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

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## INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES DROP

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI**

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

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had declined by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion. The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September.

For the week ended January 3, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 6.441 billion to USD 545.48 billion, the data released on Friday showed.



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

Surging crude oil prices overseas and negative sentiment in domestic equity markets also weighed down the Indian currency, forex traders said.

Also, dollar strengthened on increased demand amid the anticipation of restrictive trade measures by the new US administration after Donald Trump takes over as president on January 20.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.88, hit the intra-day peak of 85.85 before settling at the lowest-ever level of 86.00 (provisional) against the greenback, 14 paise lower from its previous close.

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## SC orders status quo on Sambhal Mosque

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Ordering status quo, the Supreme Court on Friday asked the Uttar Pradesh authorities, the Archaeological Survey of India and others not to take steps over a "private well" near the Mughal-era Jama Masjid mosque in Sambhal. Considering a plea of the management committee of Shahi Jama Masjid, Sambhal, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar issued notices to the Centre, the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Sambhal District Magistrate and other private individuals from the Hindu side led by Hari Shankar Jain.

"Issue notice returnable on February 21. In the meanwhile, a status report to be filed by the respondents in two weeks. The respondents shall not give effect to any notice in relation to the well," the bench ordered.

The mosque committee, in a fresh plea, said the Sambhal district administration, was conducting a purported drive to revive old temples and wells in the city with reports indicating at least 32 old unused temples were revived and 19 wells were identified for public use and prayers.

"In the list of wells being sought to be revived by the district administration is also a water well situated in the precincts of the mosque itself," it said. The plea therefore sought a direction to the Sambhal district magistrate to ensure a status quo over the private well located near the mosque entrance besides any future action without the Supreme



Court's permission.

While a covered half of the well was said to be inside the mosque, the other half protruded outside on a curved platform. Water from the well, situated at the junction of three narrow lanes leading to the main entrance of the mosque, was being used by the mosque, the plea said. It was argued that the survey led to violence and loss of lives, prompting the urgent intervention of the top court.

Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, representing the mosque management committee, referred to the well's historical significance and said, "We have been drawing water from the well since time immemorial." Ahmadi raised concerns over a notice referring to the site as "Hari Mandir" and plans for starting religious activities there. "No such activities will be permitted. Please file a status report," the CJ said.

The bench said the status quo concerning the well must be maintained, and no such notices would be given effect to. Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu party, said the well was outside the mosque's purview and used for worship

historically. Ahmadi said the well was partly within and partly outside the mosque premises, citing Google map imagery to buttress his claim. The mosque committee had challenged a November 19, 2024 order by the Sambhal senior division civil Judge allowing the appointment of an advocate commissioner to survey the mosque. The mosque committee said the plea for survey was allowed without hearing it on the same day it was filed.

The top court, on November 29 last year, ordered a Sambhal trial court to halt proceedings in the case over the mosque and its survey at Chandausi while directing the UP Government to maintain peace and harmony in the violence-hit town. The bench had directed "peace and harmony must be maintained" and took note of the statement of additional solicitor general K M Nataraj, appearing for the state administration. It directed the proposed report of the advocate commissioner following the mosque survey to be kept in a sealed cover, till the appellate court including the Allahabad High Court heard the appeal of the mosque committee.



## 2024: hottest year, global temp above pre-industrial levels

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The year 2024 was the hottest year on record, and the first with a global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, European climate agency Copernicus said on Friday.

Every month from January to June 2024 was the warmest ever recorded for those months. From July to December, except for August, each month was the second warmest on record, behind 2023, it said.

According to scientists at the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), 2024 was the hottest year since global temperature tracking began in 1850. The average global temperature was 15.1 degrees Celsius -- 0.72 degrees above the 1991-2020 average and 0.12 degrees higher than that in 2023, the previous record-holder.

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## Modi talks Godhra, US visa refusal in debutant podcast

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his first-ever podcast, opened up about significant moments from his political journey, including his experiences during the 2002 Godhra riots and the United States' decision to deny him a visa in 2005. The podcast, hosted by Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath, was released on Friday.

Recalling the events surrounding the 2002 Godhra riots, Modi shared, "On February 24, 2002, I became an MLA for the first time, and on February 27, I

## BALLOONS TO BEHOLD



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

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

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

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

During the renovation, T2 will temporarily close for four to six months, with operations being shifted to the newly expanded Terminal 1 to minimise disruption. Sources said the refurbishment work is set to commence in the 2025-26 financial year, with completion targeted by the second quarter. The upgrades are expected to be completed by the second quarter of Financial Year 2026.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked the operator of IGI airport to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of Terminal 2 (T2). The financial year starts from



April 1, 2025.

According to DIAL, the closure will not significantly impact airport operations as Terminal 1 (T1) will accommodate the additional load of passengers. T2, which was constructed 40 years ago by the AAI, will undergo extensive renovations to improve the passenger experience and increase capacity for future growth. T1 and T2 currently serve domestic flights while Terminal 3 (T3) handles international flights.

The decades-old terminal will undergo significant upgrades aimed at elevating the passenger experience and increasing the airport's capacity to meet future growth demands," said DIAL in a Press statement.

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## Delhi student held for bomb threats at 23 schools

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

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

More than 15 educational institutions including Lady Shri Ram College across the national Capital received bomb threats, which later turned out to be hoaxes. Since May last year, more than 100 schools have been receiving bomb threats through mails. Police sources said the south district police apprehended the Class 12 student, a minor, Thursday evening in connection with the threats.

According to police sources, the content of the mail received on Wednesday mentioned that since exams are going on in the schools, this will be the best time to strike and create maximum damage.

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## AAP promises funds for RWAs to hire guards

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

The political discourse in Delhi is currently being dominated by conversations around "freebies" ahead of the Assembly polls overshadowing other major issues including pollution, law and order, crimes against women and infrastructure. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal announced his 10th freebies on Friday, pledging to provide Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) with funds to hire private security guards if the party is voted back into power, as he took digs at the BJP for turning the city into a "crime capital".

This was his 10th guarantee of the ongoing freebies being offered by his government. Announcing funds for security guards in RWAs, Kejriwal said if the AAP forms the government, all RWAs will be provided with appropriate funds from the Delhi government to appoint security guards in their areas. "A systematic approach will be developed to ensure fairness and proper implementation," he added.

Reacting to the new poll promise by AAP, the BJP slammed Kejriwal and accused him of making



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses a press conference

"false" promises on the RWAs again. Kejriwal's BJP rival from the New Delhi constituency, Parvesh Verma, in a post on X, asked the AAP supremo if he remembered his previous promises to the RWAs in 2018 and 2022. Ahead of the MCD polls in 2022, Kejriwal promised to grant "financial and political powers" to the RWAs with their own "mini councilors".

Earlier, before the 2015 Assembly elections, he promised local area development funds after giving legal status to the RWAs by passing a bill in the assembly.

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

"The security guard proposal is based on feedback received from people. It is timely as people are feeling insecure due to a spurt in crime in the city," he said, accusing the BJP's Central government of not doing enough to check crime in the city.

"The BJP may not be worried about the residents of Delhi but for us citizens are like family, and we want to give them a sense of security," he said. AAP chief said now the Delhi government will fund RWAs for hiring private security guards and the number of security guards in each colony will be based on the number of families in the RWA.

Meanwhile United Residents Joint Action (URJA) president Atul Goyal said, "We appreciate the announcement but some promises were made earlier as well, which makes it difficult to fully trust this one."

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

## Ayodhya readies for first Pran Pratishtha anniversary

**KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA**

Preparations are in full swing in Ayodhya to celebrate the first anniversary of Ram Lalla's Pran Pratishtha at the grand Ram Mandir. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust, in collaboration with the district administration, is organising a three-day celebration from January 11 to 13, 2025. The festivities will begin with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performing the sacred Abhishek of Ram Lalla on January 11.

Ram Lalla will be adorned in a specially crafted Pitambari outfit woven with gold and silver threads, symbolizing divine splendor. This outfit, crafted in Delhi, will arrive in Ayodhya on January 10 and will be used during the Abhishek. Devotees will have the opportunity to witness the sacred darshan.



The highlight of the celebrations will be Ram Lalla's Maha Aarti at 12:20 PM on January 11. Cultural performances, devotional rituals, and Ram Katha discourses will follow. Champat Rai, General Secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust, stated that the event is a special opportunity for those who missed last year's consecration ceremony to participate. "We have made extensive arrangements to welcome saints, dignitaries,

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

The Shri Ram Mandir Trust has confirmed the presence of 110 VIPs and thousands of devotees. Invitations have been extended to prominent saints and spiritual leaders from across the country. Public events at Angad Tila will continue throughout the three days, offering everyone a chance to participate in the celebrations.

**WHY THE ANNIVERSARY IS ON JANUARY 11**

While the original Pran Pratishtha ceremony took place on January 22, 2024, this year's anniversary is being observed on January 11, 2025. The shift aligns with Hindu Vedic traditions, which follow the lunar calendar. According to the traditional calendar, Paush Shukla Dwadashi—the same auspicious day as the original consecration—falls on January 11 this year. This year's celebration is significant, as it coincides with ten auspicious yogas. It is believed that worshipping Lord Rama on this day fulfills devotees' deepest desires. The day offers a rare spiritual opportunity, as devotees can perform puja and seek blessings from Lord Ram Lalla.

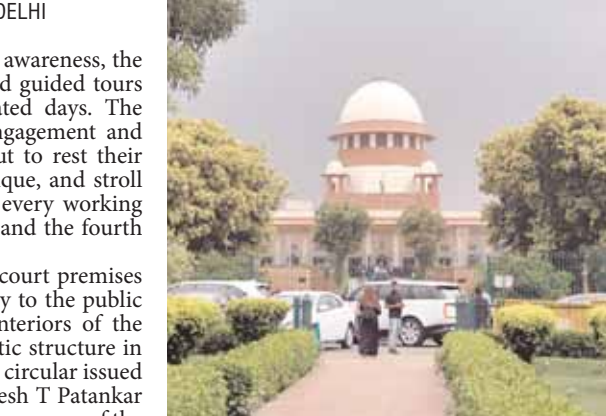
## Explore Supreme Court of India with guided tours every Saturday

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

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

"Opening of the secured apex court premises will provide a great opportunity to the public to gain inside access to the interiors of the building and admire the majestic structure in its full glory," said an official. A circular issued on January 9 by Registrar Mahesh T Patankar (court and building) read, "In pursuance of the directions of the competent authority, the guided tour shall be conducted on every working Saturday, except second and fourth Saturdays and declared holidays in four slots from 10 am to 11.30 am; 11:30 am to 1 pm; 2 pm to 3.30 pm and 3.30 pm to 5 pm."

Officials would accost the public during the tour and introduce them to the various sections of historical value. For conducting



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

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## LA wildfires: 10 dead, thousands of buildings destroyed

**PTI ■ LOS ANGELES**

The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area have killed 10 people so far and burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures, officials said Thursday. The fast-moving Kenneth Fire started in the late afternoon in the San Fernando Valley just 3.2 km from a school serving as a shelter for fire evacuees and then moved into neighbouring areas by the evening. Officials expressed encouragement after firefighters aided by calmer winds and help from crews from outside the state saw the first signs of successfully beating back the region's devastating wildfires that have killed 10 people so far.

