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FREEFALL OF FREEBIES

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday launched the first part of its 'Sankalp Patra' for the upcoming Delhi assembly elections, surpassing all 'freebies' expectations with the announcement of six poll promises, including Rs 21,000 for pregnant women, Rs 2,500 under the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana', LPG cylinders at Rs 500, and Rs 3,000 pension for senior citizens aged over 70 years. However, shortly after the announcement, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal sharply reacted to the BJP's manifesto, calling it a 'Kejriwal Patra' instead of 'Sankalp Patra'. He accused the BJP of 'copying' his party for announcing several 'revis' (freebies) in its 'Sankalp Patra', stating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi won't approve of the 'freebies' promised by the BJP. "The BJP has repeatedly said that Kejriwal gives away free handouts, but today the BJP's national president announced that they too will provide free handouts to the people of Delhi," Kejriwal said. "I want to tell them that they should acknowledge that Prime Minister Modi was wrong when he said the things he did about us. They should also accept that free handouts are not wrong—they are a gift from God and good for the country. He should come forward and assure that he consents to these (BJP) promises. He should tell us that I was right in providing free handouts," Kejriwal added. Releasing the first part of the manifesto, BJP President Nadra said that women's empowerment has been a priority area for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He added that BJP-ruled states, including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Haryana, are already providing financial aid to women. The second promise of the BJP is to provide LPG cylinders for Rs 500 to women from poor families and one free cylinder each on the occasions of



BJP National President JP Nadra along with Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and others leaders during the launch of 'BJP Sankalp Patra Part-I' for Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

AAP promises, BJP dismisses

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In another move to target youth voters, former Chief Minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, seeking re-election in the assembly polls, announced a major guarantee providing free bus travel to all school and college students in Delhi. Additionally, Kejriwal proposed a 50 percent concession on metro fares for students, urging the Central government to collaborate with the Delhi government in sharing the cost of this initiative. Terming it an irresponsible move, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit slammed Kejriwal's proposal, saying that the AAP promises what it cannot deliver financially and would eventually accuse the national authorities of obstruction. In his letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the AAP convenor



release of the BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' manifesto for the Delhi elections 2025. Notably, Delhi Metro is operated in collaboration between the Delhi and Central governments. The announcement, however, cannot be implemented immediately due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) currently in place in Delhi. Kejriwal assured that the scheme would be a priority for his government if re-elected. "The metro fares are expensive for students. I have requested PM Modi to introduce this scheme, and we are ready to bear half the cost," Kejriwal said at the press conference, adding that the initiative could be rolled out after the elections. Continued on page 2

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Mystery deepens in Saif Ali assault

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

More than 40 hours after a gruesome attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan, the Mumbai police had not achieved any breakthrough in the sensational case as of late Friday evening. Meanwhile, the actor was making a rapid recovery from the grievous wounds he sustained in the knife attack by an intruder early Thursday. On Friday, Saif, 54, was moved from the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to a special room at Lilavati Hospital. The police detained one suspect in connection with the attack, but released him after questioning, finding that he had no connection to the case. "The person who was brought to the Bandra police station is not related to the Saif Ali Khan case. We released him after questioning. No one has yet been arrested in connection with yesterday's incident," a senior police officer said. Meanwhile, doctors attending to Saif at Lilavati Hospital expressed satisfaction with his progress. "Saif Ali Khan is doing excellently. We made him walk, and he can walk well. There is no problem and not much pain," said Dr. Nitin Dange of Lilavati Hospital. The actor had sustained six stab wounds, including one to his spine, while grappling with an intruder who had broken into his 12th-floor apartment in the posh "Satguru Sharan" building located at the junction of 29th and 24th Roads in Bandra (W), northwest Mumbai. The knife attack occurred between 2 a.m. and 2:30 a.m. Thursday, following a failed burglary attempt by the yet-to-be-identified intruder. After his admission to Lilavati Hospital, Saif underwent surgery to remove a knife lodged in his spine and to seal a spinal fluid leakage. "The actor was brought to our hospital with six injuries, two of which were deep. We carried out a surgery near his spine and removed a 2.5-inch piece of knife from the spine," said Dr. Niraj Uttamani, Chief Operating Officer of Lilavati Hospital, on Thursday. Continued on page 2

