environment of policing, where seriousness often

overshadows the joys of life, 'Comedy in Khakee' seeks to remind us the power of humour and the importance of laughter," Mishra writes in his book, which is set to release on January 11 in Delhi.

The book, much on the lines of the "humour in uniform" columns that appear in various publications globally, contains anecdotes, musings and observations about a variety of human beings and cir-

cumstances the former top cop observed while being in school, during his training at the National Police Academy and various stints with the Odisha Police.

He admits to playing pranks, sometimes bordering on the dangerous, along with his twin brother during his early days and later with his "partners-in-crime" friends and batchmates.

The book describes an incident of a commode at the residence of his senior -- a deputy inspector general -- collapsing while the officer was sitting on it and tales of "sumptuous" feasts being organised by police personnel for their seniors during routine police station inspections.

"There was a particular officer of the rank of commissioner, who used to love this kind of arrangement. I had heard that once, during an inspection of the office of the subdivisional officer, he was given such a sumptuous

lunch. Having eaten his full, he retired for an afternoon siesta," Mishra writes in the book.

The characters, including an "uncanny boss" who ended an important meeting as he had got offended with the "pink napkins" served with potato chips, remain unnamed.

The 198-page book is peppered with anecdotes and repartee that went around in the police establishment during Mishra's tenure while dealing with a multitude of circumstances -- protests, riot-like situations or during routine practice at the firing range for cops.

The book is "for the jesters among us who remind us not to take ourselves too seriously and bring light into our lives with their wit and charm," according to Mishra.

The retired IPS officer confesses in the book that it was in his school that he learnt "rascals can be of different types."

NIA arrests PFI member for funding plot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The NIA has arrested a cadre of the Popular Front of India (PFI) for channelising funds from Dubai for the banned outfit to further its unlawful activities in India, an official statement issued on Sunday said. A team of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Mohammad Sajjad Alam of East Champaran district, Bihar, on Saturday as soon as he landed at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport here from Dubai, UAE, it said.

An arrest warrant had been issued against Alam, a trained cadre of the PFI, by a special NIA court. A lookout circular (LOC) had also been issued against him, the statement said.

According to the NIA, the accused was involved in channelising illegal funds from Dubai to PFI cadres in Bihar through a UAE, Karnataka and Kerala-based syndicate. The funds were used for pro-



moting the banned outfit's criminal and unlawful activities, the NIA said.

The case, which was initially registered by Phulwari Sharif police in Bihar in July 2022, relates to PFI cadres' involvement in unlawful and anti-national activities.

The cadres conspired to create an atmosphere of terror and spread religious enmity between members of different religions and groups through activities prejudicial to the maintenance of peace and harmony in the country, the statement said. Aimed at disrupting

public tranquillity and causing disaffection against India, their activities involved the use of criminal force to advance the PFI ideology of establishing Islamic rule in India as envisaged in the organisation's vision document, "India 2047: Towards Rule of Islam in India, Internal Document: Not for circulation", the probe agency said.

The NIA, which took over the case days after it was registered by police, has charge-sheeted 17 accused in the case. Alam is the 18th accused to be arrested in the case.

Yogi to perform Ram Lalla's abhishek during Pratishtha Dwadashi fest on January 11

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
AYODHYA

Ayodhya will host the Pratishtha Dwadashi festival from January 11 to 13, celebrating the first anniversary of Ram Lalla's installation in the grand temple. On the opening day, January 11, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will perform the sacred Abhishek of Shri Ram Lalla in the sanctum sanctorum at 11 AM.

Following this, he will inaugurate a cultural program at Angad Tila and address devotees. Devotional songs by renowned artistes such as Sonu Nigam, Shankar Mahadevan, and Malini Awasthi will also be released on the occasion.

Champat Rai, General Secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust said, "On January 11, corresponding to Paush Shukla Paksha, Dwadashi, Vikram Samvat 2001, we mark one year since the establishment of the newly built temple at Ayodhya Dham, the sacred birthplace of Maryada Purushottam Lord Shri Ram, the patron of Indian culture and Sanatan Dharma."

He added, "Events will include vibrant kirtans at key locations across Ayodhya, such as Lata Chowk, Janmabhoomi Path, Shringar Haat, Ram Ki Paidi, Sugriya Fort, and Chhoti Devkali. Young artistes will enchant audiences with musical performances throughout



the city."

As part of the festivities, he said, "A three-day Shri Ram Raag-Seva program will take place in a pavilion near the temple's sanctum sanctorum. This initiative, led by Ayodhya artist Yatindra Mishra with support from the Sangeet Natak Academy, will present devotional offerings to Lord Shri Ram through music, dance, and instrumental performances."

The Trust has extended invitations to saints and devotees from across the country. Champat Rai urged residents and pilgrims to participate in the celebrations, making at least a one-day visit during the three-day festival to honor the occasion and experience

the spiritual atmosphere of Ayodhya.

Three days of the program Day 1 (January 11): The festival will open with Raga Seva, performed by renowned singer Usha Mangeshkar, sister of the legendary Lata Mangeshkar, and accompanied by Mayuresh Pai, who will present devotional bhajans. This will be followed by a soulful duet (jugalbandi) of the sitar by Sahitya Nahar and the violin by Santosh Nahar. The day will conclude with a captivating Bharatnatyam dance performance by Dr. Ananda Shankar Jayant.

Day 2 (January 12): The second day will begin with Raga Seva by celebrated folk singer

Shailesh Srivastava, featuring traditional Badhwa and Sohar melodies. Following this, classical vocalist Kalapini Komkali will perform Shri Ram bhajans and Nirgun Gayan. The day's program will end with a mesmerizing flute recital by the internationally acclaimed maestro, Rakesh Chaurasia.

Day 3 (January 13): The festival's final day will start with a classical vocal performance by the acclaimed Aarti Ankalikar, followed by an elegant Kathak performance by renowned dancer Shobhana Narayan. The grand finale will feature classical singing and Shri Ram bhajans by the celebrated South Indian duo, Shri Krishna Mohan and Shri Ram Mohan Thrissur Brothers.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Vision for rural India

PM Modi hails rural resilience at Grameen Bharat Mahotsav; says rural prosperity is essential for national growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered an inspiring address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, held in New Delhi, highlighting the transformative strides made in rural development. The event celebrated the resilience and progress of rural India under the theme "Building a Resilient Rural India for Viksit Bharat 2047"—a vision to make India a developed nation by its centenary year of independence. PM Modi emphasised that the government's intentions, policies and decisions are invigorating rural India with newfound energy. He highlighted significant achievements in healthcare, agriculture and basic infrastructure that have elevated the quality of life in villages and driven economic growth. Reflecting on India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he proudly noted how Indian villages defied global doubts by ensuring vaccine access to the last mile. He attributed this success to inclusive economic policies that cater to every section of society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav



2025 highlighted significant achievements in rural development, painting an optimistic picture of progress. While these strides are commendable, a closer examination reveals underlying challenges that must be addressed to ensure holistic and sustainable rural transformation. PM Modi emphasised healthcare advancements, noting the establishment of over 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and the growing reach of telemedicine in rural areas. These initiatives reflect substantial progress; however, challenges such as a shortage of trained healthcare professionals, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent internet access in remote villages continue to hinder equitable healthcare delivery. Agriculture has been a central focus of rural development efforts, with financial assistance under PM-KISAN and a significant increase in agricultural loans helping farmers enhance productivity. Yet, structural problems persist in the agrarian sector, including reliance on unpredictable monsoon, insufficient crop diversification and market volatility. The protests against contentious agricultural reforms also highlight the need for more inclusive policy-making and effective stakeholder engagement. The Prime Minister highlighted the sharp reduction in rural poverty, which has reportedly fallen below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. While this represents significant progress, the persistence of rural inequality and exclusion of marginalised communities from development initiatives cannot be ignored. Poverty metrics alone do not capture the broader challenges of deprivation, including limited access to quality education, healthcare and social mobility. Infrastructure gaps, such as unreliable road connectivity, inadequate digital networks, and inconsistent electricity supply, limit the potential of rural economies. Furthermore, rural India's heavy dependence on agriculture underscores the urgent need for economic diversification and the creation of jobs in manufacturing and services. Prime Minister's vision is indeed laudable but a lot needs to be done for upliftment of rural masses.

PICTALK



'Sadhus' of 'Shri Niranjani Akhara' take part in a procession towards Sangam, in Prayagraj

Harmony: A prerequisite for national unity

The resurgence of communal discord calls for urgent reflection and action. It is time to expose the forces that exploit differences for personal gain



ATUL SEHGAL

The global communal ecosystem is showing change for the worse. The word communal here connotes and covers ethnic, racial, religious and sectarian communities. The last seven decades since 1950 have not seen very many episodes of communal conflict or conflagration in the global society. After the terrible death and destruction wrought by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the horrible communal riots following the partition of India into two independent states, episodes of communal violence have been relatively less compared to that in earlier periods of world history. Of late, the world is riven by acrimony and wars at multiple locations and communally divisive sentiments across global societies appear to be rising again. It seems that during the above period, the sentiments of mutual hatred and antipathy among certain global communities remained suppressed, only to resurface now.

It is time to review and relook at the elements that go into building and strengthening communal harmony. With the world in the terrible throes of wars at several locations, it is perhaps time to strengthen communal harmony and amity globally, particularly in our society and not to allow it to be undermined. History has been written largely by the conquerors of countries and the governing elite. We often do not have true accounts of history do not read true history or otherwise are inclined to interpret facts wrongly, driven by our deep-seated prejudices. If we look closely at the picture and analyse it dispassionately, we shall find that it is generally the politicians and rulers who incited communal violence for their own selfish needs or vile vested interests. Often, these acts of incitement are obscured through disinformation campaigns. There are cultural and ideological differences between communities. What to talk of mainstream religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, there are major and minor variants of these religions and sub-ideological sects whose number touch-



es almost three thousand. They all have major or minor ideological differences. Notwithstanding the many differing and dissonant injunctions of their scriptural texts, peace and harmony are basic to the progress and prosperity of citizens in every country, and every society and they are dear to all human individuals. That is why there are constitutions, laws and regulations in every country for proper governance that incorporates the functional upholding of universal peace promoting human values of justice and equality. Hence, we need to expose the machinations of the political elite to strengthen communal harmony in today's world. In the context of the current global scenario, the incidence of violence against Hindus in Pakistan or Bangladesh is more because of mischief and misdeeds of the ruling elite. During the colonial period in India, communal riots were frequently triggered by politicians or the governing elite. In our country with population of 145 crore, nearly 21 crore are Muslims. They have been a part and parcel of our society for ages. We need to better integrate them, not appease them for petty political gains. The need of the hour is ideological realignment. And we should quickly brace ourselves for it. Let us not allow the demolition or destruction



DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD IN INDIA, COMMUNAL RIOTS WERE FREQUENTLY TRIGGERED BY POLITICIANS OR THE GOVERNING ELITE. THIS HAPPENS WHEN RELIGION AS A PRACTICE OF FAITH IS GIVEN A POLITICAL COLOURING

of religious buildings anywhere, but build monuments of universal, secular and humanistic culture to promote communal harmony. Let us build buildings and institutions that bind humans, not separate them. Let us educate global humans on the eternal metaphysical truths that apply to all, everywhere. Let us awaken humanity to the threads of universal knowledge about the Creator, creation and their relationship. Bharat has been the cradle of human civilisation because the divine knowledge emanating from the one Creator was revealed in this land to sages at the dawn of civilization. That core knowledge enshrined in the divine scriptures Vedas and ideology based on that needs resurrection today. Humans can live sensibly and peacefully for ages if they wish to. Only they need to be aligned with universal Dharma. Man-made sects separate; universal Dharma (righteousness) unites—because the latter comes from the omniscient Creator of all humans. When we talk of Sanatan as the religion of the inhabitants of Bharat, we refer to the above said broad-based, universal and eternal religion of humanity that transcends caste, creed, ethnicity and sect. Sanatan Dharma is the prescribed code of living handed down to the

earliest humans by the Creator. Let us strengthen adherence to that eternal code of living expected from humans by the one master of the Universe whose subjects we all are. Let us focus on the common, positive strands of ideology that exist in various mainstream religions and let us deliberate on the ideological strands that are dissonant with the universal Sanatan Dharma. Let us not mix religion with politics; rather let us give politics a more humanistic complexion. That is what is required today. We Indians are in the process of nation rebuilding after centuries of lying low due to depredation by foreign invaders. Now is the time for fast-track progress and we must beware of nefarious designs of foreign powers to create impediments to our progress. We should try to reform our political and legal institutions to make them truly secular and democratic. Let us make our national fabric strong, placing it above caste, creed, faith or religion. At the same time, we should strive to dissolve our ideological differences in the bright shining light of Sanatan Vedic Dharma which has been the beacon of guiding light of all humanity for eons since the dawn of civilisation. (The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISRO EMBARKS DOCKING MISSION

Madam — On December 30, ISRO has embarked on another mission that has vast application in future exploratory missions. In fact, the space docking experiments or SpaDex mission are linked to the plan for setting up India's own space station named the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035 to carry out spacewalks and research in microgravity conditions. This mission also carries the PS4 orbital experiment module 4 or POEM 4, using the spent fourth stage of PSLV C 60 which otherwise would have ended as space debris carrying 24 payloads. Autonomous orbited docking is a sophisticated manoeuvre mastered by a few elite nations like the USA, China and Russia and India too is set to join this group. Docking is indispensable for missions that require heavy spacecraft and equipment that cannot be launched in one go, viz the International Space Station for instance.

A manned foray to the moon and the operation of the country's first space station is not possible without it. It could also open up opportunities for India's space research agency to collaborate with global missions that require docking facilities. The success of missions like Chandrayaan 3 and Aditya 1 in 2023 followed by the setting up of the first space observatory to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays in 2024, to the recent Cabinet approval in Sept 2024 of Venus Orbital Mission to study the different aspects of Venus, clearly showcases that it has enough expertise to contribute to the divergent facets of planetary research. This mission is the handiwork of collaboration between public and private enterprises and underscores not just its technical prowess but also lays a solid foundation for future endeavours that will shape the global space landscape. **Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital**

RELIEF FOR BHOPAL RESIDENTS

Madam—It is really sad that it took four decades to remove the toxic waste from

HMPV virus outbreaks spark panic



In China, the spread of viruses causing respiratory illnesses like Influenza A, HMPV, Mycoplasma Pneumonia, and COVID-19 has increased. This spread is affecting children's health significantly, leading to a rise in hospital admissions. These viruses exhibit symptoms similar to other respiratory infections, such as devastation caused by COVID-19, trusting the "Chinese Dragon" seems difficult. Five years ago, Wuhan's coronavirus outbreak wreaked

havoc worldwide, and now, the HMPV virus appears to have originated from the same location. Is this merely a coincidence, or is Wuhan a hub for developing biological colds and fevers in children. Now, the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is spreading in China, sparking fears that a similar outbreak could occur again. Wuhan, the epicentre of the initial coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly the origin of this new virus as well. China has stated that the situation is under control, and no travel restrictions have been imposed internationally. The Chinese Dragon seems to be spewing various deadly viruses. It is essential for the World Health Organization to take timely notice of these recurring dangerous viruses emerging from China. **Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai**

MELANISTIC LEOPARD SPOTTED AGAIN

Madam — After a "melanistic leopard" was spotted in the forests near Odisha's Nayagarh, wildlife lovers are understandably euphoric. Over the last five years, various forests of the country have reported the sighting of "melanistic leopards." Black feline of the big cat family, with small head, a robust jaw and strong hind legs—that's the compact description of "panther" or "melanistic leopard." In India, dense forests of the southern part harbour the black beauty. The black cats love to live in dense evergreen forests so that they can, as far as possible, avoid light. A genetic mutation, dominant or recessive, causes an overexpression of melanin pigments resulting in the so-called 'melanistic leopard.' However, the joy of sighting the big cat should be tempered with sobriety. Some 15 variants of the black cats are endangered. **Ganapathi Bhat | Akola**

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Embracing your unique journey to success

This year, let's shift our focus inward, honour our unique paths and recognise the triumphs that shape who we are

How often have you beaten yourself up saying you don't measure up to others in terms of skills and success? How often have you undervalued your accomplishments with a desultory wave of hand accompanied by a "Oh, this is something everyone does" or "I haven't done anything great"? Chances are that we have done it a greater number of times than what is good for our self-esteem and confidence.



A student of mine recently approached me for a review of her college admission essay wherein she had not highlighted many of her strengths that could catch the attention of the admission officer. "Oh, ma'am, these are things everyone in our school does. This isn't anything extraordinary," she said. I sat her down and explained: "We aren't worried about what others are doing. Our focus should be on what we have done so far and how it has been of consequence to us and others." The biggest reason for our disenchantment with our lives in this busy world is we often undermine our capabilities by trying to match them with

others and trying to be one up over the rest. As long as we keep looking at others, we shall never be able to make the cut, which is completing a task to the best of our abilities, putting forth the best of our ideas as they emerge in our intellect and assessing their value not in terms of where you stand or what your ranking is in comparison, but giving ourselves due credit for the distance we have come given our specific challenges in life. No victory is small. To the little boy participating in a sack race at school, winning it or making it to the other end without stumbling should be an accomplishment. To a student who successfully makes a presentation in class, the comfort that she feels standing in front of a class and speaking about what she believes in is a success. To

our character and our path forward. The mistake we often make is believing that success has a standard template. It doesn't. As we step into a new year, let us make a conscious choice—to shift the gaze inward, to honour our unique journeys, and to celebrate the progress we've made, however small it may appear. Let us define success not by comparisons but by the courage to keep going, the strength to rise after a fall, and the grace to applaud ourselves for showing up. You are enough. Your story matters. And your victories, no matter how quiet, deserve recognition. Here's to a year where we measure success by our growth, not by how we compare to others. Let those who conquer mountains do so with pride and let those who climb smaller hills find joy in reaching their summits. And for those who can climb neither—whether by circumstance or choice—let their strength shine in being the cheerleaders who uplift others on their journeys. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist, and writing coach and has published six books. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS THE SOLE CONTROLLER

Logic, practicality and experience point to the necessity of a singular, omnipotent force governing all



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Imagine there being more than one controller of the Creation. They disagree on some matters and are not able to resolve them. What kind of chaos will result? Therefore, there being more than one controller is illogical, impractical and unimaginable. And this reality rules out all small controllers, as we imagine ourselves to be. Don't we all feel that we control something or another? Do we? These examples should provide the answer. There is a huge corporation, which employs thousands of people worldwide. Its owner has a say over who is used and at what level.

This is fine till something like a COVID-19 pandemic hits. There are lockdowns, quarantines and other social restrictions. This affects the working of the corporation. What about the so-called controller? He is under quarantine. Another example is of a president of a big country. He is puffed up by the power he enjoys. Unfortunately, he is assassinated. The assassin had control over his life, and this assassin was hanged. Who controlled what?

Let me take a common household. The man of the house making most decisions about the household may feel that he is a controller. What happens when the lady of the house opposes him on some issue? Where did the control go? We must understand that making decisions is not controlling anything because that would require controlling results. A team leader can make decisions on behalf of his team but he, himself, is controlled by circumstances. The only entity, who can ensure some result every time is God only, and no one else, now or ever. Having understood that God is the whole and sole controller, let us



understand how He manages it. The control is exercised through the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is just and according to the highest religious principles ('with - the Bhagavad Geeta 18.78), which is 'dharma'. Briefly, it is 'what you sow is what you reap.' Isn't that fair? No one can complain, and no one escapes punishment either, death notwithstanding.

Many engage in wrongful acts hoping to get away from punishment from man-made laws, but in God's control, no one does. Similarly, rewards are forever coming, as decided by the Divine Authority, which works under the superintendence of God. Similarly, God has empowered the material nature to give birth to the world along with moving and stationary objects. And on account of this, the world goes on. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Questions are raised about God's fairness and the System set by Him not being just. It is not true, which will be clear from the following examples. How was Hiroshima wiped out? Why were so many women and children killed or maimed? Surely, many must have been innocent.

The answer is very simple. All those born there were destined to be hurt in that fashion. Only those, who had bad karmaphalas coming to fruition were born there. Doesn't the divine authority have control over who would be born where? They have complete control and they also know the future.

Accordingly, they manage the Creation. Another instance could be of an infant dying soon after birth. Could we know that this soul had punishment coming for the heinous crime he had committed in his previous life; he had forced his wife to abort because the child was a girl? I am speculating, but that could be a reason. All souls are relocated after death. Where they will go will depend on many factors. Only God knows!

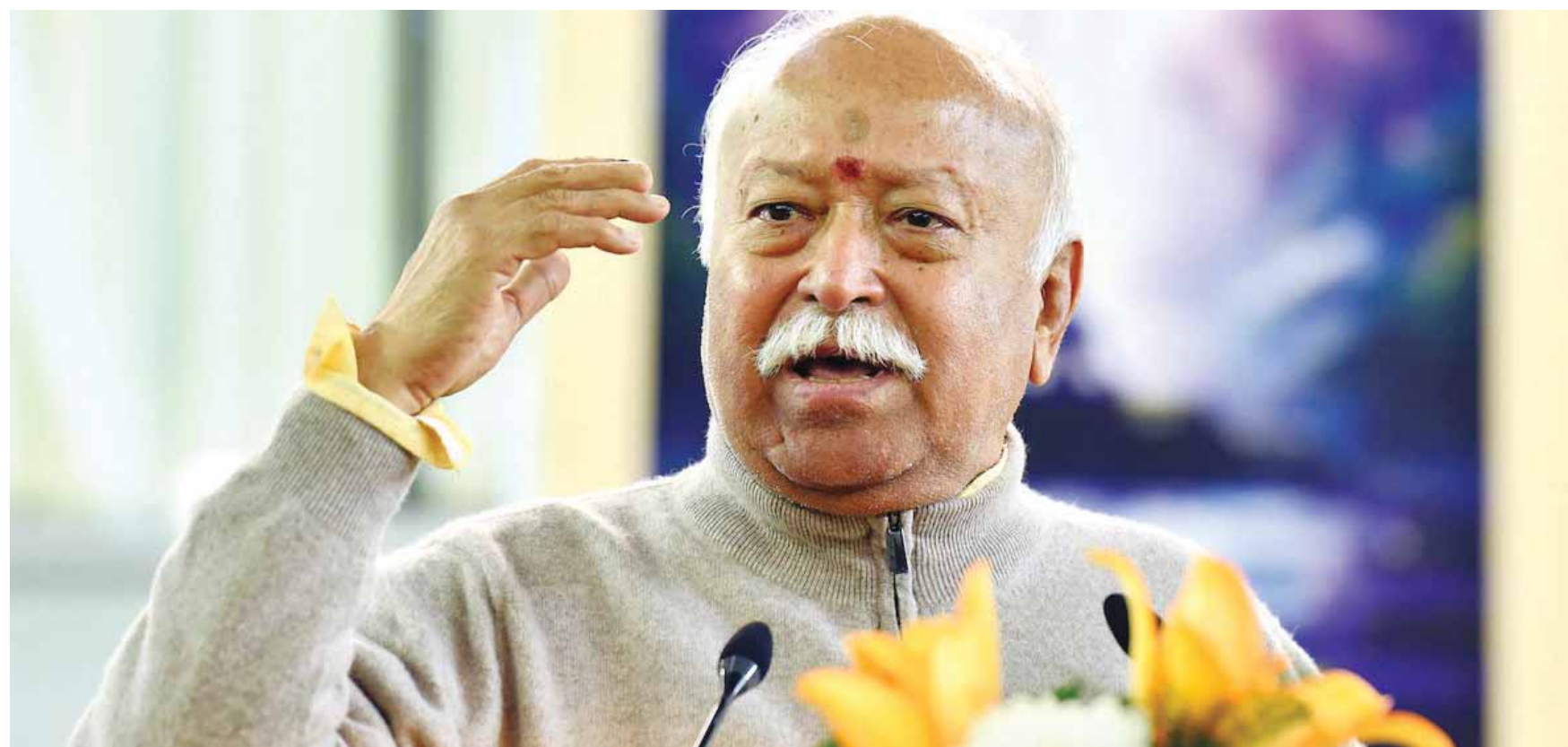
(The writer is a spiritual guide and teacher; views are personal)