**Detail story on page 8**

# 78% of regional parties' fund came from corporate donations: ADR

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The regional political parties declared donations worth over Rs 200 crore for the financial year 2022-23 with JMM, JJP, TDP and TMC reporting the highest increase in their income from donations, according to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The report highlighted the dominance of a few parties in the total donations received, significant delays in submissions to the Election Commission of India (ECI) and gaps in disclosure of donor details. Out of 57 regional parties analyzed, only 18 submitted their donation reports to the ECI within the stipulated time. A total of 2,119 donations, declared by 28 regional parties, amounting to Rs 216.765 crore were analysed. It is to be noted that people donating more than Rs 20,000

are required to reveal their identity. Seventeen other parties delayed their submissions, with delays ranging from two to 164 days. Seven parties, including the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), declared no donations for the year. The report highlighted significant increases in donations for some parties compared to the previous financial year. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) saw a staggering 3,685 per cent rise, followed by the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) at 1,997 per cent, and the TDP at 1,795 per cent. However, parties such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) reported sharp declines in donations, with drops of 99.1 per cent and 89.1 per cent, respectively. The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) topped the list of highest recipients, declaring Rs 154.03 crore from just 47

**PTI ■ RANCHI**

Former Jharkhand chief minister Raghubar Das on Friday rejoined the BJP here and asserted that the party will return to power in the state. Das had earlier resigned from the post of Odisha governor on December 24 last year to return to active politics after the party's debacle in the assembly elections, in which it failed to dislodge the JMM-led coalition from power in the state. Das was given a warm welcome into the saffron fold at the BJP's state headquarters in the presence of the party's state unit president Babul Marandi, working president Ravindra Rai, Union minister Sanjay Seth, and hundreds of supporters. Speaking on the occasion, Das said that he was happy to take the membership of the party for the second time

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**

Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) scientists identified a new pangolin species which diverged from the Chinese pangolin (Manis pentadactyla) around 3.4 million years ago, the organisation said in a statement on Friday. The ZSI said the discovery of the Indo-Burmese pangolin (Manis indo-burmanica) sheds light on the evolutionary diversity of pangolins, influenced by climatic changes in the region, one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. The study, led by Mukesh Thakur of the ZSI, used cutting-edge genomic tools to analyse mitochondrial genomes. "This is a testament to the power of modern genetic tools in uncovering hidden diversity. The Indo-Burmese pangolin not only enriches our understanding of Asian pangolins but emphasises region-specific conservation efforts," Thakur said.

# No jail time for Trump after conviction in hush money case

**PTI ■ NEW YORK**

President-elect Donald Trump was sentenced on Friday in his hush money case, but the judge declined to impose any punishment. The outcome cements Trump's conviction before he returns to power before while freeing him to return to the White House unencumbered by the threat of a jail term or a fine. Trump's sentence of an unconditional discharge caps a norm-smashing case that saw the former and future president charged with 34 felonies, put on trial for almost two months and convicted by a jury on every

imposing a sentence, but the legal protection that Trump will have as president "is a factor that overrides all others." Despite the extraordinary breadth of those legal protections, one power they do not provide is that they do not erase a jury verdict," Merchan said. Trump, briefly addressing the court as he appeared virtually from his Florida home, said his criminal trial and conviction has "been a very terrible experience" and insisted he committed no crime. The Republican former president, appearing on a video feed 10 days before he is inaugurated, again pilloried

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**

Villagers in Mekhliganj, Cooch Behar district of North Bengal, set up temporary barbed-wire fences along a 1.5 km stretch of land on Friday, defying threats from the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB). The incident began when villagers started erecting the fences early in the morning. BGB personnel and villagers from the other side ordered them to stop, but the locals continued the work on their own fields. "We contacted the Border Security Force (BSF), and with their help, we completed the 1.5 km stretch. We plan to finish the next 2.5 km in a few days," a villager said. The villagers cited ongoing issues with cross-border activities, including destruction of crops by Bangladesh's cattle, theft of paddy and livestock,

and infiltration by Bangladeshis. "We are determined to put up our own fences with the BSF's assistance," one local added. While standard fences are 10 feet high, the villagers managed to construct five-foot-high barriers due to limited resources. This incident follows reports of the BGB obstructing fencing projects by the BSF along the border. On Monday, similar tensions were reported in Sukdebpur, Kaliachak, Malda district, where BGB forces hindered BSF attempts to construct fences. Locals indicated that BGB had set up bunkers and incited resistance from Bangladeshi villagers. The BSF has urged Indian villagers to remain calm to prevent further escalation. Meanwhile, construction work at the Sukdebpur border remained suspended for the

# 2024: hottest year, global temp above pre-industrial levels

**From page 1**

Scientists noted that the average temperature in 2024 was 1.60 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 baseline, the period before human activities like burning fossil fuels began significantly impacting the climate. This is the first time the average global temperature has remained 1.5 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 average for an entire calendar year. However, a permanent breach of the 1.5-degree Celsius limit specified in the Paris Agreement refers to long-term warming over a 20- or 30-year period. That said, experts feel that the world is now entering a phase where temperatures will be consistently above this threshold. Harjeet Singh, climate activist and the founding director of Satat Sampada Climate Foundation, said the world is entering a new climate reality -- one where extreme heatwaves, devastating floods, and intense storms will become increasingly frequent and severe. "To prepare for this future, we must urgently scale up adaptation efforts across every level of society -- redesigning our homes, cities, and infrastructure, and transforming how we manage water, food, and energy systems," he said. Singh said the world must move from fossil fuels to

# INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES DROP

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Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent higher at 109.01. The 10-year US bond yields also rose to its April 2024 level at 4.69 per cent. India's gold reserves increased by USD 824 million to USD 67.092 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 58 million to USD 17.815 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 18 billion at USD 4.199 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed.

# Delhi student held for bomb threats at 23 schools

**From page 1**

Earlier in the day, officials said police will address a press conference at its headquarters to share more details but it was later cancelled. The sources said the accused had sent bomb threats to 23 different schools as he did not want to take school examinations. He used this method to trigger panic. "The student got the idea from previous incidents and hatched a plan to change his IP address by using Virtual Private Network (VPN) and

# Explore Supreme Court of India with guided tours every Saturday

**From page 1**

Public members would have a chance to sightsee the grounds which usually takes about an hour and guided through the courtrooms aside from the National Judicial Museum and Archive. Visitors will have a chance to see the new judges' library in SC's administrative building complex where entry is otherwise restricted. The first such tour happened on November 3, 2018, and since

then 296 such tours have taken place. The Supreme Court building was constructed in 1958, with its foundation stone laid by India's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad in 1954. The architecture and history make it a landmark manifesting legal importance and rich cultural heritage. The gallery section of the top court's official website has photos and details of the past tours, allowing prospective visitors a glimpse to what lies in store.

# AAP promises funds for RWAs to hire guards

**From page 1**

Kejriwal said hiring private security guards by RWAs is just a measure to instill a feeling of safety among residents and in no manner an attempt to "replace police who are responsible for providing security". The AAP National Convener hoped the posting of private security guards would help regulate the movement of unauthorised persons in colonies and prevent petty crimes. Kejriwal used the occasion to criticise the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for its handling of Delhi's law and order situation. "Delhi has been

# Delhi student held for bomb threats at 23 schools

turned into a crime capital under the BJP and Home Minister Amit Shah. People are scared and feeling unsafe," he said, adding, "Gang wars are now common in the city. BJP doesn't care for Delhi residents, but AAP does." Asserting that the two crore people in Delhi were like family to him, he said their safety was the top priority of the AAP. The AAP leader also raised concerns about alleged voter irregularities in the New Delhi Assembly constituency. Speaking about his recent meeting with the Election Commission, Kejriwal claimed, "Between December

# Delhi student held for bomb threats at 23 schools

15 and January 7, 5,500 votes were flagged for deletion in New Delhi, which accounts for 5.5% of the total voter base. Additionally, 13,000 new voter applications have been filed in this period, suggesting potential fraud." BS Vohra, president of North Delhi RWA Federation, the AAP should empower RWAs but expressed reservations over the new promise. "Last time, it was promised that councillors would be appointed, but we are still waiting for them," he said. It would be fine if funds were provided for private guards and hoped previous promises by the party would also be

# Modi talks Godhra, US visa refusal in debutant podcast

**From page 1**

"There was only one helicopter... I guess it was ONGC's, but they said that since it is a single-engine, they cannot allow a VIP to use it. We had an argument, and I said that I would be responsible for whatever happened" he stated. "I reached Godhra, and I witnessed that painful scene, those corpses. I felt everything, but I knew I was sitting in a position where I had to stay out of my emotions and natural tendencies. I did whatever I could to control myself," he remarked. During the podcast, Modi also revisited the American government's decision to deny him a visa in 2005 when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Reflecting on the incident, he said, "Talking about setbacks, I was the MLA when the American government refused to give me a visa. As an individual, going to America was not a big thing, I had visited before also; but I felt the disrespect of an elected government and the country, and there was a dilemma in my mind as to what was happening." "That day, I held a press conference, where I said that the American government had rejected my visa. I also said that I see an India, where the world will stand in queue for a visa. This is my statement in 2005, and today we are standing in 2025. So, I can see that now, the time is of India," remarked Modi. In the conversation, Modi

also reflected on leadership, admitting that mistakes are part of being human. He said he is willing to discard old ideas and embrace new ones as long as they fit into his essential ideology of "nation first". Noting that one-third seats for MLAs and Lok Sabha members will be reserved for women in near future, the PM said women are already present in local bodies due to 50 per cent reservation for them in many states and asked them to work to become as capable as they can be to prepare themselves for assemblies and Parliament. The prime minister described himself as not a typical politician, and his time is mostly spent on governance. Asserting that he has never confined himself to a comfort zone, Modi said his risk-taking ability has hardly been utilised. "My risk-taking ability is several times more," he said, adding that it was because he never bothered about himself. In his third term, he said he felt more emboldened and his dreams have widened. In first two terms, he used to judge his work by the progress it has made since he began. "Now my thoughts are in the context of Viksit Bharat by 2047," he added. On the current trend of evolution of social media, PM said the platform has strengthened democracy by opening up ways to verify information which earlier was available from a handful of sources with little alternatives.

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

**From page 1**

DIAL will procure six state-of-the-art Passenger Boarding Bridges (PBBs) from South Korea, incorporating advanced features including elevated ramps to assist wheelchair passengers; Adjusted cabins for a seamless passenger experience; Autonomous docking technology (first time in India); Side-covering cushions for enhanced safety and aesthetics and swing doors for operator safety and a better aesthetic appeal. The terminal's aesthetics will be upgraded with modern ceilings and skylight designs, creating a more appealing environment. The civil works

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

include smart washrooms, advanced flooring, and better road connectivity will improve passenger convenience. Canopies at the forecourt will ensure a dry, comfortable experience for passengers, especially during the monsoon. T2 opened in May 1986, and was initially used for international flights till July 2010, when those operations shifted to T3. After this, the terminal remained operational for only three months every year, catering to Haj flights. It was then shut for a few years, and in 2017, was renovated, and now-bankrupt airline Go First and

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

a few IndiGo flights started operations from here. Officials said IGI is scheduled to host the Airports Council International (ACI) Asia-Pacific & Middle East Regional Assembly conference in mid-April, and officials from the ministry of civil aviation confirmed that the expanded Terminal 1 (T1) will be ready by early April to ensure that the country's largest airport gets the best display. On completion of the ongoing work, T1 will have a capacity of 40 million passengers annually. T2's renovation will begin only by the end of April or May once the ACI

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

conference concludes," officials confirmed. DIAL CEO Videh Kumar Jaipuria said the refurbishment of the four-decade-old T2 is the need of the hour. "The decades-old terminal will undergo significant upgrades aimed at elevating the passenger experience and increasing the airport's capacity to meet future growth demands," he said. DIAL CEO said the overall passenger experience will be enhanced by upgrading key infrastructure, improving operational efficiency, and elevating passenger comfort. "With the terminal's

projected passenger capacity expected to reach its peak by FY 2025-26, these enhancements will be crucial in supporting the growing demand for air travel, particularly for domestic passengers," he said. Last year, the improvement work of Delhi airport's Terminal 1 was done. Functions in T1 were resumed from August 17, in phases. A large section of Terminal 1's roof collapsed in the early hours of 28 June following heavy rain, leading to the closure of the entire terminal. One person was killed and eight others were injured in the accident.