Imran Khan convicted



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Friday sentenced jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 14 and seven years in prison respectively after finding them guilty of corruption in the 190 million pounds al-Qadir Trust case. Judge Nasir Javed Rana of the anti-corruption court announced the verdict in a makeshift court set up in Adila jail where Khan is currently lodged. Khan is facing dozens of cases after he lost a trust vote in Parliament in 2022. Khan has been convicted for "corrupt practices" and "misuse of authority", while his wife has been convicted for "involvement in illegal activities". Khan, who has been jailed since August 2023, was also fined Rs 1 million and Bibi half a million rupees. Failure to pay the fine will entail an additional six months of imprisonment for Khan and three months for Bibi. The court also ordered the confiscation of the land of Al-Qadir University set up by them. Bibi was arrested from the court after the sentencing. Supporters and leaders of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party staged a protest outside Parliament House, held placards, and chanted slogans, demanding his release. "Today's verdict has tarnished the reputation of the judiciary. In this case, neither I benefited nor the government lost. I don't want any relief and will face all cases," Khan was quoted as saying by his party. "A dictator is doing all this," he said. PTI leaders strongly denounced the verdict, terming it "unjust", "shameful", and a case of "political victimisation". PTI chairman Gohar Khan said, "The behaviour of the court has been unjust. Khan sahib has not benefitted from a single rupee from this matter." PTI lawyer Faisal Chaudhry termed the decision "political use of the National Accountability Bureau". Another party leader, Shibli Faraz, argued that Khan and Bibi were not beneficiaries of the alleged transactions. He contended that they were being punished for founding the Al-Qadir University, which aimed to promote the teachings of the Prophet. "Those who looted the country walk free, while sincere leaders face jail," said Faraz, while reaffirming to challenge the verdict. Khan can appeal against the judgment in the High Court and if needed in the Supreme Court. Continued on page 2



Israel-Hamas limp towards normalcy

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's security Cabinet on Friday recommended approval of a ceasefire deal after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed an agreement had been reached that would pause the 15-month war with Hamas in Gaza and release dozens of hostages held by militants there. Mediators Qatar and the US announced the ceasefire on Wednesday, but the deal hung in limbo for more than a day as Netanyahu insisted there were last-minute snags he blamed on Hamas. The militants maintained they were "committed" to the deal, while residents of Gaza and families of the hostages anxiously waited to see if it would materialise. The deal now goes to the full Cabinet of ministers for final sign-off. It is expected to 'OK' the ceasefire, which could start as soon as Sunday, even though it has drawn fierce resistance from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners. Their objections could destabilise his government, however. Hamas triggered the war with its October 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and left some 250 others captive. Continued on page 2

Bharat on Auto Mobility

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has emerged as a major automobile hub in the world and number of cars sold in the country annually surpasses the population of many countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Friday. Underlining this, he also said future of mobility belongs to India that saw an unprecedented sale of 2.5 crore vehicles a year, and attracted USD 36 billion foreign direct investment in just four years. Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, the prime minister also emphasised that India stands as an outstanding destination for every investor looking to shape one's future in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi. PTI

chain of the mobility ecosystem — from automobile manufacturers to components, electronics parts, tyre and energy storage makers, and automotive software firms and material recyclers — under a single umbrella. Modi said the automotive industry was driven by innovation and technology and stressed that the future belongs to the East, Asia, and India. "India is an excellent destination for every investor looking to see their future in mobility," he said while reassuring everyone that the government is fully supportive and encouraged everyone to continue advancing with the mantra of 'Make in India, Make for the World'. Continued on page 2

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Har Pal Aapke Saath

Cable network rules changed: Online registration for LCOs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The government on Friday relaxed the rules governing cable television networks by making the registration process for Local Cable Operators (LCOs) fully online, with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting designated as the registering authority. The amended Cable Television Network Rules of 1994 came into effect on Friday, and the government announced that the Local Cable Operators registration certificate would be issued in real-time after the successful verification of applicant details, including Aadhaar, PAN, CIN, and DIN, among other documents. Previously, the LCO

registration process was conducted offline at the local head post office in the area where the LCO's office was situated, with the head postmaster serving as the registering authority. Under the new rules, LCOs will apply for new registrations or renewals online via the Broadcast Seva Portal of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The registration certificate will also be issued online. LCO registrations will be granted or renewed for a period of five years, with a processing fee of Rs 5,000. The registration will be valid for operations across India. Renewal applications must be made at least 90 days before the registration's expiry.