Bhagwat champions unity as the path to India's Vishavguru vision



SUKHDEV SINGH

Highlighting the risks posed by divisive narratives such as 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes, Mohan Bhagwat stresses the importance of embracing India's pluralistic identity



Delivering a Sahjeevan Vyakhyanmala series lecture on the topic, India—the Vishavguru, the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat expressed his concern over the recent upsurge of 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and pointed out: "After Ram Mandir, some think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places". Rejecting the practice, he said, "This is not acceptable." Echoing his comment on Gyanvapi Masjid that "We look for a Shivling beneath every mosque," implying that we should not, he cautioned: "The days of hegemony are gone," and that now "People choose their representatives, who run the government." Questioning the "language of dominance," he acknowledged the pluralistic nature of Indian society, where "tradition" allows people to live in harmony while following their respective faiths. Drawing a comparison of India with the world, where similarity is the principle of unity, for India, he said, "Diversity is an ornament of unity, and we should respect and accept it."

Rejecting hatred, malice, enmity, and suspicion daily under the burden of the past, he ruled out the 'majority-minority' binary and emphasised, "Everyone is equal here." To be a Vishavguru, India should be a nation of people who can rise above caste and religious differences. By what he has said, Bhagwat has targeted more than one point while acknowledging the reality of about 200 million Muslims besides the Christians, Sikhs, and others in India, on the one hand, and the geopolitical realities, on the other. If that is so, then the word 'Hindu' needs to be accepted as an Arabic-Persian cognate of the Sanskrit 'Sindu' and 'Hindustan' as a reference to the land of Hindus, i.e., the people living beyond the river Sindhu, but not a place of and for the people of a specific religion. The historical chronicles state that the river 'Sindu' was pronounced as 'Indus' by the Greeks



THE INDIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY WAS CODIFIED BY A SECTION OF PEOPLE AS A HINDU NATIONAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND AN ISLAMIC NATIONAL IDENTITY, DIVIDING THE PEOPLE ON RELIGIOUS LINES

and 'Al-Hind,' which later became 'Hinds' or 'Hindus' by the Arabic Iranians.

The Greeks called 'the land of Indus' India, while the Arabic-speaking people called the region 'Hindustan.' It was a reference to the geographical region of old Punjab. The land of Hindus i.e. the people of river Sindhu, called Hindustan or India in the above sense, is a land of several religious faiths, such as Shaivism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, besides the principles of ancient Vedas and Puranas, and the word 'Hindu' has been a geographic and a cultural identifier to distinguish between the indigenous people and others who came as traders or invaders, like Muslims, Christians, and Jews, etc., at the initial stages of their entry into the region; the distinction, however, did not mean religious opposition.

It only acted as an identifying communicative 'sign': for communication is organised on two axes: the axis of similarities and the axis of differences. The people from the 'other' lands gradually became the people of the land called Hindustan, or India, settling permanently and adding to the diversities on the land of the river Sindhu.

Since there is no definite founder and no single holy text to establish a religion called 'Hinduism,' it remains only a set of socio-cultural practices while the people practice a variety of their respective religious worship.

The words 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan' have remained signifiers for the geographic-cultural practices until projected as a religious and national identifier in

the early twentieth century in opposition to the colonial rule and in reaction to the Khilafat Movement by the Muslims in support of the Turkish Ottoman Sultan during the freedom movement of India.

The Indian national identity was codified by a section of people as a Hindu national religious identity and an Islamic national identity, dividing the people on religious lines. The division was perpetrated by the colonial British in more than one way, leading to the partition of India. Since 1947, free India has been a sovereign state nation, though it should have been a state of cultural nations politically united as a federal political state, settling the issue of religious nations forever. Yet India has stood the test of its unity in diversity with some collisions on the sidelines.

The internal dynamism of society and state is its continued collision and cohesion in their weaving: the more complex a society or a state is, the higher its level of collision-cohesion dynamics. For the well-being of the land and its population, the political drivers must turn the power to strengthen 'diversity' against the 'forced homogeneity' as a principle of organisation. But with the rising assertion of Hindu religious identity and a Hindu nation-state over Hindu geographic-cultural identity juxtaposing with the recent upsurge in 'Mandir-Masjid' controversies, rightly perceived by Mohan Bhagwat, the danger to the unity and cohesion is more imminent than not.

The sooner the ideologues of identities understand it, the better it is for the people living

together for centuries. Mohan Bhagwat seems to have realized it, and rightly so, he has underplayed the slogan—one nation, one people—stating, "Without Muslims, Hindutava is incomplete": Hindus and Muslims are different but complementary. Hindustan, or India, or Bharat, is a land of diversities, and only by choice of the ideology and practice of inclusion, it can become Vishavguru. To be the Vishavguru is to experience and accommodate more diversity. The Vishav, i.e., the universe, is organized into networks of similarities and differences, yet the precursor of life on earth is the 'difference' that engenders diversity.

Mohan Bhagwat's nuanced remarks underscore the importance of unity amidst diversity in India's journey toward becoming a Vishavguru. Acknowledging India's pluralistic fabric, he emphasised harmony over divisive narratives like 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and rejected notions of religious hegemony. Bhagwat traced the historical and cultural origins of terms like 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan,' advocating for their geographic and cultural significance rather than a singular religious identity. He urged political and social leaders to strengthen diversity as a foundation for national cohesion. By embracing inclusion and mutual respect, India can truly embody the universal ideals required to be a global guide and leader.

(The writer is Professor (Retd), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Vice-Chairman, Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

The Bhagavad Gita: A blueprint for resilience, holistic health and leadership

From inspiring modern management practices to enriching prenatal care, the Gita's teachings resonate deeply in today's fast-paced world

The Bhagavad Gita is revered as a profound source of resilience, wisdom, and ethical guidance, often referred to as the essence of the Upanishads. Known as Brahmavidya or "Superior Knowledge," it offers timeless insights into life, existence, and cosmic truths. Despite being composed millennia ago, the Gita remains relevant today, providing practical teachings for navigating the complexities of modern life.

Its wisdom extends across diverse fields such as management, leadership, psychology, and medicine. For example, many prestigious

The Relevance of Beeja Sanskara and Garbha Sanskara
A lesser-known yet signifi-



KASHINATH SAMAGANDI

cant aspect of the Gita is its emphasis on Beeja Sanskara (pre-conception practices) and Garbha Sanskara (post-conception practices). Through the concept of Atmaja Bhava, it highlights the importance of establishing a deep connection with the unborn child. These practices, rooted in Ayurveda and

Yoga, nurture wisdom, emotional stability, and virtuous qualities in the foetus, fostering holistic development. The scripture also underscores the importance of Satvika Ahara—a pure, balanced diet. During pregnancy, this diet not only supports the physical health of the mother and foetus but also nurtures emotional and spiritual harmony, laying the foundation for a well-rounded individual.

Resilience, Energy and Cosmic Balance
Rather than considering the Gita as the book of any person, caste, creed, country or religion, it is a guide to one's own personal, mental, social, and spiritual resilience and adaptability. Its teachings on perseverance, balance, and inner

strength resonate deeply with those facing modern challenges. The Gita's perspective on energy and cosmic balance aligns with contemporary scientific principles. **Ayurvedic Insights on Foetal Development**
The Gita's teachings influence Ayurvedic principles, particularly in prenatal care. It identifies six essential Bhavas contributing to foetal development: Matruja Bhava (mother's qualities) Pitruja Bhava (father's qualities) Atmaja Bhava (soul connection) Satmyaja Bhava (compatibility) Rasaja Bhava (nutrition) Satvaja Bhava (mental stability) These emphasise the importance of parental health, nutrition, emotional well-being, and spiritual align-



ment in shaping the child's future. Such principles form the core of Garbha Sanskara practices, increasingly recognised in modern prenatal care for their holistic approach. **The Balanced Mind: Sthitaprajna**
One of the Gita's most profound teachings is the concept of Sthitaprajna. This idea of remaining unaffected

by success or failure, challenges or triumphs, is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced world. Cultivating such equanimity fosters mental resilience and emotional stability, enabling individuals to navigate life's ups and downs with composure.

Holistic Health Through Integration
The Gita advocates an integrated approach to Ahar (diet), Vihar (lifestyle), Nidra (sleep), Achar (conduct), and Vichar (thoughts). These elements must work cohesively to promote comprehensive health and wellness. This holistic philosophy supports inter-science and intra-science integration in medicine. Intra-science integration ensures that all aspects of a medical system

work together to manage chronic conditions effectively, while inter-science integration leverages the strengths of multiple systems for optimal care. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing both acute and chronic conditions.

Holistic Development and Liberation: The Gita offers a roadmap for holistic self-development, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual growth. Its teachings on Dharma (duty), Karma (action), and Bhakti (devotion) provide practical guidance for leading a purposeful and ethical life. Moreover, the Gita provides insights into personal development, emotional mastery, and the attainment of Moksha (liberation).

Its universal principles resonate across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and leadership, offering a framework for self-realisation and collective well-being. In conclusion, the enduring relevance of the Bhagavad Gita lies in its universal message of harmony, balance, and self-awareness. It inspires individuals and societies towards holistic growth and ethical living.

Whether guiding inner conflicts or addressing societal complexities, the Gita remains an effective tool for achieving balance, resilience, and self-mastery in an ever-changing world.

(The author is Director of the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga; views are personal)

PM Modi to virtually inaugurate Jammu railway division, boosting train services in Northern India

PTI ■ JAMMU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the newly created Jammu railway division through virtual mode on Monday, paving the way for efficient management of train services in the northernmost region of India.

With the establishment of the new railway division in Jammu, a long-standing demand of people of the region has been fulfilled. This milestone event comes ahead of the much-awaited inauguration of train services to Kashmir from Katra, with the final trial run scheduled for Tuesday.

"The prime minister will inaugurate the Jammu railway division through virtual mode from New Delhi tomorrow," an official said.

In Jammu, the event will be attended and addressed by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Member of Parliament Jugal Kishore



Sharma. Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh is also expected to participate. Headquartered in Jammu, the newly created division will involve the reorganization of the Ferozpur Division. It will include the following sections under its jurisdiction, including Pathankot - Jammu -

Udhampur - Srinagar - Baramulla (423 route km), Bhogpur-Sirwal-Pathankot (87.21 route km), Batala (excluding) - Pathankot (68.17 route km) and Pathankot-Joginder Nagar (narrow gauge section, 163.72 route km). The total length of these sections will be 742.1 kilometres. Presently, the Indian

Railways operates 17 zones with 68 divisions across the country. he Railway officials said the final jurisdiction will be determined based on the Detailed Project Report. The division will feature modern, hi-tech facilities, leveraging the full potential of Information Technology (IT), they said. With the creation of this division, the

Indian Railways will now have 70 divisions under its 17 zones. The newly established division will oversee operations on India's iconic rail projects, including the country's first cable-stayed rail bridge, the Anji Khad Bridge and the world's highest railway arch bridge over the Chenab River at Kauri.