# AAP and BJP engage in fierce tug of war for Purvanchali voters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are engaged in a fierce tug of war for Purvanchali voters following recent remarks by AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal about the voter list. Kejriwal's statement, which accused the BJP of bringing people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to create fake voters in Delhi, has sparked a heated debate. The comments have escalated tensions, especially within Delhi's Purvanchali communities, leading to widespread discussions on voter manipulation. Congress leaders also slammed the AAP for commenting on the Purvanchali people. It is estimated that 40-50 lakh Purvanchali voters spread in all 70 assembly seats, who play a major role in deciding the fate of the political parties here. The BJP sees an opportunity to capitalise on growing discontent with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), driven by anti-incumbency sentiments and recent controversies. By

leveraging its strong historical ties with the Purvanchali voters, the BJP aims to stage a comeback in the national capital. The Delhi BJP held a protest on Friday against the AAP and its chief Arvind Kejriwal. Hundreds of protesters holding placards like "Purvanchal Virodhi Kejriwal" raised slogans against AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, with some attempting to breach the security barricades near his residence. Slogans such as "Litti chokha khayenge, Kejriwal bhagayenge", "Chhathi Maiya ki jai", and "Purvanchal Virodhi Kejriwal mardabad" echoed during the protest. During the protest, the demonstrators attempted to breach security barricades and move closer to Kejriwal's residence. However, the police used water cannons to disperse the crowd and prevented them from advancing further. According to police officials, more than 20 protesters were detained for protesting without valid permission. "They were bundled into police buses and taken to



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different police stations," a senior police officer said. As electioneering gathers steam for Delhi assembly polls next month, Delhi BJP on Friday launched a scathing attack against AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal claiming he was anti-Purvanchal after his remarks

on Thursday calling them "fake voters" have once again revealed the dark truth about his mindset. This was first visible in 2019. Leveling this charge besides others, state BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said Kejriwal is taking revenge on the people of

Delhi for losing power. He added, "Kejriwal ji, you can curse BJP, but please do not spread tension in Delhi. You have already caused significant harm by halting Delhi's development and looting its treasury. Please don't disturb the harmony of Delhi anymore."

Sachdeva also said "Kejriwal ji, you have always been anti-Purvanchal and will remain so. This bitter truth emerged once again yesterday, January 9. Why do you hate the people of Purvanchal so much? The BJP Delhi President declared that the people of Delhi will no longer tolerate this and will liberate Delhi from the sinful rule of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on February five. BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said, "Arvind Kejriwal has always insulted the Purvanchali community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he made several objectionable statements, and now he has referred to them as 'fake voters'. We will not forget this insult, and neither will the people of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Bihar. This betrayal will remain etched in the memory of Delhiites as well." After the controversy, Kejriwal was seen in a damage control mode today highlighting the work done by his party to improve the living conditions of the unauthorised colonies which are home to many peo-

ple of this community. Kejriwal also blamed the BJP for doing nothing to improve the condition of Purvanchali people. "People from Purvanchal come here and live in slums. Before 2014, it was difficult to live in these slums. It was a life of hell, with mud and sludge everywhere. There was no development. According to the Supreme Court and central government orders, no development could take place there. More than 90 per cent of the people in these slums are from Purvanchal. I want to ask the BJP, what have you done for slums in the last 10 years?" said Kejriwal. "BJP is just a party for protesting. They only hold dharna and protest and indulge in dirty politics. They can't work for the people," he said. AAP MP Sanjay Singh accused the BJP of attempting to delete the names of Purvanchali residents from the voter list in Delhi and said the saffron party was targeting "our Purvanchali brothers, calling them Bangladeshi and Rohingyas". Singh said that BJP leaders in several areas,

including Shahdara, Janakpuri, Palam, Rajouri Garden, Hari Nagar, Karawal Nagar, and Mustafabad, have submitted applications to delete the votes of Purvanchalis. He further alleged that in Palam, nine BJP workers filed requests to remove 1,641 votes, while in Rajouri Garden, six BJP workers sought the deletion of 571 votes. The AAP leader alleged that the BJP has been caught "red-handed" while attempting to manipulate the voters list. In a formal complaint to the Election Commission, Kejriwal raised concerns over applications for the addition of 13,000 new voters between December 15 and January 8. Addressing the media after lodging the complaint, Kejriwal said, "Apparently many of these voters have been brought in from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other neighbouring states to create fake voter registrations. This manipulation undermines the election process." Kejriwal's remarks sparked an immediate backlash from BJP with party leaders condemning his comments.

## BJP's CEC meets to finalise candidates to be nominated for city's Assembly polls

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Election Committee (CEC) of the BJP met on Friday to finalise the remaining candidates to be nominated for the upcoming high-octane Delhi Assembly elections, slated to be held on February 5. Two separate meetings were held throughout the days to narrow down the names of the candidates for the remaining constituencies. The first meeting, which took place at the residence of Nadda, included senior leaders including Shah, BJP National General Secretary BL Santosh, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, Co-Election In-charge MP Atul Garg and Organizational General Secretary Pawan Rana among others. The BJP has already released its first list, featuring 29 candidates, including eight prominent leaders who switched from AAP and Congress. Notable turncoats like Kailash Gahlot and Arvinder Singh Lovely have made their way into the BJP fold. The focus of the meeting was on key discussions regarding the party's strategy and preparations for the elections. All seven Lok Sabha MPs from Delhi, including Chandni Chowk MP Praveen



Khandelwal, Northeast MP Manoj Tiwari, Northwest MP Yogendra Chandolia, New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj, West Delhi MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat, East Delhi MP Harsh Malhotra and South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri were called in for the meeting one by one to review the names of the candidates for their constituency for the Delhi polls. Later in the day, the BJP convened a Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting at the party headquarters, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to confirm the final list of candidates for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. The party is set to announce its second list of candidates soon with Chandolia confirming

that Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other senior leaders are meticulously reviewing nominations for all 70 seats, with a particular focus on the remaining 41 constituencies. "Today, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and all the leaders in charge of Delhi are discussing the nominations for all seats. BJP National President JP Nadda has asked for our opinions on the 41 remaining seats, and national leadership is thoroughly discussing each constituency. If the parliamentary board meeting concludes today, the list will be released tonight; otherwise, it will be announced tomorrow," Chandolia shared. Counting for the elections will be held on February 8.

## Issue written instructions to police to maintain discipline on polling day: Yadav to Delhi's CEO

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav on Friday appealed to the chief electoral officer (CEO) to issue written instructions to police to maintain discipline on polling day, ensuring that party workers are not harassed. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva claimed, "We have concrete information that Kejriwal is deliberately arranging for large numbers of votes to be registered in the homes of his party workers in certain constituencies. These votes are of people who do not reside in Delhi and will suddenly show up to cast their vote on election day." He also said that in this regard, they have requested an appointment with the Election Commission and will file a complaint as soon as they are granted time. Yadav, along with other leaders, met the Delhi CEO and submitted a letter. In the letter, Yadav highlighted the Election Commission of India's announcement of the schedule for Delhi Assembly elections and expressed the party's concerns regarding election management. "One of the important issues,



which arises for concern on the voting day is about the non-issuance of clear-cut guidelines/directions to the local police regarding the number of tables and putting up of party flags, symbols and other material used by the workers of different political parties outside the polling stations. "It had been experienced that the Congress workers are mostly harassed by police in disguise of the Model Code of Conduct, which is against the electoral practices and healthy democratic process," he wrote in the letter. It had also been witnessed in the last elections that there were many assembly con-

stituencies, wherein the voting percentage was higher than other constituencies, it said. It was also seen that due to a heavy turnout in many constituencies, there were long queues due to "poor management" at several booths, unnecessary delays and interruption in voting for hours, which resulted in the harassment not only for voters but also for the election machinery, including political party workers, till late night, Yadav mentioned. It is further requested that no deletion or addition in the voters list should be carried out without proper verification, the letter said.

## Congress promises to build Chhath Puja ghats like the ones built in 'Maha Kumbh'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress on Friday promised to build Chhath Puja ghats, like the ones built in the 'Maha Kumbh', on the Yamuna banks, which will be declared a separate district and named after the iconic singer and Padma Bhushan Sharda Sinha, who passed away recently. "Congress has taken a pledge to make Chhath Puja like the 'Maha Kumbh' when it returns to power, and will build a separate Chhath Ghat at the Yamuna banks, which will be declared as a separate district and named as 'Sharada Sinha Ghat'," Bihar Congress President Akhilesh Prasad Singh said addressing a press conference. He added that people from Poorvanchal have played a major role in the development of Delhi. "However, their contributions have been forgotten by the AAP and the BJP. Both of them used them as a vote bank to be insulted and humiliated after winning elections," Singh said. The Congress MP said the Kejriwal government ignored the Poorvanchalis during the COVID-19 pandemic and

forced them to trek back home risking their lives, which was inhuman and degrading. "BJP and AAP deeply hurt the sentiments of Poorvanchalis by preventing them from holding their most important religious festival, Chhath Puja, at the Yamuna river banks, as it was highly polluted and the High Court had put a ban on holding the festival in the polluted water. The AAP government took no step to clean up the toxic river," he said. The Congress leader alleged that BJP President JP Nadda, whose father graduated from the Patna University, had equated Poorvanchalis in Parliament with Rohingyas and Bangladeshi illegal immigrants while Kejriwal said Poorvanchalis were adding fake votes in Delhi. "A majority of people living in the 1,797 unauthorised colonies in the capital are Poorvanchalis, who live in inhuman conditions without even basic civic facilities, like sanitation, potable water, roads, but neither Kejriwal nor BJP showed any interest in saving them from inhuman living conditions," he claimed.

# AAP and BJP spar over fake voters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP and the BJP are sparring over the fake voters ahead of the assembly polls. The AAP on Friday alleged that the BJP is buying votes and Delhi BJP's leaders have embezzled funds meant for "buying votes with money". Addressing a press conference, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh alleged that the BJP has allocated Rs 10,000 per voter to its leaders for buying votes but only a fraction of the money reached the intended recipients. "Instead of distributing the full amount, BJP leaders allegedly handed out only Rs 1,000 or Rs 1,100 to voters, pocketing the remaining Rs 9,000 for themselves," Singh said. AAP convener and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal took to social media platform X to accuse the BJP of resorting to "buying votes" and banking on "money" to win the election. "The abusive party is losing the Delhi elections badly. That is why it now wants to contest the elections by buying votes with money," Kejriwal said on X. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP retorted by stating that AAP leaders, who are exasperated, have been masters at eating NGO funds and pretty well know that their misappropriation of public funds stands exposed today and Tihar and Vaishali are team Kejriwal's ultimate abodes. South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said, "Sanjay Singh should note that yes the people of Delhi have decided to ultimately expose the scams and corruption of AAP government by widely voting against it. The entire AAP



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stands shattered since the announcement of Parvesh Sahib Singh as the New Delhi candidate which has changed the entire political climate of Delhi." Former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia described the situation as a "fraud" in a post on X and urged the Delhi residents to confront BJP leaders about the missing funds. "The BJP has crossed all limits of fraud in the Delhi elections. The top leaders of the abusive party sent Rs 10,000 to distribute but to earn money, their leaders kept Rs 9,000 and distributed only Rs 1,100," Sisodia said on X. He said people working with the BJP leaders know that the saffron party cannot win against Kejriwal in Delhi, "so why not take Rs 9,000 from the people of Delhi?" "People of Delhi, if they come to you asking for votes, ask them — where is the other Rs 9,000?" Sisodia added. Sanjay Singh further alleged that the BJP leaders had orchestrated this scheme, knowing they were likely to lose the election to AAP, an official state-

ment said. He called on the Delhiites to question the BJP over the alleged stolen money and expose their "corruption", it added. Delhi minister Saurabh Bhardwaj, also present at the press conference, accused the BJP of undermining democracy not just through vote-buying but also through voter list manipulation. He raised concerns about thousands of legitimate voters being removed from the list and fake entries being added. The AAP leaders have called on the Election Commission to intervene and ensure a free and fair election process in Delhi, the statement said. The people of Delhi are going to cast their votes on February 5 with counting to take place on February 8. An intense political battle is unfolding in the national capital with assembly elections less than a month away and AAP aiming for a third consecutive term while the BJP pulling out all stops to defeat it and come back to power after more than 26 years.