LCOs may appeal to the Appellate Authority, i.e., the Under Secretary (DAS), if their registration or renewal is denied by the registering authority (Designated Section Officer). The appeal must be filed within 30 days of the denial. Existing LCO registrations will remain valid until the period mentioned in the registration certificate. However, if the existing registration is valid for less than 90 days, LCOs must immediately apply for renewal via the portal. Applications for registration or renewal made to post offices that are currently pending must be withdrawn, and new applications must be submitted via the portal.

Supreme Court directs UP, Haryana to impose firecracker ban in NCR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Terming the rising air pollution a "drastic" problem, the Supreme Court on Friday stated that the measures needed to tackle it should also be "drastic." The Court directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers in their areas falling under the National Capital Region (NCR). A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan noted that, like Delhi, the Rajasthan government has already imposed a perpetual and complete ban on the sale and bursting of firecrackers in the NCR areas of the state. The Court asked Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to adopt similar measures.

The bench stated that until these two states pass their own orders, its previous direction banning firecrackers would remain in effect until the next hearing scheduled for March 24. "The environmental problems are drastic, and so drastic measures are needed," the bench remarked, emphasizing that the Court must take action and issue harsher orders, given that other arms of the government have not effectively addressed the issue. The bench also mentioned it would hear pleas challenging the ban on firecracker-manufacturing firms during the next hearing. When a lawyer requested the Court to lift the complete ban due to its impact on the manufacturers' fundamental

rights, the bench stated that environmental concerns take precedence over such issues. The lawyer then urged the Court to at least allow the sale of "green crackers." "We have to examine how green are green crackers," the bench responded. Additionally, the Court asked the Centre to respond to the petitions filed by firecracker-manufacturing firms. The Court had earlier directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments to enforce a complete ban on firecrackers until further orders. It also noted that the Delhi government had imposed a year-round ban on the manufacture, storage, sale, and delivery of firecrackers, including online marketing. "We are of the view that this ban will only be effective

when other states forming part of the NCR also impose similar measures. Even the state of Rajasthan has implemented a similar ban in the NCR areas of Rajasthan. For the time being, we direct the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to impose a similar ban," the bench had said. Expressing serious concern over high pollution levels in Delhi during Diwali, the Supreme Court had previously criticized the poor implementation of its orders, stating that its directives on the firecracker ban were "hardly implemented." The bench was hearing a plea filed by environmentalist M.C. Mehta in 1985, which seeks directions to curb air pollution in the national capital and surrounding areas.

MEA, Army align on LAC standoff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
There is no contradiction of position on the situation along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) asserted on Friday, days after Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi said a "degree" of standoff exists between Indian and Chinese militaries in the region. "We do not see any contradiction between what the Army Chief has said and the position we have taken," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. Following an understanding reached on October 21, the Indian and Chinese militaries sides completed the disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks on the margins of the BRICS Summit in Russia on October 23 and agreed to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling an intention to normalise the relations. Last month, NSA Ajit Doval travelled to Beijing and held Special Representatives talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the boundary dispute. At a press conference this week, Gen Dwivedi said there is still a "degree" of standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries.

Air quality improves, restrictions lifted

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Friday revoked the actions under Stage III ('Severe' Air Quality) of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) following an improvement in the national Capital's Air Quality Index (AQI) after it reached 302 a day before. "The Sub-Committee, accordingly, decided to revoke its order dated 15.01.2025, for invoking actions under Stage-

III ('Severe' Air quality) of the extant Schedule of GRAP, with immediate effect," the official order said. The revocation of Stage III actions, which had been implemented on January 15 when the AQI exceeded 350, comes in response to the positive trend in air quality levels. "Despite this improvement, actions under Stage I and II of GRAP will continue to be enforced across the NCR," an order said. The Sub-Committee on GRAP, which is responsible

for monitoring the air quality, met to review the current scenario. They noted that the AQI in Delhi is now in the 'Very Poor' category, and with favorable weather conditions predicted by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), the air quality is expected to remain stable. However, as a precaution, the situation will be closely monitored to ensure AQI levels do not deteriorate further.

Kharge accuses BJP of misleading youth on job crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP-led Centre on Friday of duping the country's youngsters on employment generation by making false claims and coming up with false data on jobs. He alleged that the government has only given paper leaks to youngsters and snatched their jobs with its bad policies. "False claims, falsification of data and covering up the truth of declining jobs have become a habit of the Modi government. 82

per cent youth are looking for a job this year, 55 per cent said it became difficult to find a job last year. 37 per cent say they have given up hope of finding a new job in 2025," Kharge claimed in a post on X. He further claimed that according to a separate survey, 69 per cent of Indian human resources (HR) professionals feel that finding qualified talent for a role has become more challenging now. "Without conducting a census, by estimating and extrapolating old surveys using government data, the Modi

government is misleading crores of youth in the name of generating employment. By converting unpaid labour into jobs and counting even one-hour work per week as jobs, it is deceiving the country." The government has duped the youth with lies like paper leaks by the Mafia Raj, stampede for a few jobs, snatching jobs by shutting down MSME through bad policies like demonetisation, usurping the right to reservation, keeping government job posts vacant for years and promising two crore jobs annually," Kharge said.