The Chenab Rail Bridge, located in Reasi district, stands 359 metres (1,178 feet) above the riverbed, making it 35 metres taller than the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The Jammu division will also manage the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) project, which is now nearing completion. The Anji Khad Bridge has a total length of 473.25 metres, including a 120-metre viaduct and a 94.25-metre central embankment. Currently, the railway services in Jammu and Kashmir are managed by the Ferozpur Division of Northern Railways.

Alliance with RJD a 'mistake', party did nothing while in power: Bihar CM Nitish Kumar



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday snubbed the RJD, headed by his arch-rival Lalu Prasad, stating that he had forged alliances "by mistake" with the opposition party which "did nothing" while in power. The JD(U) supremo made the remark days after Prasad, a former CM himself, had claimed that the RJD was keeping its "doors open" for the former ally, who is now back in the BJP-led NDA. Talking to reporters in the north Bihar district of

Muzaffarpur, as part of a state-wide Pragati Yatra, Kumar said, "Those who were in power before us... Did they do anything? People used to fear stepping out of their homes after sunset. I had by mistake (galti se) aligned with them a couple of times." "What was the condition of women back then? Today you can see these self-help groups, which we gave the name Jivika. The Centre replicated our model and called it Ajivika. Did you see such confident rural women earlier," asked the longest-serving CM of the state.

Kumar, however, did not take questions about the cryptic "offer" from Prasad, which was made light of by the RJD supremo's son and heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav, but endorsed by ally Congress. Prasad's comments had come in the backdrop of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's equivocal stance on projecting Kumar as the chief ministerial candidate in the assembly polls due in less than a year. State BJP leaders, on their part, have been maintaining that the JD(U) supremo will be the "face" of the NDA in the 2025 assembly elections.

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah challenges Kumaraswamy to prove corruption allegations with evidence



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DAVANGERE

With Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy accusing his government of corruption and ministers of extracting commission, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday challenged the JD(S) leader to prove his allegations with evidence. He said allegations should not be made without documents and proof.

"Let him prove it. Ask him to prove that 60 per cent commission is taking place and there is corruption. Let him prove it. Not just making allegations, one has to prove it," Siddaramaiah told reporters here, responding to a question.

He said the opposition's job is not only to make the allegations, they should also prove it with evidence and documents.

Earlier in the day, speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Kumaraswamy targeted the Siddaramaiah-led government and accused it of corruption and extracting commission, while alleging that ministers themselves are involved in this.

"Contractors supporting them (Congress party) are themselves saying that it (commission) has crossed 60 per cent and the earlier government was better. The loot is happening at PWD or irrigation departments.

While getting contracts is one part, now even for allotment of houses, it seems money has to be paid... "Earlier, small officers were involved, but now it is happening at Vidhana Soudha. Ministers

have to be paid for release of houses... At every department percentage is fixed..." Kumaraswamy alleged as he highlighted the suicide of officials and contractors.

Asking Siddaramaiah to answer to his own conscience, the union minister further accused those around CM of indulging in looting of the state's and public resources. "...You (CM) will have to pay for it."

Responding to a question on this year's Budget priorities, the CM, who also holds the Finance portfolio, said the Budget will be presented in March and he will speak about priorities when he begins the pre-budget consultation meetings.

On the recent hike in bus fares, Siddaramaiah said, bus fares have increased during all governments, considering the salaries of employees, the increase in diesel prices, the cost of purchase of new buses and also inflation.

He said, "Bus fares were increased long ago, and as we were told that all our road transport corporations are in distress, and as there was a long standing demand, we have increased." Questioning whether there was no hike when BJP or Kumaraswamy was in power, the CM said, "Let them say they had not increased fares. Hasn't the central government increased railway fares?"

The revised bus fares, hiked by 15 per cent across the board, came into effect at midnight on Saturday, amidst stiff criticism from opposition parties and various sections.

20 years on, Spanish woman returns to India in search of biological mother

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

Sneha, a Spanish citizen, has returned to India in search of her biological mother, who had abandoned her and her brother 20 years ago.

However, 21-year-old Sneha is running out of time as she has to return to Spain on Monday for her educational commitments.

The researcher in children's education wanted to trace her roots and reached India with scanty information about her past.

Her Spanish parents Gema Vidal and Juan Josh supported her in her quest and Gema accompanied Sneha to her home state. They had adopted Sneha and her brother Somu in 2010 from an orphanage in Bhubaneswar, where they were kept after their mother Banalata Das abandoned them in 2005.

"The purpose of my journey from Spain to Bhubaneswar is to find my biological parents, especially my mother. I want to find her and meet her. I am fully prepared for the journey even if it is difficult," Sneha



told PTI.

Asked if she would hide her biological mother for abandoning her, Sneha remained mum. She was only over a year old, and her brother was just a few months old at that time.

Accompanied by Gema, a yoga teacher in Zaragoza city of Spain, Sneha arrived in Bhubaneswar on December 19 last year and they have been staying in a hotel. Somu, however, could not come as he was busy with some work in Spain.

If they do not find Sneha's biological mother by Monday, they will come back in March for a longer stay.

"We have to return to Spain as Sneha has joined a training programme which should not

be discontinued. If we do not get Banalata in the next 24 hours, we will come back to Bhubaneswar in March," Gema said.

Banalata had abandoned Sneha and Somu at their rented house in Nayapally area in Bhubaneswar in 2005. Banalata's husband Santosh, who worked as a cook in a private firm, had earlier abandoned his family, which comprised his wife, and four children, including Sneha and Somu.

Later, Banalata also left the rented house with another son and daughter, leaving behind Sneha and Somu. The house owner later informed the police and they were shifted to an orphanage.

In 2010, Sneha, then more than five years old, and Somu, around four years old, were legally adopted by the Spanish couple.

"Sneha is very responsible and educated. She is the joy of our house. She is our life," Gema said.

Gema had earlier revealed to Sneha and Somu about their roots in Odisha and that they were adopted.

"She is well educated and conducting research, so she decided to locate her biological mother and I accompanied her to this place," Gema said.

During their frantic search in Bhubaneswar, Gema and Sneha came across a retired teacher of Rama Devi Women's University, Sneha Sudha Mishra, who helped them find out the names of her parents.

"We found out about her parents' names from the house owner in Nayapally and later the names were verified with the police and the orphanage," Mishra said.

With the help of Mishra, Sneha and Gema met city Commissioner of Police Dev Datta Singh, who assigned the job of locating Banalata Das and Santosh Das to two police personnel Anjali Chhotray and Gangadhar Pradhan.

"We have found out that Banalata Das and Santosh are from Badamba-Narsinghpur area in Cuttack district. We have engaged police and panchayat functionaries to locate them," Inspector Anjali Chhotray said.

Anti-corruption activist slams Beed sarpanch murder investigation



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Anti-corruption activist Anjali Damania on Sunday said the ongoing investigation into the murder of Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was "hogwash" and asserted police from outside that district must help the probe for the truth to come out.

Massajog community bond with Karad and cannot probe him," she alleged. "The ongoing probe is a hogwash. Beed police must not be in charge of the probe. I have met Director General of Police Rashmi Shukla in this regard.

I also urge Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis (who holds the home portfolio) to take action against those troubling me," Damania added.

minister and Parli MLA Dhananjay Munde, cannot conduct a fair and impartial inquiry, Damania alleged. Speaking to reporters, she further alleged Maharashtra ministers Dhananjay Munde and Pankaja Munde, both from Beed, were targeting her with "abusive and vulgar language" through calls and messages.

"I am accused of creating social disharmony by targeting the Vanjari community. I have not done anything like that. I just mentioned that since the times of (late BJP stalwart) Gopinath Munde, all government appointees in Beed are from one community. Police in the district who belong to a particular community bond with Karad

and cannot probe him," she alleged. "The ongoing probe is a hogwash. Beed police must not be in charge of the probe. I have met Director General of Police Rashmi Shukla in this regard.

I also urge Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis (who holds the home portfolio) to take action against those troubling me," Damania added.

Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa seeks Bharat Ratna for former PM Manmohan Singh

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa on Sunday wrote to Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Assembly Speaker Kulraj Singh Sandhwan, seeking a joint resolution in the House to recommend the Bharat Ratna for former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

Bajwa proposed the joint resolution to advocate for Singh to be conferred with India's highest civilian honour in recognition of his "monumental contributions to the country's progress and his exemplary service."

He also wrote to BJP Legislative Party leader Ashwani Sharma, Shiromani Akali Dal MLA Manpreet Singh Ayal, and Bahujan Samaj Party lawmaker Nachatar Pal, proposing that



an all-party delegation meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to push for Singh to be conferred with the honour. Singh - the architect of India's economic reforms - died on December 26 at the age of 92 following age-related complications.

In his letter, Bajwa said, "I am writing to propose a collective initiative of profound national significance -- one that

transcends political boundaries to honour one of India's most distinguished statesmen, Dr Manmohan Singh."

"Singh's contributions to our nation have been unparalleled. As the principal architect of India's economic liberalisation in 1991, he set the foundation for the country's transformative growth, resilience and global standing.

His tenure as prime minister was marked by a steadfast focus on inclusive development, social justice and economic stability, directly impacting millions of lives across the nation," he added.

Bajwa said he proposed the joint resolution due to Singh's contributions profoundly shaping India's destiny.

"As a proud son of Punjab, Dr Singh's dedication to public service and nation-building continues to inspire us all," he said in a post on X.

"I have also proposed forming an all-party delegation to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to advocate for this recognition. Honouring Dr Singh with the Bharat Ratna will not only celebrate his extraordinary contributions but also reaffirm our shared commitment to democracy,

integrity, and excellence in public service," the Qadian MLA added in the post.

In his letter to the chief minister and the speaker, Bajwa said Singh's journey was a testament to resilience, dedication and humility.

"As a proud son of Punjab, he upheld the values of hard work and service throughout his remarkable career. His contributions to the state are equally commendable, addressing critical challenges in agriculture, rural development, and education, and catalysing growth in Punjab as well as in the country," he said.

Bajwa added that what distinguished Singh was his unwavering commitment to the nation, consistently prioritising the greater good over political divides.

Four killed, two missing after vehicle falls into river in J-K's Kishtwar



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Four people were killed after their vehicle skidded off the road, rolled down a hill and fell into a river in Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, police said.

Two persons, including the driver, are missing and a rescue operation is underway. The accident took place in the Paddar area, a police official said.

Police did not immediately identify the vehicle. Udhampur MP and Union minister Jitendra Singh expressed grief over the loss of lives in the accident.

"Saddened to learn just now that 4 of the passengers travelling in the vehicle have been found dead on the spot. Two other persons, including the driver, are not traced as yet. My sincere condolences to the bereaved families," he said in a post on X.

The minister said he contacted Deputy Commissioner, Kishtwar, Rajesh Kumar Shavan immediately after receiving the report about the accident. "Rescue teams have been put into action. I am regularly receiving the updates," he said.

Bride takes bathroom break and flushes groom's hopes away!

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a tale that left an entire village chuckling in disbelief, a bride in Khajni's Bharohiya area in Gorakhpur took an innocent bathroom break during her wedding rituals-and never came back. The 40-year-old groom, Kamlesh Kumar, now finds himself not just heartbroken but also missing jewelry, cash, and his faith in second chances.