## Series of poster campaigns escalate political rivalry between AAP and BJP



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The political rivalry between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has escalated through a series of pointed poster campaigns ahead of the Delhi assembly elections. AAP initiated a new round of poster advertisements targeting the BJP, triggering a swift retaliation from the BJP on the social media platform X. AAP released an additional poster titled "BJP ke Gaalibaz Daanavon Se Delhi Rahe Satarak", displaying images of BJP officials including Amit Shah, Manoj Tiwari, Ramesh Bidhuri, Virendra Sachdeva, and Pravesh Verma. In response, the BJP issued a poster criticising AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's treatment of the Purvanchal community. With the caption "Purvanchal Samaj ka Apmaan, Sheeshmahal ke Nawab

Kejriwal ki Pehchaan!", the poster labelled Kejriwal as hostile to the Purvanchal community, claiming he dismissed them as illegitimate and deserted them during the Covid-19 crisis, whilst consistently ridiculing them when opportunities arose. AAP took a dig at the BJP for not declaring a chief ministerial candidate and shared with the caption "Delhi ka CM Kaun?". The poster positioned Arvind Kejriwal as the face of the "Aam Aadmi Party" while labeling the BJP as the "Gaalib Galoch Party". The poster accused BJP leaders of making derogatory remarks, including calling out Amit Shah for allegedly disrespecting Baba Saheb, JP Nadda for insulting Purvanchalis, Ramesh Bidhuri for targeting a female CM, Virendra Sachdeva for insulting a former CM, and Manoj Tiwari for making obscene remarks about women.

## AAP announces office bearers of newly formed 'Sanatan Seva Samiti'



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP on Friday announced the office bearers of the newly formed "Sanatan Seva Samiti" on Friday with Ghanendra Bhardwaj appointed as the state in-charge, while Vijay Sharma named the state president. AAP's state convener Gopal Rai released a list of eight office bearers, including the state in-charge and state president. The committee aims to provide a platform for priests and saints dedicated to Sanatan Dharma. Recently, the AAP claimed that many priests and saints have joined its Sanatan Seva Samiti after leaving the BJP's Mandir Prakoshth. According to the list of office bearers of the Sanatan Seva Samiti released by Rai, Jitendra Sharma as the state executive president, Sardar Rajinder Singh as the state vice-president, Brijesh Sharma as the state organizational secretary, and Manish Gupta and Sardar Rajinder Singh (Honey) as state secretaries. Dushyant

Sharma has been named the state joint secretary. Ahead of the upcoming Delhi assembly election, AAP Convener Arvind Kejriwal, has guaranteed the "Pujari-Granthi Samman Yojana," under which Pujaris and Granthis will receive Rs 18,000 per month. While welcoming the priests and saints into the party fold on January 8, AAP chief expressed his gratitude, saying, "I consider myself very fortunate that God has given us the opportunity to serve the priests and saints who work tirelessly for Sanatan Dharma. The BJP has done nothing for the members associated with its Mandir Prakoshth, but the Aam Aadmi Party delivers on what it promises." During the event, prominent religious figures, including Jagadguru Ramanujacharya Swami, Yogeshwaracharya Maharaj, Jagadguru Swami Awadhesh Prapannacharya Maharaj, and Acharya Shri Madhur Das Maharaj, among others were present.

## Illegal Bangladeshi migrant, aunt held for possessing 768 grams of heroin



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police arrested an illegal Bangladeshi migrant and his maternal aunt for allegedly possessing 768 grams of heroin, valued at Rs 8 crore in the market, an official said on Friday. The Anti-Narcotics Squad (ANS) of the southeast district arrested Hamidul and his aunt Naseema from the Sunlight Colony area in Delhi, the official said. Hamidul (23) had entered India illegally three months ago and became involved in drug peddling to earn quick money, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Ravi Kumar said. Naseema who previously worked for a news channel allegedly supplied the heroin, he added. Acting on a secret tip, the ANS conducted a raid at Jungpura Extension, where Hamidul was apprehended. A search of his accommodation led to the recovery of 75 grams of high-quality heroin. During interrogation, Hamidul revealed that Naseema had supplied the heroin to him for distribution and a subsequent raid at her residence yielded an additional 80 grams of heroin, Kumar said. The team located her at a hotel in Sunlight Colony, where 693 grams of heroin were seized from her possession, said the DCP. Hamidul disclosed that he joined the drug trade to make quick money after arriving in India illegally, the DCP said.

# Rajnath calls for enhanced cohesiveness of global community

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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



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

# Former UP Police DG appointed president of IPF

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

# New FIR against Karti Chidambaram

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

# Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav unveils upgraded Amrit Bharat trains with 12 key enhancements

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
CHENNAI

The Ministry of Railways has added 12 major improvements on the Amrit Bharat Version 2.0 trains and 50 such trains will be manufactured at ICF over the next two years, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Friday. Vaishnav, who inspected the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) along with its General Manager U Subba Rao, said the state government should place service to people above politics and the Centre and his Ministry is committed to take measures for the welfare of the people.

"Very happy to see the Amrit Bharat Version 2.0 (being manufactured here). As you can recall, the Amrit Bharat Version 1.0 was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi last January 2024 and based on the experience in the last one year, many improvements have been made in the Amrit Bharat Version 2.0," Vaishnav told reporters at the ICF here. Sharing some of



the salient features that have been improved in the Amrit Bharat trains, he said, "12 major improvements have been done in the entire train. Semi-automatic couplers, modular toilets, chair pillars and partitions, emergency talk back feature, emergency brake system, continuous lighting system like Vande Bharat trains, seats and berths with

new ergonomic design have been improved." He said the entire pantry car in the Amrit Bharat Version 2.0 trains have been built using a new design. Targeted at low income and low middle income families, he said, "50 such Amrit Bharat Version 2.0 trains would be manufactured in the coming two years (at the Integral Coach Factory). This

will provide a very affordable service and very high quality of travelling experience to people travelling long distances." Responding to a query about the apprehension raised by the Commissioner of Railway Safety on the construction of the historic Pamban bridge in Rameswaram, he said the designing of the bridge was done based on the Research

Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO). "When you do the RDSO standard, such a standard of designs is done for bridges which are constructed in large numbers. This is a unique bridge. Pamban Bridge is once in a lifetime that you design and construct a bridge of this type," he said. He cleared the air that the Commissioner of Railways Safety was explained that this is not a standard bridge and uniquely designed bridge and the services of the best international experts have been taken for designing. "The CRS has understood and they have now given the clearance on the bridge design. Panel report has also come," he said. The minister said the Railways has installed the KAVACH (a facility to help prevent train accidents) in 10,000 locomotives and 15,000 km of track side fittings are also being done. "Telecom towers are also being installed. Cameras are being installed on the front of the locomotives.

# Trinidad, Tobago President Christine Carla Kangaloo wins Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award by President Murmu



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
BHUBANESWAR

Trinidad & Tobago President Christine Carla Kangaloo and 26 others were conferred the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award by President Droupadi Murmu on the last day of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention here. Murmu congratulated all the awardees and appreciated them for working for the society in different fields. She said that their success

stories are not just a matter of pride for India, but they also inspire millions across the world to strive for excellence. Murmu said Kangaloo's outstanding contributions in leading her nation, with a special focus on women and the Indian diaspora, have set a high benchmark on the world stage. The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award is the highest honour conferred on overseas Indians. The awardees represent the excellence achieved by the Indian diaspora in various fields.

The Trinidad & Tobago President got the award in the public affairs category. Other awardees included Ajay Rane (Australia, community service), Marialena Joan Fernandes (Austria, education), Swami Sanyuktanand (Fiji, community service), Saraswati Vidya Niketan (Guyana, community service), Lekh Raj Juneja (Japan, science and technology), Prem Kumar (Kyrgyz Republic, medical science) and Soukthavy Chowdhury (Laos, business).

# BSF foils cattle smuggling attempt on India-Bangladesh border, recovers 10 bulls

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
KOLKATA

BSF jawans were attacked by Bangladeshi cattle smugglers on the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district on Thursday night, a statement from the paramilitary force said. In a retaliatory action carried out in self-defence, the jawans successfully foiled the smuggling attempt and recovered 10 bulls, it added. The incident took place at Khatadah border outpost (BOP), where BSF personnel saw smugglers approaching



the border fence from the Indian side with cattle. Simultaneously, smugglers from the Bangladesh side crossed the international border into India.

When the BSF jawans challenged them to stop, the smugglers ignored the warning and advanced aggressively, wielding sharp-edged spears while attempting to cut the border fence. In response to the threat, a BSF jawan fired a blank round as a warning. "Taking advantage of the darkness and uneven terrain, the smugglers fled back to Bangladesh. A subsequent search of the area led to the recovery of 8 bulls of Haryana origin and three sharp-edged spears left behind by the attackers," the statement by BSF South Bengal Frontier

said. Previous incidents of similar smuggling attempts and assaults have been reported at Pipli BOP (Kolkata sector) and BOPs HC Pur and Nawada (Malda sector), where BSF jawans were forced to defend themselves using stun grenades and other weapons, the statement added. A BSF spokesperson said despite frequent flag meetings with the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) to raise concerns about these attacks, no concrete action has been taken by Bangladeshi authorities.

# Assam coal mine tragedy: 'Sardar' of trapped miners arrested as rescue efforts continue

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
GUWAHATI

The 'sardar' of workers of the coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district, where eight miners remained trapped, was arrested, even as a dewatering exercise continued in the quarry to facilitate the resumption of rescue operations, police said on Friday. The fate of the trapped miners appeared to be grim with personnel involved in the rescue operations racing against time to bring them out of the ill-fated quarry, while the body of one labourer,

hailing from Nepal, has been recovered from there, an official said. "The 'sardar' (head) of the miners, who had fled the quarry site soon after the incident on January 6, was arrested on Thursday night from a place after an extensive search operation. This is the second arrest in connection with the case," said a senior officer who did not divulge the place of arrest. The arrested person has been identified as Hanan Laskar, and Punish Nunisa, the leaseholder of the quarry, was held on the second day of the incident in connection with

the case, the official said. The labourers were on Monday trapped inside the 3-Kilo Coal Quarry in Umranago area, around 250 km from Guwahati, after a sudden gush of water flooded the site. A case was registered in connection with the incident at the mine which appears to be 'illegal', Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said. Nine labourers were trapped inside the mine after a sudden gush of water flooded the quarry, and the body of one labourer has been recovered so far.

# AAP's Sanjay Singh assures Goa court he will refrain from defaming CM's wife

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
PANAJI

Am Aadmi Party's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh has assured Goa court that he will refrain from making any defamatory statements against CM Dr. Pramod Sawant's wife Sulakshana Sawant. Sanjay Singh's lawyer submitted in Bicholim Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC) court that his client will refrain from commenting against CM Dr. Pramod Sawant's wife Sulakshana Sawant. The court in Goa had issued a notice to Sanjay Singh in a Rs 100-crore defamation case filed against him by Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant's wife for allegedly naming her in the cash-for-jobs scam. The court had sought Singh's reply by January 10, 2025. Next hearing on the matter is kept on 24th January 2025. Pramod Sawant's wife Sulakshana Sawant had filed a case in the court of Civil Judge Senior Division, Bicholim, North Goa. Sulakshana Sawant, in her complaint, had requested the court to direct Sanjay Singh to publish an apology clarifying that the said defamatory video/article and interview are false, not based on facts, and tender an unconditional apology. The complainant had also urged the court to restrain Sanjay Singh from making any public statements maligning her by injunction on social media or other platforms.

# Farmer leader Dallewal challenges Punjab BJP: meet Modi instead of Akal Takht Jathedar to end fast

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab BJP has appealed to the Akal Takht but should approach Prime Minister Narendra Modi if they want him to end his hunger strike, farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said on Friday as his fast-unto-death entered day 46. In a three-minute video message released on Friday, the 70-year-old farmer leader asserted he will end his fast only after the Centre accepts farmers' demands which include a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price for crops. A BJP delegation, comprising Sukhminder Pal Singh Grewal and Sarchand Singh, appealed to Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh on Thursday to intervene to end the indefinite fast of the farmer leader. The delegation expressed concern over Dallewal's deteriorating health.