Mystery deepens in Saif Ali assault

From page 1
Contrary to earlier reports suggesting that Saif's elder son, Ibrahim (23), had rushed his bleeding father to the hospital, it has now emerged that Saif himself took an autorickshaw to Lilavati Hospital. His eight-year-old son, Taimur, accompanied him in the rickshaw. Confirming how Saif reached the hospital, autorickshaw driver Bhajan Singh Rana (47) told a television channel: "I was passing by the building when I suddenly heard a cry for help from a lady (apparently Saif's housemaid) standing near the main gate asking me to stop the vehicle." "When I stopped the vehicle, the actor, whom I did not recognize at first, walked up to my autorickshaw and sat down. There was a small child (Taimur) and one more person with him at that time. He (Saif) appeared calm and

collected throughout our journey to the hospital. The only thing he asked me during the ride was, 'Kitna time lagega?' (How long will it take to reach the hospital?)," Rana said. Doctors at Lilavati Hospital have hailed Saif as a "real-life hero," noting that despite being in deep pain and covered in blood, he managed to reach the hospital on his own in an autorickshaw, barely an hour after the attack. The incident took place sometime after 2 a.m. on Thursday in the 12th-floor flat of Saif's "Satguru Sharan" building. A housemaid at Saif's residence, identified as Eliyama Phillipps alias Lima, was the first to see the intruder and raised an alarm, prompting Saif to rush out of his bedroom to investigate. Seeing Saif, the knife-wielding intruder, suspected to have broken into the actor's home for a burglary, attacked him.

During the ensuing struggle, the actor was stabbed multiple times before the assailant fled the flat. Following the attack, the Bandra Police and Crime Branch set up 10 investigative teams to track down the assailant. Speaking to the media, Maharashtra's Minister of State for Home, Yogesh Kadam, said: "There is no involvement of any criminal gang in the attack on Saif Ali Khan. The preliminary probe suggests that robbery was the motive behind the incident." "The police have identified one person from the CCTV footage. A suspect was detained for questioning today. We suspect the involvement of others, and the police are searching for them," Kadam said. The suspect detained by the Bandra police was later released, as he had no connection to the incident.

Israel-Hamas limp towards normalcy

From page 1
Israel responded with a devastating offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed. Beyond the death and destruction in Gaza, the conflict has also destabilised the Middle East and sparked worldwide protests. On Thursday, Israeli strikes killed at least 72 people in Gaza. In previous conflicts, both sides stepped up military operations in the final hours before ceasefires as a way to project strength. A three-phase deal Netanyahu instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning from Gaza, and said their families were informed a deal had been reached. The prime minister's office said if the deal passes,

the ceasefire could start Sunday when the first hostages could be freed. Under the deal, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes, and there would be a surge of humanitarian assistance. The remainder of the hostages, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second -- and much more difficult -- phase that will be negotiated during the first. Hamas has said it will not release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal, while Israel has vowed to keep fighting until it dismantles the group and to maintain open-ended security control over the territory. Jaher Jabareen, head of

Hamas' office responsible for prisoners, said on Friday that the names of those expected to be released from Israeli jails will be published, but didn't say when. Longer-term questions about post-war Gaza remain, including who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction. An Egyptian official and a Hamas official confirmed that the last-minute issues were over the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released from Israeli jails during the first phase of the deal, but those have now been resolved. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private negotiations. The Hamas official said mediators showed the group Israel's approval. The Egyptian official added that an Israeli delegation from the military and Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency arrived in Cairo on Friday to

discuss the reopening of the Rafah crossing, a key link between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. An Israeli official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, confirmed a delegation was going to Cairo to discuss the crossing. Objections to the deal in Israel On Thursday, Israel's hard-line national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, threatened to quit the government if Israel approved the ceasefire. He reiterated his stand on Friday, writing on X, "If the deal passes, we will leave the government with a heavy heart." While Ben-Gvir's resignation would not bring down the government or derail the ceasefire deal, the move would destabilise the government at a delicate moment and could eventually lead to its collapse if Ben-Gvir were joined by other key Netanyahu allies.