The drama unfolded at the Shiv Temple, where Kamlesh, a farmer from Sitapur's Govindpur village, was tying the knot for the second time. Having lost his first wife, he had hoped to rebuild his family, even



paying a mediator Rs 30,000 to help find him a bride. But it seems the mediator's guarantee didn't include

"sticking around until the pheras."

According to Kamlesh, the bride arrived at the temple

on Friday with her mother. As the rituals began, everything seemed to be going smoothly-until the bride excused herself for a quick visit to the bathroom. Minutes turned to hours, and it became clear that the bathroom wasn't her only destination.

Her mother, who was supposed to be supervising the ceremonies, also vanished into thin air. "She was dressed so beautifully; I didn't think she'd sprint off like that," Kamlesh told reporters, trying to hide his embarrassment.

"I gave her sarees, beauty products, jewelry, and even paid for all the wedding arrangements. I didn't think

I'd be footing the bill for her great escape. The incident left wedding guests bewildered and Kamlesh devastated. "I just wanted to start over, but now I'm worse off than before," he lamented.

Kamlesh revealed that a man from Sitapur demanded Rs 30,000 in exchange for arranging his marriage. After paying Rs 3,000 upfront, Kamlesh was taken to Khajni on January 1, where he was introduced to a woman and a girl at a hotel.

The woman from Khajni took Kamlesh's phone number after the meeting. Following this, the Sitapur broker informed Kamlesh that an additional Rs 60,000

was required-Rs 30,000 for himself and Rs 30,000 for the woman in Khajni.

Subsequently, the woman from Khajni contacted Kamlesh, asking him to bring Rs 30,000 on January 3, assuring him that the marriage would be arranged immediately. Trusting her, Kamlesh arrived in Khajni with his son to finalize the wedding.

However, after taking the money, jewelry, and other items, the woman, who was supposed to be the bride, and the Sitapur broker disappeared in an auto under the pretext of preparing for the jaimala (garland exchange) ceremony.

When Kamlesh approached

the police for help, he was met with disappointment.

The local police reportedly dismissed his complaint, claiming it was a matter for Sitapur authorities and sent him back without initiating any investigation.

As Kamlesh's story spreads, the village is abuzz with jokes about bathroom breaks becoming the new runaway tactic. But for Kamlesh, the joke is anything but funny. "I thought I was starting a new chapter in life," he said. "Turns out, it was the start of a comedy show."

Singapore concerned over increasing 'sham marriages' with foreign women

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore authorities are concerned over the increase in "sham marriages or marriages of convenience" between Singaporean men and foreign women, which most of the time involves a syndicate and could lead to social problems. The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) has highlighted the concern and reported that "sham marriages" have increased to 32 cases between January and September last year compared to just four cases during the same period in 2023. A media report cited ICA as saying that arrests of people involved in "sham marriages" followed vigorous investigations into a suspected syndicate arranging such arrangements between Singaporean men getting paid for marrying foreign women. "Sham marriages" in Singapore often involve a foreign woman paying a Singaporean man money for a union to be arranged, so she can get a permit to stay or work here, reported The Straits Times on Sunday.

A marriage of convenience is when two people tie the knot for the sole intention of acquiring an immigration advantage. Inspector Mark Chai, deputy officer-in-charge of ICA's intelligence division, said the increase in such cases was concerning as it could lead to a social problem in multi-ethnic Singapore, where these foreigners could get involved in illicit activities. He attributed the increase to more foreigners wanting to extend their visit passes to continue staying and working here. "The idea of such marriages is often spread through word of mouth. And to some Singaporean men, it can be seen as easy money," the broadsheet had Insp Chai saying. "But it is illegal, and the ICA is stepping up enforcement efforts to bust such arrangements," he warned. Those convicted for their involvement in a marriage of convenience can be jailed for up to 10 years, fined up to SGD10,000, or both. Superintendent Goh Wee Kiat, a senior assistant direc-

tor at ICA's intelligence division, added that most marriage of convenience cases were flagged to the ICA by tip-offs from the public. He said, "The couple can try to hide the fact that their union is a marriage of convenience, but there are telltale signs that our officers are able to spot." He cited one case of a Singaporean mother not being aware of her son's marriage, which is usually not the case for such a milestone event in someone's life. A case was also cited of sham marriage where the "wife" lived away from the house of her "husband". He was arrested for making a false declaration, saying his "wife" lived with him but her clothes were elsewhere. Goh encouraged the public to report any suspected cases of marriage of convenience here, noting that all information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence. In June 2024, 13 people - six Vietnamese women and seven Singaporean men - were charged over their alleged links to marriages of convenience.

UK Opp wants Starmer to scrap plans for Islamophobia definition

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's Opposition Conservative Party is leading calls for Prime Minister Keir Starmer to scrap government plans for an official definition of Islamophobia over fears it would restrict free speech and action against wrongdoing. Shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick said this weekend that a "false label" of Islamophobia had hampered investigations into the child abuse grooming gang scandal involving men of Pakistani heritage. It comes as The Daily Telegraph newspaper claims that the Labour Party government is considering a formal definition of anti-Muslim discrimination. "The government should drop its plans for such a deeply flawed definition of Islamophobia," Jenrick told the newspaper. "Throughout the grooming gang scandal the false label of Islamophobia was used to silence people. It appears that the government has learnt nothing and is determined to press ahead with a definition that will have a chilling effect on freedom of speech," he said. In a social media post, the Tory MP elaborated that "for

decades the most appalling crimes from predominantly British-Pakistani men were legalised and actively covered up to prevent disorder". "The rule of law was abandoned to sustain the myth that diversity is our strength, destroying the lives of thousands of vulnerable white working class girls in the process," he noted. The shadow minister blamed the "onset of mass migration" for the scandal, brought back into focus by Tesla chief Elon Musk posting severely critical remarks on his X platform over the British government's handling of young girls' sexual exploitation across a number of towns and cities in England more than a decade ago.

"The foreign nationals responsible must be deported - no ifs, no buts. And the officials that covered up must be sent to jail for their appalling cowardice. Even that won't be enough for the victims," added Jenrick.

His intervention comes as sources in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), led by Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, were referenced by The Daily Telegraph

to claim that officials were considering whether to introduce a formal definition of Islamophobia. Such a definition, though not legally binding, would require organisations to adopt it.

Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
 Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 83/13 PIU-03/2024 Dated : 04/01/2025

National Competitive E-Tender Notice

The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" invites tender for Consultancy Services for the following works. The RFP/TOR document will be available from date 09-01-2025 at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (₹)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	Consultancy Services for Preparing of D.P.R. for Construction of Two lane motor road including Two lane Bridges from Rupalgarh Km 55 to Pancheshwar Km 90 in Uttarakhand State (App. Length 35.00 Kms)	3.50	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	08	Experience of Two Lane Motor Road & Bridges with consultancy work in NH/NHA/PSU and any department of State Govt.
2	Consultancy for Services for Preparing of D.P.R. for Construction of Single lane motor road including 1.5 lane Bridges from Pancheshwar Km 90 to Baltari Km 120, in Uttarakhand State (App. Length 30.00 Kms)	2.08	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	08	Experience of Two Lane Motor Road & Bridges with consultancy work in NH/NHA/PSU and any department of State Govt.

PUBLIC NOTICE
 Castro S/o Mr. Ditto Rajkumar D (Age 33 Yrs) R/o 11 Middle Street, Udangudi, Thoottukudi, Tamil Nadu 628203 and Salomi Adarsh, D/o Jagdish Chandra Adarsh (Age 41 Yrs) R/o A-24, A-Block, 1st Cross Street, LG Chowk, Gamma-1 Greater Noida Gautam Buddha Nagar UP-201310 Under Special Marriage Act, 1954 an application has been submitted regarding marriage. If you have any objection regarding the above, you can submit your written objection within 15 days in the office of the undersigned (Room No. 119) on any working day.
 Deputy District Officer Sadar
 Special marriage officer
 Gautam Buddha Nagar
 Deputy District Officer

Austrian People's Party nominates Christian Stocker as interim leader

AP ■ VIENNA

Austrian People's Party on Sunday nominated its General Secretary Christian Stocker as interim leader after the expected resignation of Chancellor Karl Nehammer, Austrian news agency APA reported. Nehammer announced Saturday he would resign in the next few days after coalition talks with the Social Democrats collapsed. Stocker, a lawyer and member of the Austrian Parliament, has served as general secretary of the People's Party since 2022. He is seen as an experienced and calm crisis communicator who has frequently appeared in Austrian media to defend controversial decisions. Protected by special police forces, Nehammer walked across the square from the Chancellery toward the presi-


dent's office in Vienna. "What is important for me is that the way of stability and the centre can be continued," he said. The 52-year-old Nehammer became chancellor and conservative party leader in 2021, after his predecessor Sebastian Kurz was forced to stand down following allegations of corruption. In April 2022, Nehammer became the first European leader to visit Moscow and meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin since the invasion of Ukraine in February that year. Before going to Moscow, he also met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv. Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen will make a public statement to announce the next steps once the meeting with Nehammer is over.

New Orleans mourns victims of truck attack

AP ■ NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans mourned, wept and danced at a vigil Saturday evening along the famous thoroughfare where a man rammed a pickup truck into a crowd, killing and injuring revellers who were there to celebrate the new year. A makeshift memorial of crosses and pictures of the 14 deceased victims amassed with candles, flowers and teddy bears. Victims' relatives held each other, some crying. But as a brass band began playing, the sorrow transformed into a celebration of life as the crowd snapped fingers, swayed and followed the music down Bourbon Street. The coroner's office listed the cause of death for all 14 victims as "blunt force injuries." Beyond the deaths, authorities say about 30 other people suffered injuries in the attack early Wednesday by Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a former US Army soldier who proclaimed his support for the Islamic State militant group in online videos posted hours before he struck. Police fatally shot Jabbar, 42, during a firefight at the scene of the deadly crash on Bourbon Street, famous worldwide for its festive vibes in New Orleans' historic French Quarter. University Medical Center New Orleans spokesperson Carolina Giepert said 13 people remained hospitalised, with eight people in intensive care. Cathy Tenedorio, who lost her 25-year-old son Matthew, said she was moved by the flood of condolences and kindness at Saturday's vigil. "This is the most overwhelming response of love, an out-


pouring of love. I'm floating through it all," she said. New Orleans native Autrelle Felix, 28, left a handwritten card beside a memorial for his friend Nicole Perez, a single mother who was killed. "It means a lot, to see that our city comes together when there's a real tragedy," Felix said. "We all become one." Others who crowded around the brass band said the best way to honour the victims was with a party. "Because that's what they were down here to do, they were having a good time," life-long New Orleans resident Kari Mitten said. President Joe Biden planned to travel to New Orleans with first lady Jill Biden on Monday to "grieve with the families and community members impacted by the tragic attack." Federal authorities searching Jabbar's Houston home found a workbench in the garage and hazardous materials believed to have been used to make explosive devices, according to law enforcement officials familiar with the search. Jabbar had suspected bomb-making materials at his home and reserved the vehicle used in the attack more than six weeks earlier, law enforcement officials told The Associated Press. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly about the inquiry. Jabbar purchased a cooler in Vidor, Texas, hours before the attack and gun oil from a store in Sulphur, Louisiana. He also booked his truck rental on November 14, suggesting he may have been plotting the attack for more than six weeks, authorities said.