In his video message Dallewal said, "We have got information that the leaders of the Punjab unit of BJP appealed to the Akal Takht to intervene in order to end Dallewal's fast-unto-death. (They appealed to the Akal Takht that) a direction be given so that he should end his fast. I respect the Akal Takht." "But the Punjab BJP should approach (PM) Modi ji, the vice president (Jagdeep Dhankhar), Agriculture Minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan), (Home Minister) Amit Shah ji. Instead of meeting them, they are

approaching the Akal Takht Jathedar," he said. Farmer leaders camped at the Punjab-Haryana border also burnt effigies of the central government on Friday. Dallewal, who is the convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), has been on the indefinite hunger strike at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 last year over farmers' various demands including seeking a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

**PARVESH SHARMA ■**  
GURUGRAM

A cybercrime team of Gurugram police has arrested two Airtel company employees who had provided virtual numbers to Indonesian and Chinese fraudsters to cheat people through WhatsApp/Telegram in the name of part-time job/investment. As per the instructions of Priyanshu Diwan, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Cyber Crime, Gurugram, the police team of Cyber East, Gurugram and the joint team of Indian Cyber Coordination Center (I4C), MHA, Govt of India, took action based on technical analysis and nabbed the suspects on Thursday. The accused have been identified as Neeraj Walia, a



resident of District Baghpat (Uttar Pradesh), and Hemant Sharma. The accused were arrested as per rules in the case under sections 318(4), 319, 61(2) BNS at Police Station Cyber Crime East, Gurugram. According to the police, the complainant filed a complaint that he received a call from a landline number in Gurugram in which he was offered a part-time job.

In which the complainant/victim had to post reviews of different hotels. On completing the task, Rs 200 were transferred to the victim's bank account. After that, the victim was added to the Telegram group by the accused. After that, while giving him the task, small amounts were transferred to his account 2-3 times. Later on, money was transferred from him in the name of investing for these tasks. After that, more money was demanded to withdraw this money. During police interrogation, it was found that Neeraj works as a site verifier in Airtel company and Hemant is his team leader. "The accused had issued the landline number/DID number used in the crime in the name of Ekamdarsh

Services Pvt Ltd. Despite the above company not being present on the mentioned site, the accused violated TRAI rules and issued a landline number in the name of the above company," Diwan said. Using the above number, the companions of the accused cheated people in the name of task-based investment. The accused also disclosed that, in connivance with the operational manager of Ekamdarsh Services Pvt Ltd, a company registered at a fake address, had provided many more numbers to an Indonesian person apart from the above landline number/DID number. "In connection with the matter further investigation is underway. The accused have been taken on police remand for intensive interrogation," he added.

# Prayagraj transforms into mega tent city for Maha Kumbh 2025

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■**  
PRAYAGRAJ

The Maha Kumbh 2025 has transformed the sandy banks of Prayagraj's Sangam into a spectacular tent city, a temporary settlement capable of accommodating more than 20 lakh devotees at a time. With over one lakh tents ranging from basic to luxurious, this extraordinary project represents a harmonious blend of engineering, tradition, and spiritual fervor. The scale of this undertaking is staggering. Approximately 68 lakh wooden poles have been used, their combined length exceeding 20,000 kilometers-greater than the distance from Prayagraj to Washington, D.C. Additionally, 100 kilometers of fabric and 250 tonnes of CGI sheets were used for roofing. Over 3,000 workers have been laboring in three shifts for months, meticulously converting these raw materials into a vast, functional city. Each tent is crafted with care, employing durable fabrics like cotton and terrycot,



often lined with polythene to ensure protection against rain. A project of this magnitude owes its success largely to the expertise of Lalluji and Sons, a company with a 104-year legacy of managing Kumbh preparations. Known as the "Vishwakarma of Kumbh," the company has constructed 75% of the tent city. According to Deepanshu

Agarwal, Managing Partner of Lalluji and Sons, preparations began 18 months ago, encompassing tasks such as crafting new tents, repairing old structures, and executing extensive logistical planning. Despite challenges, including delays caused by prolonged monsoons, the team has worked tirelessly to meet the deadlines.

For many workers, the Kumbh is not just an event but a lifelong calling. Rambachan, a 60-year-old veteran, reminisced about the days when wages were ₹10 per day. "Now we earn ₹500 daily, but the joy of contributing to something this significant is priceless," he said. Younger workers like Kuldeep echoed his sentiments, describing the pride they feel in their work. The tent city is a marvel not only in its scale but also in its offerings. While some tents cater to Kalpwasis, who live in simplicity and gather around bonfires for prayers, others provide modern luxuries. Premium accommodations include marble flooring, Wi-Fi, electric blankets, and even televisions, blending comfort with tradition. Pilgrims like Raghunath, a 68-year-old from Rajasthan, and Sushila, a 50-year-old from Varanasi, expressed awe at the modern amenities, describing the experience as unparalleled. Spanning 3,200 hectares-800 hectares more than in 2019-the Maha Kumbh 2025 tent

city is twice the scale of its predecessor. With temporary police stations, administrative offices, and facilities for millions, it stands as a testament to human ingenuity, devotion, and the enduring spirit of one of the world's largest spiritual gatherings. CM inaugurates 'Kumbhvani' Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated Prasar Bharati's FM channel 'Kumbhvani' at the Circuit House on Friday, during the second day of his Prayagraj tour. Expressing his best wishes for the success of the channel, CM Yogi stated his confidence that 'Kumbhvani' will not only reach new heights of popularity but also extend the spirit of Mahakumbh to remote villages where many people, despite their desire, cannot physically attend the event. He emphasized that the channel would serve as a vital medium to deliver all relevant information about Mahakumbh to these distant communities. Highlighting the importance

of live broadcasting, CM Yogi said, "Such efforts would enable those in far-flung areas to experience and understand the grandeur of Mahakumbh." He said this would allow them to share the pride of this grand celebration of Sanatan Dharma with future generations. He also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and Prasar Bharati for their efforts in launching Kumbhvani. "It is a remarkable moment, and Prasar Bharati has beautifully captured its essence through Kumbhvani," he said. The Kumbhvani FM channel will not only broadcast live coverage of the daily events but will also share religious references and stories related to the Mahakumbh in remote villages, making the spiritual essence of the event accessible to all. Kumbhvani on 103.5 MHz Prasar Bharati has launched the OTT-based Kumbhvani FM channel to disseminate comprehensive information

about the Maha Kumbh. Broadcasting at a frequency of 103.5 MHz, the channel will be on air from January 10 to February 26, operating daily from 5:55 AM to 10:05 PM. Kala Kumbh serves as an authentic document of Kumbh's developmental journey In another development Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the Kala Kumbh in Sector 7. After opening the UP State Pavilion, CM Yogi visited the Kala Kumbh, a unique camp created by the Uttar Pradesh Culture Department, located right across from the pavilion. Chief Minister Yogi proceeded to the exhibition hall, where he admired the distinctive artworks, temple replicas, and thematic exhibitions. Praising the initiative, he described Kala Kumbh as an authentic documentation of the Kumbh's developmental journey. On this occasion, Principal Secretary of Tourism and Culture, Mukesh Meshram, presented

the Chief Minister with a memento. Spanning approximately 5 acres within the fairgrounds, the Kala Kumbh features an exhibition gallery and a stage for cultural performances. The gallery displays photographs, replicas, and exhibits tracing the journey of Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, monuments of Uttar Pradesh, protected heritage sites, manuscripts, and artefacts. A key highlight of the Kala Kumbh is the section dedicated to the historical perspective of Mahakumbh. This eighth segment of the exhibition delves into administrative insights from all Kumbh events held in Prayagraj between 1866 and 1954, presented through government letters, records, and official documents. This section includes reports, correspondences, administrative orders, and other records, offering a comprehensive view of Kumbh over the last 150 years.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Transforming defence

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

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



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

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### PICTALK



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

PTI

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

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

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



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

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

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



ARUN CHAUDHARY

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Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

# The trust factor in human interaction

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



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### TWO TIER SYSTEM IN TEST CRICKET

Madam — There are talks between Australia, England, and India and the International Cricket Council's (ICC) new chair, Jay Shah to split Test (cricket) playing nations into two tier, with Australia, England and India in one tier and the rest in a different tier. The concept has gained impetus post the BGT series, where the attendance and TV viewership touched new records. If agreed upon by the ICC council, this will come into effect post-2027 after the present commitments are met by these nations. The objective is that these three nations will play against each other twice in three years as against the present four-year schedule. While the idea may have sprung up from the revenue point of view, ICC must focus on its unwritten objective of improving the quality and skill level of the weaker member nations and making all the members play competitive cricket.

The choice of three nations—India, Australia, and England—also in the upper tier, is arbitrary if it is on the basis of the quality of cricket displayed. If it is so, India has not displayed quality cricket, both in the home series against the Kiwis and down under in the BGT series recently. Also, the Windies have stunned the Aussies in Gabba in a pink ball test in 2024. The recent entrants to the test-playing nations, like Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan have also displayed talents and enthusiasm. Hence such an idea of an arbitrary split must be shunned. If the ICC is serious about splitting, it must be based on the performance in a given time period, say between 2025-28, on the number of points scored by each nation on the number of test wins/losses and can consider having two or three divisions amongst the twelve member countries. Having done that on the basis of points scored, one can consider promotion or demotion of the first and last two, respectively, which will also instill a sense of competitiveness and thereby sustain interest in the test cricket.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

## A policy shift for Afghanistan



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

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

#### HONOURING INDIAN DIASPORA

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

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

#### MAHAKUMBH MELA IN PRAYAGRAJ

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

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

## HOMESCHOOLING: AN OPTION WORTH EXPLORING

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



SAKSHI SETHI

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

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

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



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

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

In olden times, education often took place at home, with parents or private tutors guiding the learning of their child. The rise of formalised schooling in the 19th and 20th centuries shifted education to institutions, but homeschooling remained a choice for families who sought alternatives. Modern homeschooling driven by educational reformers and parents seeking greater control over their children's education began gaining traction in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it continues to evolve, integrating technology and innovative teaching practices. Technology undoubtedly has played a pivotal role in making homeschooling more accessible and effective. It has also enabled collaboration and connection among homeschooling communities. Online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and educational applications such as Scholastic Kids, Udemy, Duolingo, Funbrain and many more provide parents with resources to create comprehensive curricula. The shift to homeschooling reflects a broader desire among parents to take control of their children's education and provide a more personalised, values-driven learning environment. While homeschooling comes with its challenges, the benefits of flexibility, individualised attention and alignment with family priorities make homeschooling an increasingly appealing choice for families worldwide.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

# Junta faces collapse amid escalating defeats

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



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR



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

Crystal-gazing is a hazardous business. Nevertheless, a fling at it is warranted by the unfolding events in that star-crossed country. A report under the headline, 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG', (datelined January 6, 2025), in the news website The Irrawaddy, cited the NUG as stating that the military regime controlled only 107 of the country's 330 townships. The PDF and EROs fully or partly controlled 144 townships or 44 per cent of the country. The website, which enjoys a high-measure of credibility, carried an article by Maung Kavi (datelined January 8, 2025) under the headline, 'Myanmar Junta Boss warns resistance as Regime Loses Ground Nationwide', saying that the NUG had further claimed that nearly 1,500 of the junta's soldiers and police personnel had defected to the civil disobedience movement and 480 of them had taken up 'revolutionary duties'. The report titled 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG'; further states that 315 officers were killed and 127 injured in course of the last year. In the same period, 53 senior officers ranging in rank from colonel to major general, were either killed, injured, or taken prisoner. Among the rank and file, 14,093 soldiers and border guard policemen were killed and 7,363 injured. Anti-regime groups seized 741 junta



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to Maung Kavi's report

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

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

Roughly 70,000 are combat soldiers. At least 21,000 service members have been lost through casualties, desertion and defection since the coup. At this troop level, the Sit-Tat is barely able to sustain itself as a fighting force, much less a government. The odds are now rapidly stacking up against the Junta. No doubt, the latter has tanks and other armoured vehicles, artillery and air force. Tanks and armoured vehicles are very difficult to deploy in the areas dominated by the ethnic forces. With densely forested mountainous terrains, deep gorges and steep climbs, these are ideal for staging ambushes. Moreover, air-strikes and artillery do not win wars, even when backed by heavily armed and trained infantry. Otherwise, the United States would have swept to a victory in Vietnam.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



HARISH KHATRI

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

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

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

These are moments when an empathetic, knowledgeable professional on the other end



of a call or chat can provide not just solutions, but also reassurance. It is this empathy paired with technology that is revolutionising travel assistance in India. Real-time support services aim to address the emotional and logistical needs of travellers in equal measure. **Utilising Technology to Enable Seamless Experiences:** The amalgamation of technology and travel assistance has unlocked possibilities previously deemed unattainable. Advanced algorithms, live