Imran Khan convicted

From page 1
The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in December 2023 filed the case against Khan (72), Bibi (50) and six others, accusing them of causing a loss to the tune of 190 million pounds (PRs 50 billion) to the national kitty. Only Khan and Bibi have been prosecuted in the case as all others, including a property tycoon, were out of the country. The case revolves around allegations that an amount of PRs 50 billion, returned to Pakistan by the UK's National Crime Agency as part of a settlement with the property tycoon, was misused. The funds were reportedly intended for the national treasury but were allegedly redirected for the personal benefit of the businessman who helped Bibi and Khan to set up a university. Bibi, as a trustee of the Al-Qadir Trust, is accused of benefiting from this settlement, including acquiring 458 kanals of land for Al-Qadir University in Jhelum. Judge Rana concluded the hearing in the case on December 18 but reserved the judgment until December 23. Later, he fixed January 6 as the date for announcing the verdict, Geo News reported. He was on leave on January 6 so the verdict was postponed until January 13. But the verdict was once again deferred as the accused and their lawyers were not present in the court on January 13. The judgment comes amidst the ongoing negotiation between the government and Khan's PTI to address the political instability in the country due to the imprisonment of Khan and several other leaders of his party. Pakistan has been in the grip of political turmoil since the elections were held on February 8 last year when the PTI refused to accept the result and held several protests over alleged rigging of polls, and Khan's detention. So far three rounds of talks have been held between the government and the PTI and the opposition party has presented its charter of demands in writing to the government. Khan claims all cases against him were "politically motivated". Last year, he was acquitted in the cipher case for disclosing official secrets and the Iddat case for violating marriage laws but was charged in the Toshakhana 2 corruption case.

Bharat on Auto Mobility

From page 1
Modi said the 'Make in India' initiative has played an important role in unleashing the growth potential of India's auto industry. The performance linked incentive (PLI) schemes, he said, have given new momentum to the 'Make in India' campaign, aiding sales of over Rs 2.25 lakh crore and creation of more than 1.5 lakh direct jobs in the sector. "Driven by the aspirations of the people and energy of the youth, India's automobile sector is witnessing an unprecedented transformation," he said, and added that in the past year, the Indian auto industry has

grown by nearly 12 per cent and exports rose. Modi remarked that the number of cars sold annually in India surpasses the population of many countries. The sale of approximately 2.5 crore cars in a year demonstrates the continuously growing demand in India, he added. India is currently the world's fifth-largest economy and the third-largest passenger vehicle market. The prime minister further said as India ascends to become one of the top three economies globally, the country's auto market will witness unprecedented transformation and expansion.

Several factors drive the future of mobility in India, including the country's large youth population, the expanding middle class, rapid urbanisation, modern infrastructure development, and affordable vehicles through the 'Make in India' initiative, he said. He pointed out a major customer base is India's middle class and over the past decade, 25 crore Indians have risen out of poverty, forming a neo-middle class that is purchasing their first vehicles. Modi said India is building a mobility system that supports both the economy and ecology, reducing the import bill for fossil fuels. The country, he said, is focusing

on the development of green technology, EVs, hydrogen fuel and biofuels. Underlining the comprehensive support provided by the government to the auto sector at every level, Modi remarked that over the past decade, new avenues for FDI, technology transfer, and global partnerships were established in the industry. He informed that in the last four years alone, the sector has attracted over USD 36 billion in Foreign Direct Investment. He noted that this figure was expected to multiply in the coming years. The Prime Minister reiterated the government's commitment to developing a

complete ecosystem for auto manufacturing within India. Modi also talked about the rapid growth of electric mobility in India over the past few years and remarked that the sale of electric vehicles has increased 640 times in the past decade. He said while only around 2,600 electric vehicles were sold annually ten years ago, over 16.8 lakh electric vehicles were sold in 2024. The prime minister projected that the number of electric vehicles in India could increase eight-fold by the end of this decade, showcasing the immense potential in this segment. He also asked the manufacturers to take

advantage of the vehicle scrapping policy and suggested that companies could introduce their own incentive schemes to encourage more people to scrap their old vehicles. The prime minister reminisced Ratan Tata and Osamu Suzuki. He said that the contributions of both the stalwarts were immense into the growth of the Indian auto sector as well as towards fulfilling the dreams of middle-class families of India. Modi expressed confidence that their legacy will continue to inspire the entire mobility sector of India. Speaking on the occasion, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said

Bharat Mobility 2025 presents the India story to the world and that it will augment investments and boost trade for the country. Auto industry has emerged as a symbol for Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India and startups are also participating in the event, he said. The minister informed that India has become the largest manufacturer of three-wheelers and tractors in the world and also holds the top spot as a two-wheeler market in the world. Union ministers Nitin Gadkari, Manohar Lal, H D Kumaraswamy, Jitan Ram Manjhi, and Hardeep Singh Puri too were present among other dignitaries at the event.