Indian Railways Fostering New Regional Growth Hubs

for

Viksit Bharat



Inauguration of New Jammu Railway Division of Northern Railway & Charlapalli New Terminal Station in the twin cities of Secunderabad and Hyderabad

and

Foundation stone laying for Rayagada Rail Division Building in Odisha

By

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

(Through Video Conferencing)

On January 6, 2025 | Time 11:00 AM

HIGHLIGHTS

Jammu Railway Division

- Links major cities and towns across India to the Jammu & Kashmir region, fulfilling the long-pending demand of its people.
- Acts as a game-changer by promoting trade, tourism and economic opportunities in the region.
- Seamlessly connects regions of Jammu & Kashmir viz. Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla and Leh & Ladakh to major destinations across India strengthening unity and development.

Rayagada Divisional Office Building

- Features a Divisional Control Office, eco-friendly staff residences and modern amenities, enhancing railway operations in Koraput, Rayagada and Kalahandi.
- Streamlines railway management and boosts operational efficiency across Odisha.
- Strengthens connectivity, accelerates development and fosters economic progress in tribal belt of South Odisha for Viksit Bharat.

Charlapalli New Railway Terminal in Telangana

- A world-class, eco-friendly terminal that offers top-tier facilities at Charlapalli in the Twin Cities.
- Relieves pressure on existing terminals in Secunderabad, Hyderabad and Kacheguda.
- Facilitates the operation of new trains and enhances connectivity for the people of Telangana and nearby regions.

In the august presence of

Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati Governor, Odisha	Mohan Charan Majhi Chief Minister, Odisha	Jishnu Dev Varma Governor, Telangana	A. Revanth Reddy Chief Minister, Telangana
Ashwini Vaishnaw Union Minister of Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology	G. Kishan Reddy Union Minister of Coal and Mines	Manoj Sinha Lieutenant Governor, Jammu & Kashmir	Omar Abdullah Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir
Dr. Jitendra Singh Union Minister of State for Science & Technology (I/C), Earth Sciences (I/C), PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Atomic Energy & Department of Space	V. Somanna Union Minister of State for Railways and Jal Shakti	Bandi Sanjay Kumar Union Minister of State for Home Affairs	Ravneet Singh Union Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing Industries

Watch the live programme on **DD NEWS**

FDI in India growing rapidly: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

FDI inflows into the country are surging, with investors from the Middle East, Japan, European Union, and the US recognising India's status as a top investment destination, driving rapid economic growth and generating millions of new jobs, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

He said that global investors are showing keen interest in India as the country offers several advantages such as strong domestic market, skilled and talented workforce and rule of law.

"I can clearly see FDI (foreign direct investment) in India once again growing rapidly and creating millions of jobs. Countries in the Middle East, EFTA region, Japan, and investors from the EU and the US are all realising that India continues to be the most preferred destination for FDI," Goyal told PTI.

He added that India's stable and predictable regulatory framework, coupled with a favourable business environment and progressive policies aimed at enhancing ease of doing business, is attracting an increasing number of investors from around the world.

"Last month I met a CEO of one of



the largest funds in the US, who is also the largest investor in India, and he shared with me that his investments in India over the last 10 years have been some of the best investments his funds have ever done," he noted.

The US fund, Goyal said, informed him that they are investors in India for the last 20 years, but more than 80 per cent of their investments happened in the last few years.

investment (FDI) inflows since January this year despite global uncertainties and challenges.

In the January-September period this year, FDI into the country rose by about 42 per cent to USD 42.13 billion. The inflow was at USD 29.73 billion in the year-ago period.

The inflows during April-Sept 2024-25 grew by 45 per cent to USD 29.79 billion against USD 20.48 billion in the same period previous fiscal. Total FDI in 2023-24 was a healthy USD 71.28 billion.

The key sectors attracting the maximum of these inflows include the services segment, computer software and hardware, telecommunications, trading, construction development, automobile, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

FDI is allowed through the automatic route in most of the sectors while in areas such as telecom, media, pharmaceuticals and insurance, government approval is required for foreign investors.

These inflows are important as India would require huge investments in the coming years for its infrastructure sector to boost growth. Healthy foreign inflows also help in maintaining the balance of payments and the value of the rupee.

Govt to launch another round of PLI scheme for steel sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The government will launch another round of production-linked incentive scheme for the steel sector on Monday.

The 'PLI scheme 1.1' will be launched by the steel minister H D Kumaraswamy.

"Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries... Will launch 'PLI scheme 1.1' for the steel industry and call for applications... On January 6," the steel ministry said in a statement.

To encourage domestic production of specialty steel and lower imports by drawing in capital investments, the government had earlier introduced the PLI scheme for specialty steel.

The scheme has attracted investments worth Rs 27,106 crore, envisaging creation of 14,760 direct employment opportunities with an estimated production of 7.90 million tonnes of specialty steel.

As of November 2024, companies have already

invested Rs 18,300 crore and generated over 8,660 in employment.

The government has been interacting regularly with the participating companies and based on feedback, it was felt that there was a scope to notify the scheme again to attract more participation, the statement said.

The concept of Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) was conceived during the Covid-induced global lockdowns of 2020, emphasising the need to boost domestic manufacturing.

Initially launched for three sectors, the PLI scheme was later extended to include steel in November 2020.

The government had earlier said that it is working on another round of the PLI scheme for specialty steel as the response for the first round of the initiative did not meet expectations.

Specialty steel is still one area where more is needed to be done. The government brought a PLI to incentivise the manufacturing of specialty steel but the offtake of the sops was not as expected, the government had earlier said.

Specialty steel is a high-grade product used in sectors like defence, automobile, and electrical, among others.

Budget: CII suggests seven-point agenda for employment generation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The upcoming annual budget for FY26 could announce further measures to boost employment generation, CII said on Sunday, emphasising that job creation at a mass scale is important to engage the young population productively, and drive inclusive growth in the world's most populous nation.

The industry body has suggested a seven-point agenda to harness India's demographic dividend, including an integrated national employment policy, support to labour-intensive sectors, and setting up an international mobility authority, among other targeted measures.

With a median age of just 29 years, India is a young country, and is set to add 133 million people to its working-age population by 2050.

The government could consider launching an internship programme in government offices in rural areas for the college-educated youth, CII said.

It argued that this initiative would create short-term

employment opportunities in government offices while bridging the gap between education and professional skills.

The programme would also help augment the available manpower resources for the effective implementation of various rural programmes and government initiatives.

CII has also proposed introducing a new provision under income tax rule in lieu of Section 80JJAA to encourage new employment. The new provision should continue as Chapter VIA deduction from gross total income, which is available even if a taxpayer opts for concessional tax regime.

It has proposed an integrated national employment policy which could subsume under its ambit the slew of employment generating schemes currently in works by various ministries/states.

In addition, the unified policy could also build on the single integrated employment portal -- National Career Service (NCS) -- wherein all the data can flow into this from various ministries and state portals.

Highlighting that increasing women's participation in the workforce, which currently is low, can further boost the Indian economy, CII said, new initiatives including the construction of dormitories

using CSR funds, the formalisation of sectors like care economy, and establishing government-supported creches in industrial clusters could be taken to increase female labour force participation.

Moreover, rolling out labour codes while ensuring social security coverage to the gig and platform workers would further strengthen the employment landscape.

Many parts of the world are facing workforce shortages due to ageing populations, and India should leverage this opportunity. The government could consider setting up an international mobility authority under the Ministry of External Affairs. This authority could facilitate G2G collaborations for helping Indian youth tap the overseas employment opportunities.

The authority could also work with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to help develop skill development programmes aligned with global opportunities. In addition to technical skills, the programmes should also include cultural training, and foreign language skills.

Global trends, earnings, FII trading activity major drivers for markets this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Equity markets this week will take cues from global trends, trading activity of foreign investors and quarterly earnings, with TCS kick-starting the results calendar on Thursday, analysts said.

Macroeconomic data announcements and the rupee-dollar trend would also dictate market trends, experts noted.

"The Q3 FY25 earnings season will begin this week, with IT giants and leading financial institutions set to announce their results. TCS and Tata Elxsi will declare results on Thursday, January 9, 2025. Investors will closely monitor individual stock performances.

"Following the earnings season, markets' focus is expected to shift towards the upcoming Union Budget and the policy decisions of the Trump 2.0 administration," Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been net sellers, while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have been actively buying. This ongoing tug-of-war between FIIs and DIIs is likely to play a crucial role in determining the

direction of the market this week, he added.

"Looking ahead to the second week of the year, several key events are likely to influence market sentiment. The earnings season begins with IT major TCS, a key trigger as any signs of improvement in Q3 numbers could reverse the ongoing trend of FII outflows.

Additionally, a host of economic data, including HSBC services PMI, and IIP, will be closely monitored for further cues," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The rupee depreciated 4 paise to close at a record low of 85.79 against the US dollar on Friday.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, "Looking ahead, the market is likely to focus on Q3 earnings, with expectations of improvement in earnings on a QoQ basis."

On the global front, FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) minutes will be announced during the week. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 524.04 points, or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 191.35 points, or 0.80 per cent. On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 720.60 points, or 0.90 per cent, to close at 79,223.11. The Nifty tanked 183.90 points, or 0.76 per cent, to 24,004.75.

"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.

Karur Vysya Bank adds two more branches in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Private sector Karur Vysya Bank has inaugurated two more branches, taking the overall branch network to 475 in Tamil Nadu, the bank said on Sunday.

The Tamil Nadu-based bank inaugurated two branches, one each in Chennai and the other at Tiruchirappalli.

According to a press release, during the current financial year, the company has added 28 new branches, taking the overall presence of the banking network to 866 across the country.

The new branches would provide basic banking transactions and would also address the specific needs of customers. It would also provide banking and financial services covering retail, institutional and consumer lending.

As on September 30, 2024, the bank's total business stood at Rs 1,76,138 crore with a deposit base of Rs 95,839 crore and advances at Rs 80,299 crore. In the last financial year, the bank recorded its highest net profit of Rs 1,605 crore, the release added.

FMCG makers expect inflation to hit volume growth, operating profit in Q3



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hit by inflation, higher input costs and pricing measures, fast-moving consumer goods companies are expected to see a contraction in their gross margin and a modest-to-flat operating profit in the October-December quarter.

Several FMCG makers are likely to log a low single-digit rise in their revenue, returning to the cycle of value-driven growth.

One of the reasons could be that a number of companies have opted for a price hike in the December quarter due to rising costs of input items such as copra, vegetable oil, and palm oil.

The price hikes came at a time when the urban market was dragged down by lowered consumption due to high food inflation. However, the rural market, which is slightly above one-third of the total FMCG market, stayed ahead of it.

Some of the listed FMCG companies, such as Dabur and Marico, shared their updates for the third quarter

trade, which mainly consists of neighbourhood kirana stores, was under pressure in the October-December period.

Marico expressed similar views, saying, "During the quarter, the sector witnessed steady demand trends on the back of improving rural consumption and stable sentiment in urban vis-à-vis the preceding quarter."

Over domestic volume growth, Marico said it expects an 'uptick' in the December quarter but on a sequential basis and said its operating profit growth will be modest due to higher input costs.

It expects a "higher-than-anticipated gross margin contraction" as key inputs faced 'higher-than-expected' inflation, said a quarterly update by Marico, which owns brands such as Saffola, Parachute, Hair & Care, Nihar and Livon, among others.

"Among key inputs, copra prices remained firm at higher-than-expected levels and vegetable oil prices moved up during the quarter, while crude oil derivatives remained range-bound. The rising trend in input costs is expected to result in a higher-than-anticipated gross margin contraction on a year-on-year basis, as the company continues to favour consumer franchise expansion in the current environment," said Marico.

According to NuVama, the urban demand scenario is challenging due to inflationary pressures, low wage growth and higher housing rental costs.



CCI will focus on leveraging tech for fair competition: Chairperson Kaur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

CCI will focus on strengthening enforcement, enhancing collaborations and leveraging technology to ensure fair competition in the country, its chief Ravneet Kaur has said.