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

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

**A Vision for the Future of Indian Travel**  
As India continues to grow as

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

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

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

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

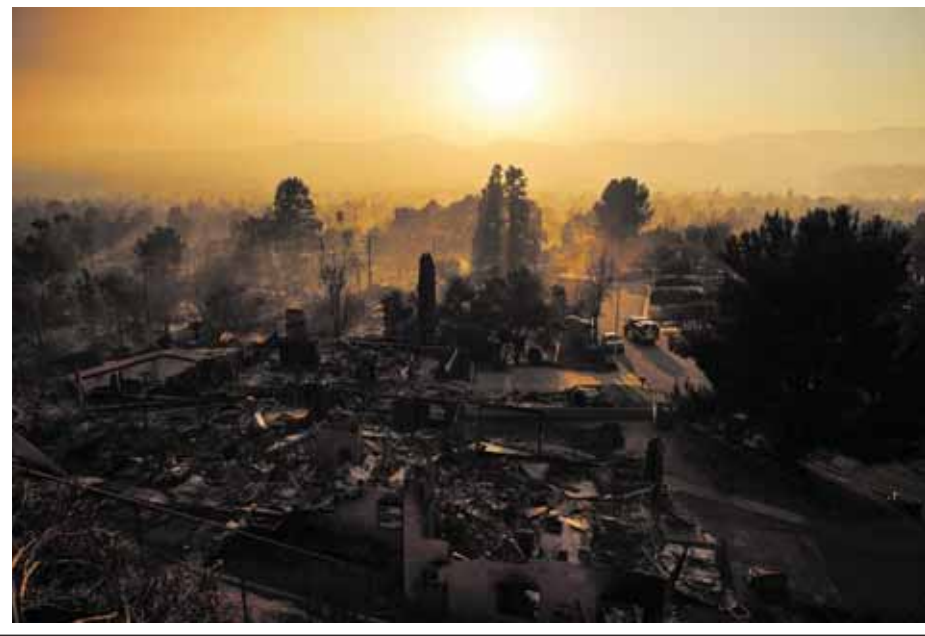
Over 10,000 structures lost in LA blaze

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area this week burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures...

announced the Eaton Fire near Pasadena that started Tuesday night has burned more than 5,000 structures...



(Above) President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris lead a briefing regarding the federal response to the spread of wildfires in the Los Angeles area...



destruction and loss," said Barbara Bruderlin, head of the Malibu Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce...

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Washington Post. Shari Shaw told KTLA that she tried to get her 66-year-old brother, Victor Shaw, to evacuate Tuesday night...

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

PTI ■ LAHORE Pakistan's incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan has said that economic progress can never happen as long as the current "fascist system" is in place...

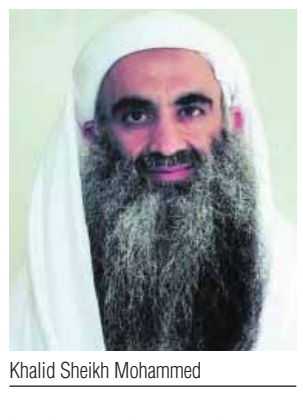
Pakistan, of which two years have already passed. Judges or police officers who become a party to oppression are rewarded with promotions here...

the current "fascist system" is in place. "Economic prosperity requires investment, which is impossible without institutions adhering to their boundaries and responsibilities as defined by the Constitution..."

The PTI supremo reminded that many of his party men who took part in the November 26 protest in Islamabad are still missing. "These individuals disappeared from D-Chowk in Islamabad, not from some remote tribal area..."

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON The Biden administration succeeded Thursday in temporarily blocking a guilty plea by accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed...



Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

The federal appeals panel agreed Thursday evening to a temporary stay. It stressed that the stay would hold only as long as it took to more fully consider arguments in the government's request...

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME

I, RAINA GUPTA W/o Dwarika Prasad Gupta R/o RZ-179, Gali No.4 Dabri Vaishali Dabri South West Delhi-110045 have changed my name to RITU GUPTA for all future purposes.

I, Mansaram Betal, Father of No.3200947F Hav Chanchal Kumar Betal, R/o- Vill-Ramnagar PO- Ramnagar Mobarakpur, PS- Arambagh, Dist- Hooghly, WB- 712616, have changed my name from Mansaram Betal to Manasharam Betal, vide affidavit dated 10/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

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

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

Indian Overseas Bank Waziebadd Branch (Shyam Chowk, Near Girls, Govt. High School, Wazirabad, Gurgaon, Haryana 122003, Phone - 0124-2577240, E-mail id: lob3714@job.in)

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

PUBLIC NOTICE (In case there is no will) Plot / Property No-APARTMENT No, CM633A, 33RD FLOOR, BLOCK 6A, THE CAMELLIAS, DLF 5, GURUGRAM, HARYANA, ALONG WITH CAR PARKING NOS.633A-PB1-1, 633A-PB1-2, 633A-PB1-3, 633A-PB1-4 AND 633A-PB1-5 was registered in the name of Mr. RAJIV KRISHAN LUTHRA S/o Late, Mr. Anurudh Krishan Luthra, R/o 3/15 Shanti Niketan, New Delhi : 110 021, who has expired on 10th May 2023...

PUBLIC NOTICE My client Virendra Kumar S/o late Sh Chand Mohan R/o H.No 159 Gali no 2 Village Tahipur Delhi-110095 has at know to public at large debarred seravale-relations with his son Pramod Kumar and his wife Taruna Pal and his sons Dharaik Pal and Vedant Pal from movable-immovable properties due to their misconduct my client will not be responsible for their illegal acts and any liabilities.

PUBLIC NOTICE General Public is hereby informed that my client Mr. Harish Chander Chopra, S/o Late Sh. Mohan Lal has retired from partnership firm M/s Mohan Lal Harish Chander having its office at C-98, New Subzi Mandi, Azadpur, Delhi, w.e.f. 16.12.2024 and he is not a partner in the said firm anymore. All the liabilities of the firm existing at the time of his retirement in the books of accounts have been taken over by the continuing partners of the firm. Anybody, person, body corporate dealing with the said firm or continuing partners shall do so with the knowledge of fact that my client has already retired from the firm and shall not be liable for any act or liability of the firm or its continuing partners.

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

PUBLIC NOTICE AND POOJA TYAGI who are purchasing the Apartment No.D-0832N 8th Floor, Tower-D, having super area measuring 166.93 Sq. Mtrs. (1796.17 sq. ft.), project known as "RAHEJA VEDAS" situated in the scheme named "Raheja's Vedanta Vides & Vedanta Floors", situated at Sector-108, Tehsil Kadipur, District-Gurgaon, Haryana, from Mr. Devendra Goswami and Mr. Armit Bharti, vide Sale Deed dated 01.08.2024, bearing document no.5788, now ANJU TYAGI and POOJA TYAGI intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from IDBI Bank Limited. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person having any type of claim/right/interest/ creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. (Lucent Legal LLP Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact # 011-40046316)

DISCUSSION OF THE PROPERTY All that part and parcel of the BUILT UP ENTIRE FIRST FLOOR, UPTO THE EXTENT OF CEILING LEVEL, HAVING ITS PLINTH COVERED AREA, 41.80 SQ. METERS, i.e. 50 sq.yds. COMPRISING OF TWO BED ROOMS, ONE DRAWING CUM DINING ROOM, ONE KITCHEN AND TOILET/BATHROOM, WITH COMMON RIGHTS TO USE STAIRCASE, PASSAGE, ENTRANCE AND ROOF/TERRACE OF TOP FLOOR, BUILT ON PART OF PROPERTY BEARING NO.C-104, OUT OF KHASRA NO.811, SITUATED AT ABADI OF C-BLOCK, GALI NO.8, KUMAON SQUARE, WEST VINOD NAGAR, IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE MANDAWALI FAZAL PUR, ILLAQA SHAHDARA, DELHI-110092. Failing Under the Registration of Sub-Registrar-VIII A, Preet Vihar, Delhi.

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Name of Board/Corp./Auth, Name of Work, Notice Tender, Opening Date, Amount / Est. in Rupees, Website of the Board Corp./Auth, Nodal Officer/Contact Details/Email.





# India's economy projected to grow 6.6 per cent in 2025: UN

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

The Indian economy is projected to expand by 6.6 per cent in 2025, primarily supported by robust private consumption and investment, according to a United Nations report. The report titled 'the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025' was released here on Wednesday. It also said that the near-term outlook for South Asia is expected to remain robust, with growth projected at 5.7 per cent in 2025 and 6.0 per cent in 2026, "driven by strong performance in India as well as economic recovery in a few other economies", including Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The Indian economy grew by 6.8 per cent in 2024 and is forecast to expand by 6.6 per cent in 2025. The Indian economy is projected to return to the 6.8 per cent growth in 2026. "The economy of India, the largest in the (South Asia) region, is forecast to expand by 6.6 per cent in 2025, primarily supported by robust private consumption and investment. Additionally, capital expenditure on infrastructure development is expected to have strong multiplier effects on growth in the coming years," the report said. It added that strong export growth in services and certain goods categories,

particularly pharmaceuticals and electronics, will bolster economic activity for India. On the supply side, expansion in the manufacturing and services sectors will keep driving the economy throughout the forecast period. Meanwhile, favourable monsoon rains in 2024 have improved the summer-sowing areas for all major crops, boosting agricultural output expectations for 2025. Investment growth has remained particularly strong in East Asia and South Asia, partly driven by domestic and foreign investments in new supply chains, particularly in India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, the report said. In India, the public sector continues to play a pivotal role in funding large-scale infrastructure projects, physical and digital connectivity, and social infrastructure, including improvements in sanitation and water supply. Strong investment growth is expected to continue through 2025. Consumer price inflation in India is forecast to decelerate from an estimated 4.8 per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent in 2025, staying within the 2-6 per cent medium-term target range set by the central bank. While decreasing energy prices have contributed to the ongoing decline, adverse weather conditions have kept prices of vegetables, cereals, and other staples elevated in 2024, resulting



in spikes in the country's headline inflation in June and September. It said that several developing economies, including China, India, and Mexico, have maintained robust investment growth, while African nations have faced limited public investment due to high debt servicing burdens, and Western Asia has experienced low investment growth amid subdued oil revenues. Global economic growth is forecast at 2.8

per cent in 2025 and 2.9 per cent in 2026, largely unchanged from the rate of 2.8 per cent recorded in 2023 and estimated for 2024. The positive but moderately slower growth projected for the two largest economies—China and the United States of America—will likely be complemented by mild recovery in the European Union, Japan, and the United Kingdom and strong performance in several large developing economies,

notably India and Indonesia, it said. China is facing the prospect of gradual economic moderation, with growth estimated at 4.9 per cent in 2024 and projected at 4.8 per cent in 2025. Public sector investments and strong export performance are partly offset by subdued consumption growth and lingering weakness in the property sector. The Chinese authorities have stepped up policy support to lift property markets, address local government debt challenges, and boost domestic demand; the impacts of relevant initiatives are expected to be manifested over time, it said. The shrinking population and rising trade and technology tensions, if unaddressed, could threaten the country's medium-term growth prospects, it said. Among developing countries, robust momentum in India and modest growth acceleration in Africa, Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean will offset a slight moderation of growth in China. The report noted that weaker external demand, persistent debt challenges, and social unrest and political turmoil in some economies may undermine the outlook for the South Asian region. "However, risks to the outlook are tilted to the downside owing to the possible escalation of geopolitical tensions,

deceleration in external demand, ongoing debt challenges, and social unrest. In addition, as the region is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate hazards, extreme weather events pose a significant risk," it said. It said that the labour market situation in developing countries remains challenging, with significant variations in the outlook driven by differing economic conditions and policy responses. Some economies have exhibited resilience, it said adding that employment indicators in India have remained robust. In India, employment indicators have remained strong throughout 2024, with labour force participation near record highs, the report said, citing the Reserve Bank of India data. Urban unemployment stood at 6.6 per cent during this period—virtually unchanged from the rate of 6.7 per cent recorded in 2023. Although there has been progress in female labour market participation in the country, substantial gender gaps remain. Climate-related shocks have battered South Asia in 2024. During the first half of the year, several of the region's countries—including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—experienced heatwaves, droughts, and irregular rainfall patterns, which led to reduced crop yields and elevated food prices.