FREEFALL OF FREEBIES

From page 1
Nadda also added that the BJP will increase the senior citizen pension for people aged between 60 and 70 from Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 and for senior citizens, widows, divyang (differently-abled) individuals, and the destitute aged over 70 from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000. In a bid to woo slum dwellers, the party will launch 'Atal Canteens' in JJ clusters to provide nutritious meals at Rs 5. Nadda also assured that all the schemes currently running in Delhi will continue. Meanwhile, AAP chief Kejriwal asked, "Why should people vote for them?" adding that the BJP manifesto only

promises what the ruling party is already offering. He criticized the BJP for failing to include any promise in their manifesto regarding improvements in law and order, calling their poll document a 'bundle of lies.' On Nadda's claim that they will investigate the scam in Mohalla clinics, Kejriwal alleged that the BJP has only promised the same old schemes, which they have failed to deliver on. Kejriwal also claimed that the BJP manifesto mentions that Mohalla Clinics will be closed. "The AAP will go across Delhi to ask people if they want these clinics or not," the former Chief Minister said.

AAP promises, BJP dismisses

From page 1
"Delhi Metro is a 50:50 joint project between the Delhi Government and the Central Government. Therefore, the expenditure on this should be borne equally by both governments," the letter read. "To reduce the financial burden on students, I propose to give a 50 percent concession to students in Delhi Metro," the letter continued. Kejriwal said that students in Delhi are dependent on the Metro for commuting to schools and colleges, and thus, the financial burden on them must be reduced. "I am writing this letter to draw your attention to an

important matter concerning the school and college students of Delhi. The students of Delhi depend largely on the Metro to commute to their school or college," the letter stated. He also took to X to share the announcement: "The expense of bus and metro fares will no longer be a hindrance to education. Once our government is formed, we will start free bus travel for school and college students and will also provide concessions in metro fares. Every penny spent on students is an investment in the future of the country." Speaking at the press conference, Kejriwal

announced free bus rides for male students if his party is re-elected in the February 5 polls. The AAP government already provides free bus travel to women in the city. Explaining the rationale, Kejriwal reasoned that these measures are designed to remove a significant financial burden on students, ensuring that access to education remains uninterrupted by economic barriers. "Women in Delhi are already enjoying free bus rides. Now, we will extend the same benefit to male students to ease their financial burden and promote education accessibility," Kejriwal said. Responding to a media

query, Arvind Kejriwal said, "We are saying that students' metro fares should be reduced by half. Does the BJP agree to this, and will they include it in their manifesto? If the BJP does not include this in their manifesto, why should students vote for them?" Meanwhile, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit publicly criticized Kejriwal's 50% metro fare concession proposal, labeling it as 'irresponsible.' He questioned why the AAP had not previously implemented similar pledges, suggesting duplicity in their promises. Dikshit further accused the AAP of attempting to mislead the

public by shifting blame to the central government. He claimed that AAP promises what it cannot deliver financially and would eventually accuse the national authorities of obstruction. The upcoming Delhi Assembly elections are set to witness a triangular contest between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Congress. The Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP will aim for its third consecutive term, riding on its previous electoral successes. Meanwhile, the BJP and Congress are preparing to challenge AAP's dominance in the capital.

AAP mixes AI with welfare to woo voters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is going all out to woo voters in an effort to secure victory for the third consecutive time in the Delhi assembly polls. The party is using a mix of technology, including artificial intelligence (AI) spoofs targeting BJP leaders, and traditional methods like padyatras to reach out to the electorate.

A key aspect of the AAP campaign is its use of AI to produce targeted content. This includes videos featuring party leader Arvind Kejriwal alongside Babasaheb Ambedkar and AI-generated spoofs of popular Bollywood characters to attack the opposition, especially the BJP. These videos, including satirical takes on BJP leaders, are designed to engage a tech-savvy electorate while delivering the AAP's message in a modern, accessible format.