Competition Commission of India (CCI), which has the mandate to foster fair competition as well as curb anti-competitive practices, has been working on understanding the dynamic interplay between traditional market practices and the rapidly evolving digital economy.

"There is an imperative need for a nimble, proactive regulatory approach that adapts to emerging market challenges, particularly in sectors driven by technology and innovation," Kaur told PTI in a recent interview.

Various amendments to the Competition Act were made in 2023 leading to introduction of new mechanisms, including settlement, commitment and deal value thresholds.

The CCI Chairperson

emphasised that the endeavour is to strike a balance between effective oversight and a simplified, market-friendly regulatory regime.

"Going forward, our focus will be on strengthening enforcement, enhancing collaborations and leveraging technology to uphold fair competition in India," she said.

Among other efforts to boost its capabilities, the watchdog plans to hire more domain experts to help assess competition amid rapid changes in the technology landscape.

"Recruitment of domain experts in areas like AI, data analytics and digital markets is a priority. This will ensure that CCI remains future ready and well equipped to address challenges posed by rapidly evolving technologies," Kaur said.

Currently, the regulator is conducting two market studies on competition issues in relation to artificial intelligence and to renewable energy space across BRICS nations.

Govt should lower GST on cement at 18 per cent, frame policy to boost demand: JK Lakshmi

PTI ■ PATNA



The government should reduce GST on cement to 18 per cent from 28 per cent and take some policy measures in the upcoming Budget to boost consumption of this key building material, a senior official of JK Lakshmi Cement said.

In an interview with PTI, Arun Shukla, President and Director of JK Lakshmi Cement, said there is a case to increase cement manufacturing capacity in India to meet the rising demand, which is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 7-8 per cent.

"One of the long-cherished dream, or the wish for us, has been reducing GST on cement," Shukla told PTI on the sidelines of 'Bihar Business Connect 2024' meet held here recently.

In India, cement is taxed at the highest rate of 28 per cent and this needs to be reduced to 18 per cent, he said while replying to a query on the Budget wishlist from the industry.

"Cement is, I would say, one of the major component of driving growth in the economy," Shukla said, adding that cement is required to build world-class infrastructure that can support the growth of the Indian economy.

He also emphasised on the need to enhance the consumption of cement in India.

"Cement is one of the major drivers of growth, so how we can really increase

consumption of cement?" he said.

Shukla said the cement concrete roads have more longevity and in the long run and it is more cost-effective than bitumen roads.

"So my wish would be to really kind of drive this (cement consumption), through maybe some of the policies and specifications..." he said.

JK Lakshmi Cement, part of the JK Organisation, is investing Rs 500 crore in Bihar to set up a manufacturing plant in Madhubani district.

The Bharat Hari Singhania family-promoted JK Lakshmi Cement had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state government in 2023 investors' meet itself for its proposed manufacturing unit.

The company has already acquired land and is in the process of obtaining other approvals to set up the plant.

"We want to cater to local demand from this plant at Madhubani in Bihar," he said, adding that the plant is expected to be operational within a year.

Shukla complimented the Bihar government for fulfilling its promises, including fiscal incentives, saying "they are really walking the talk."

About the company's experience in Bihar so far, Shukla said, "I think the experience has been encouraging, and the very reason I am here for the second time to attend this meeting was to express my gratitude, but to also encourage my other colleagues to set up..."

"The kind of support we have got from all corners, all departments and the bureaucracy in Bihar was amazing. And this is one of perhaps the best experience which we had in setting up a new plant at new location," he said.

JK Lakshmi Cement has 18 million tonnes of annual capacity.

"We have set a target to reach 30 million tonnes by 2030," he said.

The 12 million additional capacity expansions across various geographies are on track, Shukla said.



COMFORTING COLOURS

Colours have a very powerful impact on our mind and moods. This impact can be felt visually and subconsciously. Imagine a room, half painted with bright colours and other half with naturals and blacks, very similar to the web series *Wednesday*. Every individual has their own colour choice and associated psychological effects. Black might be appealing to one individual and pink to the other. It is so interesting to know the whole pseudoscience behind the colour theory. It has become very important to correctly use the strategy of colour around like in offices, houses, study area, workshop place etc. which is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is a powerful tool that can evoke feelings of comfort, calmness, and happiness. Understanding colour theory, the colour spectrum, and the application of colour codes can help anyone create environments that nurture the body, mind, and soul.

THE SCIENCE OF COLOUR THEORY

Colour theory is the foundation of how we perceive and interact with colours. It encompasses the colour wheel, which is divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary colours which we all have studied in our primary schooling.

Each colour elicits different emotional responses. For instance, warm colours like red and orange can stimulate energy and excitement, while cool colours such as blue and green promote calmness and relaxation.

In real life the application of colour theory can transform a space into chaos or calmness.

For example, a healthcare facility painted in soft blues and greens can create a soothing atmosphere for patients, reducing anxiety and promoting healing.

Conversely, vibrant yellows and oranges in a creative workspace can inspire innovation and collaboration.

Understanding the *Colour Band* and *Spectrum* is very important, to choose the right shade. The colour spectrum, which includes the visible light spectrum, ranges from red to violet. Each colour in this spectrum has unique psychological effects.

Colours influence our emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in profound ways, making them more than just aesthetic choices, writes **ANURAAG BHARDWAJ**



SOME SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF VARIOUS COLOURS WITH PERSONALITY TRAITS:

RED: Symbolises passion, energy, and action; often associated with assertive, energetic individuals or leaders.

GREEN: Represents growth, harmony, and balance; often linked to nurturing, environmentally conscious, and calm personalities.

PURPLE: Conveys luxury, spirituality, and creativity; usually associated with imaginative, artistic, or introspective individuals.

YELLOW: Symbolises happiness, optimism, and intellect; often connected to cheerful, open-minded, and social people.

BLUE: Represents calmness, trust, and stability; typically associated with reliable, calm, and thoughtful individuals.

BLACK: Conveys sophistication, authority, and mystery; often linked to powerful, serious, and independent personalities.

WHITE: Symbolises purity, simplicity, and innocence; usually associated with peaceful, organised, and honest individuals.

ORANGE: Represents enthusiasm, warmth, and creativity; often linked to adventurous, energetic, and sociable people.

Colour choices vary from person to person, and there are many factors that can influence how someone perceives colours. An individual can utilise the colour band to create dynamic environments. For instance, a gradient of colours transitioning from warm to cool can guide individuals through a space, influencing their mood as they move. So how can anyone select the *Colour Codes* and understand *Shade Cards* for their use.

There are multiple options in shades of whites, yellow, red etc. available at the stores. So, to choose the right shade, the first method is *The Pantone Matching System (PMS)* is one widely used colour code system that provides standardised colours for various applications, from paint to textiles. Second, you can refer to the *colour fan deck* of any paint brand and choose from the colour family you like the most and feels aesthetic to you.

Most recommended colours to promote mental health are *light taupe, beige, pastel pinks, lavender, pastel greens, white or ivory, icy blue*. By understanding the psychological effects of colour and utilising these tools effectively, a person can create spaces that not only look beautiful but also nurture the body, mind, and soul. Try to unlock new possibilities for enhancing your daily lives through the power of colours.

— The author is an architect and is the founder of Anjaney Vastu & AB Architects



BREATHE IN AND BREATHE OUT

Ever wondered sometimes you take a deep breath in and you feel happy, but you don't know how that happiness comes from? Ever wondered why even one of the nostrils gets blocked and throws you off the track? Well in this article we are about to find out the healing through breathing. Now there will be no more queues for the doctor's appointment for little things and no more worries as we're about to find out how and why.

Before starting and before telling let's just figure it out I hope everybody has two holes in the nostrils. One is on the right and one is on the left. In yoga it is said one is *Ida* and the other is *pingla*, one is a feminine and the other is a masculine. Before starting, let's just figure it out. Let's go for the test now tell me which nostril is working more than the other, is it left or is it right. Just test it. As per the science of yoga the right nostril is associated with the heat with the sun and that is why it is also called the *Suryanadi*.

The *left nostril* is associated with calmness and coolness and that is why it is known as the *Chandra nadi*. Both of the *nadis* are equally important as one heats the body which is essential for living and one cools the body which is also equivalent for the living. But real bliss happens only when these two are working absolutely fine. That means you're breathing from both of your nostrils which is a rare phenomena and it is also known as a *Sushumna nadi* (middle nadi). The more both nostrils are working the



Simple breathing techniques can regulate your energy, calm your mind, and enhance overall well-being without relying on medicine, says **YASH GUPTA**



better the body the mind and the life will be as per the yoga and in the spiritual path as well. So all of the spiritual paths are associated only and only with the breath, nothing more but nothing less. So once if you're feeling very anxious and the restlessness comes up, are you feeling a high blood pressure just do one very simple thing: put your right arm onto your level as you're placing your arm on the shoulder of your friend? This will activate your left nostril and help you cool down the body. With this all of



the anxiety, worries, restlessness and the blood pressure will cool down naturally and you don't have to rely on any sort of medicine. Just your *nostrils* are enough to keep you in the balance and the same way if you're feeling very cold, like the winter season right now, try raising your left arm onto the shoulder of a friend and then see what magic happens to your body would naturally start to heat up. Now you can switch between your modes and regulate your body temperature accordingly. If

you don't have time to raise your arm and sit for five minutes simply use the cotton and plug it in your opposite ear and just stuff it completely so that it creates a vacuum. And then bingo that's done. You become your own doctor using just a breath as simple as that it is possible the healing lies in your breathing. Remember to breathe properly to live harmoniously.

— The author is an Art of Living faculty, meditation and mind coach and professional yoga trainer

Australia beat India to reach WTC final; reclaim BGT after 10 years

PTI ■ SYDNEY

A listless India was knocked out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final as Australia cruised to a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test here on Sunday to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years, leaving the visitors with much to deliberate in a difficult transition phase made worse by over-the-hill batting stars.

Australia won the five-match series 3-1 and qualified for the WTC final against South Africa slated at the Lord's from June 11 to 15.

While Australia would be eyeing a second successive WTC mace, it would be the first time since the event's inception that India won't be in the finals. The team had finished runner-up in the previous two summit clashes.

On Sunday, the target of 162 could have been trickier for Australia had India's new Test captain Jasprit Bumrah been in a position to bowl despite painful back spasms. But once Virat Kohli led

the team out, it was as clear as the Sydney skyline that defending the total would be next to impossible. Bumrah deservedly walked away with the player of the series honour for his astonishing haul of 32 wickets in five matches. But it was hardly a consolation for the shambolic team performance that India managed, showing resilience only in brief phases.

"Little frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, you can't fight your body. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said of his inability to bowl in the second innings during the presentation ceremony.

Prasidh Krishna (3/65 in 12 overs) and Mohammed Siraj (1/69 in 12 overs) were not a patch on Bumrah and despite multiple breakthroughs, they bowled too many poor deliveries to make it easy for the hosts to canter home in just 27 overs.

Usman Khawaja (41), Travis Head (34 not out) and debutant Beau Webster (39 not out) completed



the formalities, putting an end to India's misery in a tour that has exposed all of the team's batting frailties and an unhealthy reliance on Bumrah.

Once Bumrah was ruled out after he tried some shadow bowling during the morning warm-up session and didn't feel comfortable, the writing was on the wall.

The magnificent Scott Boland (6/45) and the ever-reliable Pat Cummins (3/44) polished off the Indian tail for just 157 in 39.5 overs. If one takes out Rishabh Pant's fiery 61 and Yashasvi Jaiswal's 22, the other nine players collectively contributed a mere 74 runs.