## India's industrial production growth hits six-month high of 5.2 per cent in November: Government data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's industrial production (IIP) growth accelerated to a six-month high of 5.2 per cent year-on-year in November 2024, riding on the increased festive demand and pick up in manufacturing sector, according to the official data released on Friday. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) recorded a growth of 2.5 per cent in November 2023, according to a statement by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation. The previous high growth rate at 6.3 per cent was recorded in May 2024. It grew by 4.9 per cent in June and 5 per cent in July 2024. The IIP growth was flat in August before picking up at 3.1 per cent in September and 3.7 per cent in October 2024.



The growth in the factory output, measured in terms of the IIP, in April-November 2024 grew by 4.1 per cent against 6.5 per cent in the year-ago period, the data showed. As per the data, the mining output growth decelerated to 1.9 per cent in November from 7 per cent expansion in the year-ago month. The manufacturing sector's growth accelerated to 5.8 per

cent in November from 1.3 per cent a year ago. Power generation growth slowed to 4.4 per cent from 5.8 per cent a year ago. As per use-based classification, the capital goods segment growth accelerated to 9 per cent in November 2024 against a contraction of 1.1 per cent in the year-ago period. Showing festive demand, consumer durable (or white)

goods production grew by 13.1 per cent during the reporting month against a contraction of 4.8 per cent in November 2023. In November 2024, consumer non-durables output growth remained almost flat at 0.6 per cent compared to a contraction of 3.4 per cent in November 2023. According to the data, infrastructure/construction goods reported a growth of 10 per cent in November 2024, up from a 1.5 per cent expansion in the year-ago period. The data also showed that the output of primary goods logged a 2.7 per cent growth in November 2024 against 8.4 per cent a year earlier. The expansion in the intermediate goods segment was 5 per cent in the month under review, higher than 3.4 per cent a year ago.

## Fund raising from capital markets to jump 21 per cent to ₹14.27 lakh Crore in FY25: Buch

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Overall fundraising from capital markets, including through equity and debt instruments, is estimated to jump by nearly 21 per cent to Rs 14.27 lakh crore in FY25 from the Rs 11.8 lakh crore in FY24, Sebi chief Madhabi Puri Buch said on Friday. Buch said in the past nine months of the current fiscal, entities have mobilised Rs 3.3 lakh crore in equity and Rs 7.3 lakh crore from the debt markets, with the overall mop-up reaching Rs 10.7 lakh crore. "If we project for the next quarter (Q4), we will probably end somewhere like over Rs 14 lakh crore raised for the year in terms of capital, both equity and debt," Buch said addressing a NISM-organised conference here. A presentation made by Buch pegged the FY25 estimate at Rs 14.27 lakh crore. Buch said money raised by real estate investments trusts, infrastructure investment trusts and municipal bonds has a very small contribution to the



overall capital raising at around Rs 10,000 crore in the first nine months of FY25, but added that she sees the activity growing over the next decade to even exceed the money raised from equity and debt markets. The capital markets regulator is working towards expediting the time taken for clearing issuances, Buch said, committing to reduce the time taken for clearing small and medium enterprises (SME) board proposals. She said Sebi is taking up to 3 months for such SME issuances, while the banks are

giving in-principle approvals in 15 minutes, and added that it will like to use more of tech tools to advance the issuances. Buch said a lot of attention is paid to IPOs and Sebi is "flooded" with new applications on the same, but added that other avenues including preferential issuances, institutional placements and rights issues are also important and may go unnoticed. She added that the regulator has come up with a system for expediting rights issuances, and hoped that the industry adopts the same. Pointing out that the regulator has been clearing mutual funds' new offers much faster, the Sebi chairperson said systematic investment plans (SIP) with a minimum amount of Rs 250 will be launched shortly. She appreciated the resource mobilisation done by domestic institutional investors over the last few years, and added that this money has helped in times of volatilities which may see a pull-out by foreign portfolio investors.

## Snag in system: Government extends monthly GST return, payment deadline

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday extended the deadline for filing monthly GST sales return form GSTR-1 and GST payment by 2 days after taxpayers reported technical glitches in the GSTN system. As per a notification by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), the last date for filing GSTR-1 for December is January 13, while that for taxpayers opting for quarterly payment under the QRMP scheme for the October-December period will be January 15. Normally, the last date for filing GSTR-1 for monthly return filers is January 11, while for quarterly taxpayers it



is January 13. The deadline for GST payment by filing GSTR-3B for December has been extended to January 22, from the existing date of January 20. For taxpayers who pay GST quarterly, the due date has been extended to January 24 and January 26, depending on the state-wise registration of the business. Earlier in the day, GST Network said in a post on X

that it has sent an "incident report" to the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on the technical glitches in the system and requested an extension of the filing date of GST sales return or GSTR-1. "GST portal is currently experiencing technical issues and is under maintenance. We expect the portal to be operational by 12:00 noon. CBIC is being sent an incident report to consider extension in filing date," GST Tech, the official handle of GSTN, said in a post on X. The GST Network has since Thursday as taxpayers were unable to generate summary of GSTR-1 and file the return.

## Sensex, Nifty extend losses for third consecutive session

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty nursed losses for the third consecutive session on Friday, in lockstep with a weak trend in global equities as concerns over economic growth and a slowdown in quarterly earnings sapped investors' risk appetite. Surging crude oil prices and a strengthening dollar index also contributed to the weak trend in equities. In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 241.30 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 77,378.91. During the day, the benchmark gyrated 820.15 points between the day's high of 77,919.70 and a low of 77,099.55.



The NSE Nifty dropped 95 points or 0.40 per cent to 23,431.50. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, UltraTech Cement, Sun

Pharma, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Adani Ports and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the major laggards. Tata Consultancy Services

jumped nearly 6 per cent after the IT services company reported an 11.95 per cent jump in the December quarter net profit to Rs 12,380 crore. Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Infosys and Bajaj Finserv were the other big gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 7,170.87 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. "Domestic market sentiment remained subdued due to rising crude oil prices, driven by supply concerns, and a strengthening dollar index. Despite the IT sector's resilience following positive early Q3 results, broader indices bled due to uncertainties surrounding Trump policies and high

valuations. "Consolidation may persist in the near term, yet investors are closely watching the US non-farm payroll data today for further guidance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading lower. US markets were closed on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 2.02 per cent to USD 78.47 a barrel. In the previous session, the 30-share BSE benchmark dropped 528.28 points or 0.68 per cent to sink below the 78,000 level at 77,620.21. The Nifty slumped 162.45 points or 0.69 per cent to 23,526.50.

## Redevelopment of Exclusive La-Mandre Villa Community

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Yugen Infra unveils its latest venture—the redevelopment of La-Mandre, an elite villa community near Mandrem Beach, North Goa. Spanning 8000 square meters, the project features 13 exquisitely designed villas, offering luxurious living amidst serene landscapes. Located just minutes from Goa's iconic beaches, these RERA-approved villas boast spacious plots ranging from 215 to 590 square meters, with nearly 50 per cent open space. Residents will enjoy access to the world-class Golf Course at Yugen Golf City near Mopa Airport. Amit Mangain, Director of Yugen Infra, remarked, "La-Mandre blends opulence with nature, creating a lifestyle of privacy and connectivity in Goa's lush landscapes."

## Gold rises ₹250 to ₹80,550 per 10 gm; silver trades flat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 250 to Rs 80,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday as rupee hit record low amid consistent buying from retailers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal ended the previous session at Rs 80,300 per 10 grams. However, silver traded flat at Rs 93,000 per kg on Friday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity continuing to shine bright for the fourth straight session by appreciating Rs 250 to Rs 80,150 per 10 grams. It had finished at Rs 79,900 per 10 grams on Thursday. Traders said the rise in gold prices at local market is also propelled by robust overseas demand. Meanwhile, the rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86-mark for the first time against the US dollar on Friday as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger



American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds. On a weekly basis, gold prices surged Rs 1,550, or 2 per cent, to Rs 80,550 per 10 grams, while silver shot up 2.5 per cent to Rs 93,000 per kg. On the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery climbed Rs 388, or 0.5 per cent, to Rs 78,492 per 10 grams in the futures trade on Friday. Silver contracts for March delivery bounced Rs 506, or 0.55 per cent, to Rs 92,217 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Comex gold futures increased USD 16.10 per ounce, or 0.6 per cent, to USD 2,706.90 per ounce in the overseas market. "Gold extended rally on

Friday on the back of safe-haven demand due to uncertainty around future US monetary policy under President-elect Donald Trump," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. According to Augmont's Head of Research Renisha Chainani, gold continued its winning streak due to safe-haven demand sparked by worries about Donald Trump's proposed policies, while the UK faced a Budget crisis. "The Federal Open Market Committee's (FOMC) members hinted that more (rate) easing would be appropriate if the data came in as anticipated. "Market participants will be looking for the upcoming US non-farm payrolls and UoM Consumer Sentiment data for additional economic cues," Chainani said. Silver comex futures in the Asian market hours shot up 0.6 per cent to USD 31.20 per ounce.

## SpiceJet to fly 10 grounded aircraft by mid-April

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic carrier SpiceJet on Friday announced plans to bring back into operations 10 of its grounded aircraft, including four Boeing B737 Max, by mid-April. The airline said it has added 10 planes to its fleet since October 2024 -- three grounded aircraft that were brought back into service and seven inducted on lease. The move comes close on the heels of SpiceJet signing a pact with US-based engine MRO StandardAero Inc last month for the restoration of its grounded MAX fleet. SpiceJet has 28 aircraft, of the total 62 in the fleet, in operations, comprising 20 B737, six De Havilland Canada DHC-8 Dash 8 and two Airbus A320, as on January 10 as per flight tracking website planespotter.Com. The remaining 34 aircraft -- 16 B737s and 18 De Havilland Canada DHC-8 Dash 8 -- are on the ground due to various reasons, as per the website. The return of 10 grounded



aircraft back into operations will help the airline significantly increase its current fleet of 28 aircraft, even as some of these planes are re-delivered to lessors during the same period, SpiceJet said. Over the past three months, SpiceJet said its network expansion strategy has resulted in the addition of more than 60 new flights, further enhancing connectivity and service options for its passengers. This pact with StandardAero Inc followed successful partnerships with CFM International, Inc, the OEM for LEAP-1B engines, and a key lessor, paving the way for the un-grounding and return to service of three Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, SpiceJet said.

## INBRIEF

### RAJASTHAN'S GROWTH ENGINE: HINDUSTAN ZINC DRIVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

India's largest and only integrated zinc, lead and silver producer, Hindustan Zinc (NSE: HINDZINC) completes 59 years of operations. Incorporated in 1966 as a public sector undertaking, Hindustan Zinc Limited has grown leaps and bounds since then providing zinc sufficiency to the country and the world at large. As a fully integrated producer, Hindustan Zinc operates underground zinc-lead mines, smelters, and captive power plants in Rajasthan.

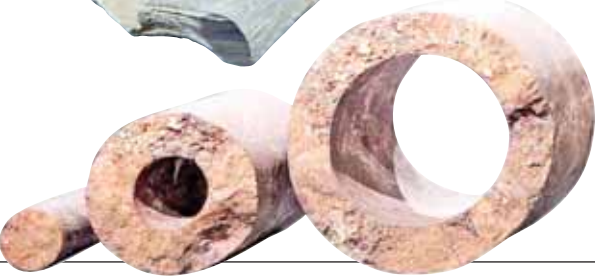
### POFESSOR VANDANA BHALLA OF GNDU HONOURED BY INDIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

AMRITSAR: Prof. Vandana Bhalla from the Department of Chemistry of the Guru Nanak Dev University, has been honoured with the prestigious fellowship of the Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS), Bangalore. This recognition places her among the leading scientists in the country and marks a historic achievement for GNDU, as she becomes only the third individual from the university to receive this distinction in the past 55 years.

### PROF KARAMJEET SINGH CELEBRATES LOHRI WITH GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEES

AMRITSAR: The joyous festival of Lohri was celebrated with great enthusiasm and fervor at Guru Nanak Dev University campus in front Administration Block. Vice Chancellor Prof. Karamjeet Singh joined the non-teaching employees of the university to mark this auspicious occasion.