The use of the iconic Gabbar character from the movie Sholay to mock the BJP's claims of superior governance serves as a prime example of such digs. A senior party leader said the campaign strategy includes a mix of door-to-door contact, rallies by top party leaders, and extensive use of social media to highlight the achievements of the AAP government. The party also started its outreach in various constituencies through its padyatra campaign that began in mid-2024, and candidates were announced early compared to other parties to take a strategic lead, he said.

The AAP, however, must tread carefully as the Election Commission has issued an advisory asking all political parties to promote transparency and accountability in the use of AI-generated content. The Delhi Police has also designated a



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses a press conference. Ranjan Dimri

nodal officer to monitor social media platforms and SMS for potential misuse, including the circulation of deepfake videos and misleading messages during the assembly polls. While technology plays a key role in campaigning, the AAP has placed a strong emphasis on traditional outreach methods to strengthen personal connections with voters. E-rickshaws fitted with LED screens and loudspeakers blaring campaign songs and speeches are ensuring that Kejriwal's message reaches every corner of the city.

In addition, the AAP is strategically targeting key voter segments with a mix of tailored welfare promises. For women voters, the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana offers a monthly allowance of Rs 2,100, along with free bus rides, while the promise of free healthcare for senior citizens, accessible at both government and private hospitals, is central to AAP's appeal to elderly voters.

For the city's auto-rickshaw drivers, said to be a core voter base of the AAP, the party is offering Rs 10 lakh in insurance and Rs 1 lakh in financial assistance for their daughters' marriages. Kejriwal, along with his wife Sunita, recently shared a meal with an auto driver's family and invited drivers to his home for tea to strengthen this connection. The AAP is also focusing on the 'Purvanchali' community, a significant segment of Delhi's electorate. It organises Chhath Puja celebrations for community members hailing from eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and has launched a campaign song in the Bhojpuri language to reach out to them.

To engage underprivileged voters, Kejriwal has introduced initiatives like the 'Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana', which offers free coaching for competitive exams to students from marginalised communities. Kejriwal also recently invited sanitation workers to his

home for tea. To appeal to Hindu voters, the AAP has incorporated elements of soft Hindutva into its strategy. Kejriwal is frequently seen chanting the Hanuman Chalisa on camera and visiting temples, positioning himself as a leader who understands and respects Hindu traditions, in contrast to the BJP's more assertive Hindutva stance. The AAP has also capitalised on the BJP's internal challenges, such as not naming a chief ministerial candidate. As BJP leader Ramesh Bidhuri came under fire for his controversial remarks against Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Kejriwal claimed that he was the saffron party's top contender for the chief minister's post. The BJP, which has been out of power since 1998, struggled to put up an effective counter even as Bidhuri, the candidate from the Kalkaji Assembly constituency against Atishi and Congress' Alka Lamba, vehemently denied the claim. At the core of the AAP's campaign is its extensive welfare programme, which continues to be a major draw for voters. The party's flagship policies, such as free electricity, water, healthcare, and education, remain central to its appeal, especially among lower-middle-class workers, street vendors, and other marginalised groups. The Delhi Assembly election is being seen as a referendum on AAP's governance model and its leader, Arvind Kejriwal. While many experts and political rivals criticise the party's focus on free welfare schemes, AAP maintains that it has offered a viable alternative model of governance for the country.

AAP, BJP, Congress candidates file nominations for Delhi polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

On the final day for filing nominations for the Delhi Assembly elections, many candidates from AAP, BJP, and Congress officially entered the electoral battle on Friday, including AAP's Patparganj candidate Awadh Ojha, BJP's Sangam Vihar candidate Chandan Kumar Choudhary, and Congress' Kasturba Nagar candidate Abhishek Dutt.

Ojha, a civil services turned politician, offered prayers at a temple before filing his nomination papers. Excited about his first electoral contest, he expressed confidence in his ability to take on the BJP's powerful campaign machinery with AAP's developmental pitch. According to his election affidavit, Ojha has movable assets worth Rs 48.58 lakh, including Rs 1.5 lakh in cash and about Rs 10 lakh in jewelry. His wife has movable assets worth approximately Rs 60 lakh, including Rs 20 lakh in jewelry. Additionally, AAP candidate Durgesh Pathak from Rajinder Nagar Assembly constituency held a 'Jan Aashirwad Yatra' before filing his nomination. "Today, I am filing my nomination. I am thankful to Arvind Kejriwal for trusting me, and to

the whole party. The people are saying they want to make Arvind Kejriwal their CM again. As for the BJP's manifesto, they release one every year, but it's just a collection of lies," he said. A total of 11 candidates from the BJP also filed their nominations, including BJP's Greater Kailash candidate Shikha Rai and Mehrauli candidate Gajendra Yadav. Before filing her nomination, Shikha Rai said, "BJP is coming to power in Delhi, and we will secure victory from Greater Kailash." She had appeared in BJP's fourth list of candidates released the day before.