The series would leave the men who matter in Indian cricket establishment with a lot on their minds when they deliberate on ways to get the house back in order.

With six of the completed innings yielding less than 200 runs, one doesn't need a soothsayer to tell what went wrong on the tour. Regular skipper Rohit Sharma and

batting talisman Virat Kohli flopped with technical issues troubling them throughout the season.

Jaiswal (391 runs) was the top-scorer despite three ducks followed by rookie Nitish Kumar Reddy (298 runs), KL Rahul (276 runs) and Pant (255 runs).

As much as one wants to take a nuanced view of Rohit and Kohli's poor form but it is undeniable that both veterans are finding it increasingly difficult to stem the rot that has set in their batting.

There are a few good youngsters in the fringes and the new World Test Championship cycle would demand that they be given a chance to develop over time.

While a tough call on Kohli and Rohit is awaited, the BCCI brass also needs to seriously look at whether coach Gautam Gambhir is the right man to be in-charge across formats.

Under Gambhir, India have lost six Tests out of 10 during the season going by apart from being defeated in an ODI series in Sri Lanka.



It's frustrating but you have to respect your body: Bumrah

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Laid low by a back spasm, Jasprit Bumrah was frustrated at missing out on bowling on the "spiciest wicket of the series," but the premier India pacer emphasized that sometimes it becomes imperative for a player to respect his body.

Bumrah could not bowl on day three when India needed to defend a small 162-run target on a tricky wicket.

Australia needed just 27 overs to overhaul the target and claim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years as they took advantage of Bumrah's absence.

"It was really frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, can't fight it. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said, who was named Player of the Series for his 32 wickets in the series, during the post-match presentation.

"Felt a bit of discomfort during my second spell in the first innings and had to check it out."

Resuming day three at 141 for six, India lost their remaining four wickets for 16 runs to be all out for 157 in their second innings.

Asked about the discussion in the morning, Bumrah said: "The chat this morning was about the same thing, about

having belief and showing character. Lots of ifs and buts, the whole series was fought hard, we were in the game today as well, not like we were out of it, this is how Test cricket goes."

"Being in the game for longer, creating pressure, absorbing pressure and playing to the situation are all important. You have to adapt to the situations and these learnings will help us in the future."

Bumrah added that the experience of playing in Australia will help young players like Nitish Reddy and Harshit Rana in future.

"They've (youngsters) gained a lot of experience, they'll go from strength to strength. We've shown that we have a lot of talent in our group."

"Lot of the youngsters are keen, they're disappointed that we haven't won but they'll take learnings from this experience. It was a great series, congratulations to Australia, they fought really well."

Travis Head, who emerged as the highest run-scorer in the series with 446 runs, heaped praise on Bumrah.

"He's a great performer, he had an exceptional tour. It is the best individual performance I have seen in Test cricket," Head said.

Winning captain Pat Cummins described his team's 3-1 victory in the five-match series as

"unreal" and expressed immense pride in regaining the trophy.

"Unreal. A few of us didn't have this Trophy. Lived up to all the hype. Just been clear with our plans. We tried to be proactive, and ultimately, it worked out. Immensely proud," he said.

The star pacer also praised the camaraderie within the squad.

"We weren't at our best in Perth, but we had a lot of fun playing alongside each other. I love playing with these guys. Such a special group. I feel privileged to be part of such a team. Three debutants in this series fitted in well and contributed at different times."

Reflecting on his own performance, Cummins called the series "one of my most favourite Test series."

"Pretty happy with how I played. I had a fresh start coming into this series. These are the big series you prepare for. There were some keen moments when our mainstays really stood up. You need to do that to beat a side like India. Our guys put their hands up. It would go down as one of my most favourite Test series," he added.

Adjudged Player-of-the-Match for his impressive 10 for 76, Scott Boland expressed his satisfaction after playing a key role in Australia's 3-1 win.

He had replaced injured Josh Hazlewood in the squad.

Started setting new goals for 2025 after World Championship and Khel Ratna: Gukesh

PTI ■ BENGALURU

D Gukesh climbed dizzy heights in the past one month, a World Championship triumph getting garnished by the Major Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna award recently, but the chess prodigy now wants to reset his focus and goals to tackle a "challenging" 2025.

Gukesh will be seen in action in the Tata Steel tournament in Wijk aan Zee in Netherlands, beginning on January 17.

The event will see participation from frontline players such as Anish Giri, Arjun Erigaisi, Fabio Caruana and R Praggnandhaa among others.

"Yeah, 2025 will offer a very tough challenge. A lot of new and interesting tournaments are coming up. The world championship was in the past.



I'm very happy about it and all the awards and receptions," Gukesh told a select media gathering during the felicitation ceremony organised by WestBridge Capital here on Sunday.

"But now, I have started thinking about new goals, new tournaments and new ways to prepare. The goal, the approach will be the same, to

give my best, to keep improving myself, and win as many tournaments as possible.

"So, I am looking forward to a fun year with a lot of learning, a lot of improvements and hopefully a lot of good results," he added.

However, Gukesh will have to carry with him the tag of world champion and along

with it loads of expectations and increased scrutiny. But the 19-year-old is prepared to stand in the limelight.

"Yeah, I have been used to being under the attention for a while. Obviously, after the world championship, it will be more. But the basic things I remember are to keep improving myself and accepting failures when they come."

"I think in general, I have high expectations of myself. So, I think my aim is to meet my own expectations rather than that of others," he said.

But he has been able to handle all the adulation that has deservedly come his way.

"I had thought that it (winning the World Championship) would be somewhat similar to the Candidates, but obviously it's much more. I'm grateful for all the attention and recognition."



Varun Tomar shines in men's 10m air pistol

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reigning Asian champion Varun Tomar grabbed the spotlight by clinching both the senior and the junior men's 10m air pistol titles at the 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSCC) here on Sunday.

The 21-year-old Army marksman, who narrowly missed out on last year's Paris Olympics, overcame a sluggish start in the senior final to snatch his maiden national crown at the expense of teammate Pradhyumn Singh, who fell short by 0.8 points.

Rajasthan's Aakash Bhardwaj won the bronze.

Tomar then had a similar slow start in the junior final, but quickly made up ground, staying in touch with eventual silver winner Nikhil Saroha of Uttar Pradesh who was on a start-to-finish mission.

Tomar's patience finally paid off after the 21st shot as Nikhil blinked with an 8.5, handing the senior pro an easy double gold in the end at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting range.

Tomar's score in the senior final was 238, while he was clearly more confident in the junior final, resulting in greater accuracy with a tally of 246.2.

Pradhyumn also rounded off a fruitful day with a second medal, a bronze in the junior men's air pistol.

The youth final saw a UP 1-2 when Chirag Sharma overcame the 14-year-old Dev Pratap by margin of 1.3 after 24 shots.

Gavaskar upset after not being invited to present BGT with Border

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday expressed his displeasure after not being invited to present the trophy, named after him and Allan Border, to Australia following their win over India in the high-voltage five-match rubber.

Australia reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar trophy after 10 years with a six-wicket win over India in the fifth and final Test.

Border presented the trophy to the home team but Gavaskar, despite being at the venue at the same time, was inexplicably ignored.

"I certainly would have loved to have been there for the presentation. After all it is the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and it is about Australia and



India," Gavaskar was quoted as saying by Code Sports.

"I mean, I am here on the ground. To me it should not matter that Australia won when it comes to the presentation. They played better cricket so they won. That's fine."

"Just because I am an Indian.

I would have been happy to present the trophy with my good friend Allan Border," he added.

Had the Indian team won the trophy, Gavaskar would have been invited to present it to the victorious side.

Cricket Australia (CA) later confirmed that Gavaskar was

aware he would have presented the award to Indian captain Jasprit Bumrah if the tourists had won the Sydney Test and retained the trophy.

"We acknowledge it would have been preferable if both Allan Border and Sunil Gavaskar had been asked to go on stage," a CA spokesperson said in a statement.

Both India and Australia have been competing for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy since 1996-1997 and the rivalry has grown to become one of the biggest in Test cricket.

The five-match series that Australia won drew record crowds at multiple venues and broke an 87-year-old attendance record at the Melbourne Cricket Ground last week.

If you have commitment towards red ball, play domestic cricket, says Gambhir

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India head coach Gautam Gambhir said on Sunday that struggling stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli "still have the hunger to excel" but urged all senior players, including the duo, to play domestic games and show their "commitment" towards red-ball cricket.

Known for his plain speak, the two-time World Cup hero also didn't give any assurances on whether Rohit or Kohli will be a part of the Test set-up moving forward.

Both the stars were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia that the visitors lost 1-3 to surrender the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as well as a spot in the World Test Championship final.

"It's not the right moment right

now for me to talk about where we are going to be after five months. A lot of things change in sport. Forms change, people change, attitude changes, everything changes in sport. And we all know that five months is a long time," Gambhir said at the post-series press conference.

"So let's see before the England series (in July) what's going to happen. But whatever will happen, will happen for the best interest of Indian cricket," asserted the former opener.

Rohit scored 31 runs in five innings before dropping himself from the playing eleven and Kohli managed 190 in nine knocks, including a second innings century after India had taken a lead of more than 300. A glaring failure for Kohli was his inability to avoid being dismissed on deliveries that

were bowled outside the off stump.

Asked if he would like the seniors to play at least one round, if not two, of Ranji Trophy starting January 23, Gambhir sent across a clear message.

"I would always like everyone to play domestic cricket. That is how much importance domestic cricket needs to be given. Not only one game, if they are available and they have the commitment to play red-ball cricket, everyone should play domestic cricket," Gambhir said.

"As simple as it can get. If you don't give importance to domestic cricket, you will never get the desired players that you want in Test cricket," he explained.

Kohli last played a Ranji Trophy match in 2012 while



Rohit's most recent domestic red-ball game was in the 2015-16 season.

The 'Ro-Ko' Dilemma

The tough-talking former player refused to be drawn into a discussion on the much-

speculated future of Kohli and Rohit, insisting that they are the best judge when it comes to analysing their role in Indian cricket.

"See, I can't talk about the future of any player, it's up to

them as well. But yes, what I can say is that they still have the hunger, they still have the passion, they're tough people and hopefully they can continue to take Indian cricket forward," he said.

"...Ultimately whatever they plan, they will plan for the best interest of Indian cricket."

He wants the star duo to do some soul searching as to where they stand.

"First of all, every individual knows where their game and hunger is. That is the most important thing for any sport and any profession."

"It is not just about the sport, how hungry you are, how passionate you are and whether the team is moving forward with your contributions or not," he pointed out.

"I need to be fair to everyone Gambhir, in his pre-match

press conference, spoke about honesty in the dressing room. He reiterated the position on Sunday, saying that his responsibility is to be fair to everyone irrespective of their experience and stature.

"If I am fair with only two or three individuals and not with others, then I am being dishonest to my job," he said.

"So, whether it is a player who has not made a debut yet or a player who has played 100 Test matches, the simple aim of my job is that I have to be absolutely fair and equal to everyone," he added.

During his days in Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super Giants, Gambhir often stressed about the need for a happy dressing room. He said that philosophy holds good for the India set-up too.

"If you're committed to what

we are doing with honesty, I think that should be fine. And more importantly, to keep the dressing room happy, I have to be absolutely honest and equal and fair to everyone in that dressing room."

Rohit has shown accountability Gambhir lauded Rohit for opting out of the fifth Test due to poor form.

"If a leader has taken this decision, I don't think there is any problem. We talked about accountability and that starts from the top and Rohit Sharma started that in the last match," the 43-year-old said.

"I am the first one to accept mistakes"

When asked if there is an acceptance of everything that has gone wrong on the tour, Gambhir was quick to declare that he never runs from accountability.