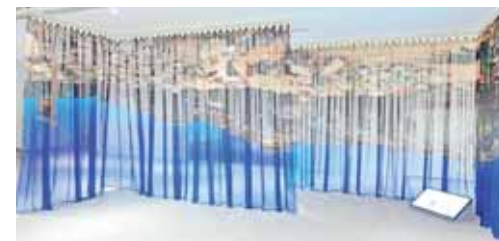
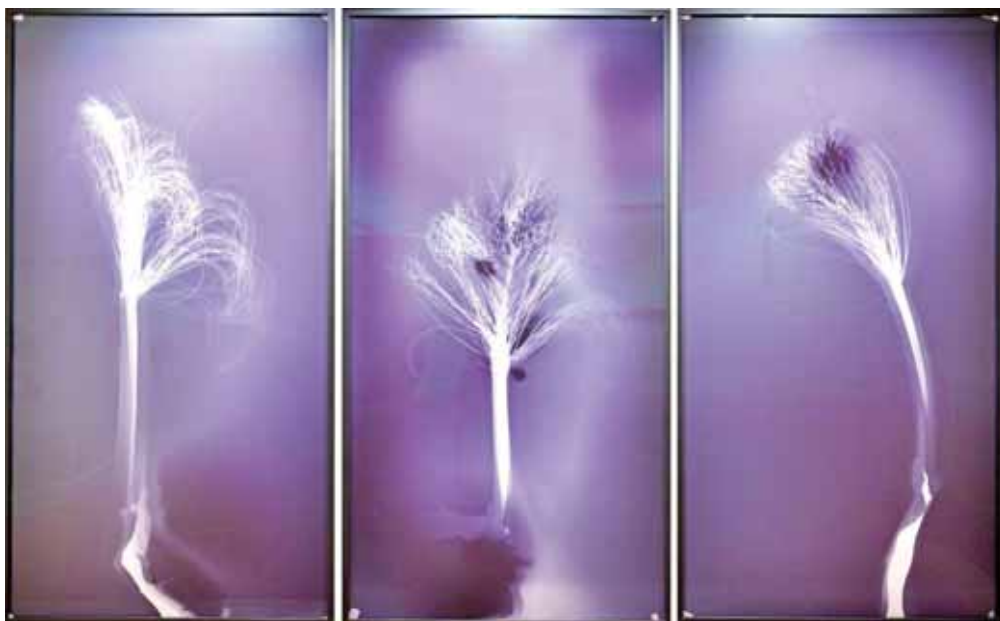


## ROOTS AND REFLECTIONS

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

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

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



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

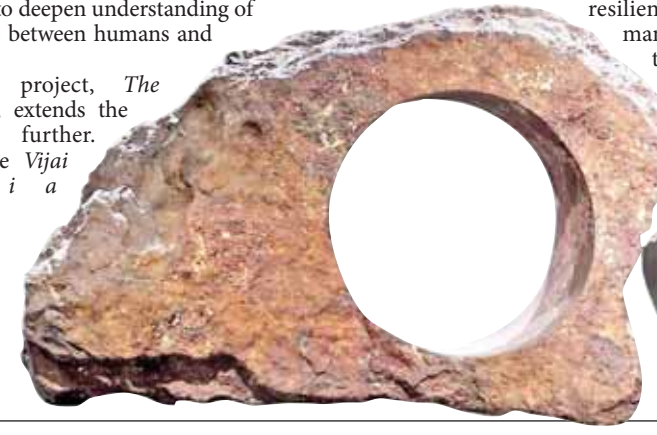
Patchineelam and Ranjana Dave connect themes of grounding and immersion, using tools, landscapes, and micro-stories to reveal the subtle interactions between people and their environments. The Artists' Roundtable becomes a dynamic space where materials and ideas evolve, creating a dialogue that is both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

lifelessness of dead snakes beside the enduring strength of mountains. This contrast challenges visitors to confront the environmental challenges of today while appreciating the artistry that brings these narratives to life.

The simplicity of the presentation allows the works to speak for themselves. The museum provides a space for these artists to explore their deep engagement with the natural world, leaving visitors with a sense of introspection and a renewed connection to the Earth. *The Elemental You* offers a thoughtful exploration of how we relate to our environment. It reminds us of the fragility of our planet and the enduring beauty found in its details. As you leave the exhibition, the reflections it inspires remain, offering a quiet yet powerful reminder of our place within the larger story of the Earth.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

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



By TEAM VIVA

The 10th edition of *Vividh Mat: Perspectives*, presented by Devyani Jaipuria in collaboration with ASAVARI, focused on the theme *Shringara: Rang Anurag*. This edition explored *Shringara*, a concept that embodies love, beauty and the depth of the human experience. The event began with an engaging discussion led by Padmeshri Shovana Narayan, SNA awardee and Ambassador Dr Suresh Goel, former DG of ICCR. The panel also included Jatin Das, the renowned artist and sculptor, celebrated poet Sudeep Sen and actor-director Sohaila Kapur. Together, they shared their insights into *Shringara*, highlighting it as more than just an aesthetic concept, but an essential part of life.



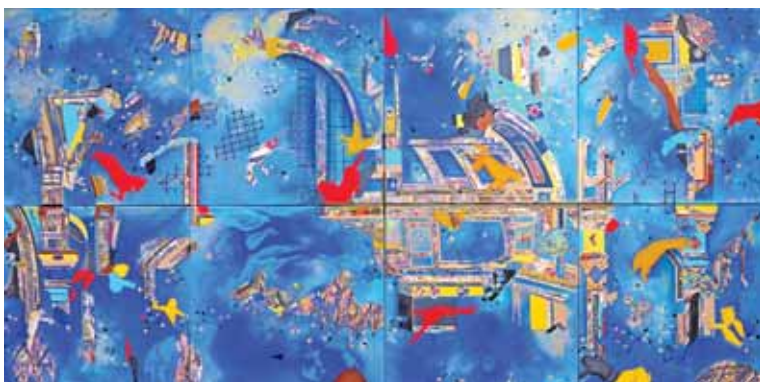
Jatin Das explained that *Shringara* is not only about visual beauty but is also the very pulse of life. He described it as a delicate balance between form and emotion, where art touches the soul. Sudeep Sen further elaborated by describing *Shringara* as "the poetry of the senses," a celebration that speaks directly to the heart, connecting art, love and life. He emphasised how *Shringara* invites us to reflect on the deepest layers of the human soul. Sohaila Kapur added to the discussion by describing *Shringara* as a means of capturing the essence of beauty through performance. She noted that it is the emotional core of art, brought to life through movement, offering an experience that connects the audience directly to the emotions conveyed. The conversation highlighted how *Shringara* is not only a visual or emotional experience but also a spiritual one, bridging cultural and philosophical perspectives. Shovana Narayan, deeply connected to classical Indian dance, shared her personal view of *Shringara*, describing it as a language that speaks directly to the heart. For her, the evening was a celebration of beauty; it was the culmination of



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

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

## LAYERS OF MEANING



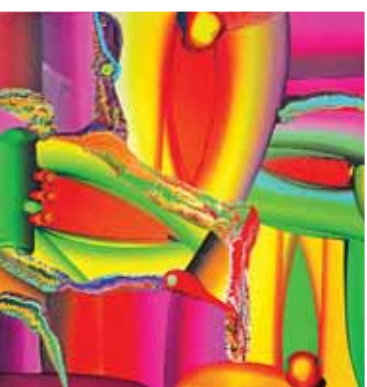
*Echoes of Elegance* presents a unique exploration of India's vibrant art scene through its diverse creators, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

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

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

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

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



# India pacer Varun Aaron retires from 'representative cricket'

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India pacer Varun Aaron, who was once regarded as the country's fastest bowler before injuries hampered his promising career, announced retirement from "representative cricket" on Friday after his home state Jharkhand's campaign ended in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy. The 35-year-old Aaron made the announcement on social media after Jharkhand failed to go beyond the preliminary stage of the marquee domestic one-day event. After a dazzling start, Aaron struggled with erratic form, which was made worse by injury breakdowns, and he had not represented India since 2015. "For the past 20 years, I have lived, breathed, and thrived on the rush of bowling fast. Today, with immense gratitude, I officially announce my retirement from representative cricket," Aaron posted on his Instagram account.

At just 21, Aaron burst onto the scene during the 2010-11 Vijay Hazare Trophy, showcasing his raw pace and making a mark with a blistering 153kph delivery against Gujarat in the final. His ability to consistently bowl at speeds exceeding 150kph quickly caught the attention of the Indian cricketing fraternity and he soon made his international debut in an ODI against England in Mumbai in 2011. This was followed by a Test debut at the same venue against the West Indies, again in 2011. However, the relentless demands of bowling at high speed took a significant toll on his body. He played nine ODIs and as many Tests, taking 29 wickets across the two formats for India. Over the course of his career, he endured as many as eight back stress fractures and three foot fractures, which severely hampered his progress.



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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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



## Gael Monfils reaches his 35th ATP final

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

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

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



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

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

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**  
Pratika Rawal showcased maturity beyond her experience, while Tejal Hasabnis capped a memorable comeback, posting a fifty each, as India outplayed an inexperienced Ireland by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match women's ODI series here on Friday. Rawal anchored the modest run chase of 239 after stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana's brisk 41, smashing 10 fours and one six for a career-best 89 (96 balls). Hasabnis, who last played an ODI against New Zealand in October 2024, struck her first fifty after her comeback, remaining unbeaten on 53 off 46 balls with the help of nine boundaries. Rawal and Hasabnis put together a match-winning 116-run partnership from 84 balls with India winning the match with 93 balls to spare. Carrying forward her dominant form from the West Indies series, Mandhana gave the team a fantastic start with a blistering 29-ball 41, studded with six fours and a six. In the process, she became the second Indian and 15th overall to surpass 4,000 ODI runs. Mandhana unsettled the Irish bowlers with her attacking strokeplay on both sides of the wicket. Her aggression was particularly evident against seamer Dempsey in the eighth over, when she stepped out to hammer a boundary, followed by a six and another four. Her rookie opening partner Rawal, who debuted in the preceding West Indies series, provided excellent support.

The duo shared their third fifty-plus opening stand in four matches, keeping the scoreboard ticking with ease. However, Ireland managed a breakthrough right at the end of powerplay when Mandhana mistimed a slog sweep to mid-on, falling nine runs short of her fifty. Harleen Deol (20) and Jemimah Rodrigues (9) looked in good touch initially, but clever bowling by left-arm spinner Aimee Maguire (3/57 from 8 overs) stalled India's momentum temporarily. The 18-year-old Maguire lured Jemimah into stepping out too far, resulting in a stumping when the batter was at least a foot outside her crease. This phase saw India lose three wickets for 46 runs, but Mandhana's explosive start



ensured the team stayed well on par. The inexperience of Ireland came to fore as they failed to seize the momentum, leaking 21 runs in extras. Laura Delany was the weakest link in their bowling unit and she bowled successive no balls with two waist-high full tosses in the

24th over when Hasabnis cashed in on the opportunity to hit back-to-back fours from the two freebies. Earlier, butter-fingered India let Ireland off the hook with their pathetic fielding as visiting skipper Gaby Lewis carved out a classy 92 to lift her team to a respectable 238 for 7. Opting to bat, Ireland were in deep trouble at 56 for four in the 14th over, but Lewis and Leah Paul (59 off 73 balls) added 117 runs for the fifth wicket to steer their team to safety. Lewis scored her runs in 129 balls, lacing the knock with 15 boundaries. Aided by at least three clear dropped catches and a few misfields, the duo of Lewis and Paul went about their job in a calculated manner and brought a semblance of stability to the Ireland innings while putting together the team's first-ever century partnership against India. Medium pacer Titas Sadhu effected the first breakthrough for India when she induced an outside edge from Sarah Forbes (9) after the batter tried to play away from her body, and Deepti Sharma did the rest in the slip cordon. Making their first visit to the country, Ireland were reduced to 34 for two thanks to a terrible mix-up that led to the run out of Una Raymond-Hoey (5), who attempted an inexplicable single despite hitting the ball straight to Jemimah Rodrigues at cover. Orla Prendergast (9) was next to go as she was stumped by Ghosh off the bowling of leg-spinner Priya Mishra (2/56), leaving the visitors in a spot of bother at 56 for three in the 14th over.