BJP's Mehrauli candidate, Gajendra Yadav, held a 'Vijay Sankalp Yatra' in the presence of Lok Sabha MP Anurag Thakur and New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj before filing his nomination. "Today, I have come to support Bhuvan Singh Tanwar for his nomination. I extend my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to him. Together, Bhuvan ji and I will bring a complete transformation to the Cantt Assembly constituency," said Swaraj. Before filing his nomination, BJP candidate Chandan Kumar Choudhary from the Sangam Vihar constituency said, "I want to thank the party and inform everyone that in the Sangam Vihar region, 60% of the population is from Purvanchal. The party has placed its trust in me

by making me a candidate." In the assembly polls, the BJP is contesting from 68 seats, with one seat each allotted to its allies, Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas). After filing his nomination from the reserved seat of Deoli Assembly, LJP (RV) candidate Deepak Tanwar said, "First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to our National President, Chirag Paswan, for entrusting a small worker like me with the responsibility of overseeing the Deoli Assembly. This has brought immense pride to our community. We want to assure our National President that the entire public is with us, and we stand firmly in support of his leadership." Congress candidate from Kasturba Nagar Assembly constituency, Abhishek Dutt, also offered prayers before filing his nomination. "I thank the people of Kasturba Nagar. All the residents of Kasturba Nagar Assembly know that by voting for Abhishek Dutt, schemes for sewerage, water, and road repairs will be initiated, ensuring the welfare of everyone." Meanwhile, the Delhi Police registered 244 cases of violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) between January 7 and January 16. A total of 9,558 people were arrested during this period under various provisions, including the Excise Act, according to a statement.



Jal Board announces water disruptions

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Water supply in several areas across the national capital will be affected due to the annual flushing program of the underground reservoir and booster pumping station on January 20 and 21. According to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), the affected areas include Sanjay Enclave and its adjoining areas, Burari, Sant Nagar, Nathupura, Kamal Vihar, Sweeper Colony, Jhangir Puri, and Mukhmail Pur Village, among others. Areas affected on January 20 include Sweeper Colony, Jhangir Puri, Mukhmail Pur Village, Tagore Garden, and 608 St Tagore Garden. Residents of the affected areas can avail themselves of water tankers, which will be available on request from Water Emergency Centres, including the Center Control Room (1916), Kewal Park Water Emergency (27681578), and Burari Water Emergency (27619244).

Satish Upadhyay unveils plan for Malviya Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and the party's candidate from Malviya Nagar in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, Satish Upadhyay, released his "Development Roadmap" for the constituency on Friday. He promised a single-window solution for local issues, a review of electricity and water bills, removal of garbage, and clean drinking water. The former Delhi BJP president is contesting against the outgoing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA from Malviya Nagar, Somnath Bharti. Addressing a press conference, Upadhyay outlined his plans to address issues such as open drains, waterlogging, sewage, traffic congestion, Resident Welfare Association (RWA) matters, parking facilities, well-equipped parks, and reviving ration card registrations. "The AAP failed to fulfill its promises made to the public. Basic issues, such as water supply and sewage problems, remain unresolved. The dream

of making Delhi like Paris or London remains unfulfilled, with people struggling for basic amenities," he said. The city's infrastructure is in a "deplorable" state, with broken roads and waterlogging during rains being common, while health facilities are also inadequate, the BJP leader alleged. He expressed confidence that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for a 'Viksit India' by 2047 and Digital India, Malviya Nagar will achieve comprehensive development, and the BJP will form the government in Delhi after a gap of more than 25 years. The polls for the 70-member Delhi Assembly are scheduled to be held on February 5, with the results to be declared on February 8. The contest is being seen as a straight fight between the AAP, which has been in power in the capital since 2015, and the BJP, with the Congress trying hard to regain its lost ground in the city, which it ruled for 15 uninterrupted years until 2013



Vinesh Phogat accuses BJP, AAP of vote-bank politics

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader and Haryana CMLA Vinesh Phogat on Friday accused the BJP and AAP of indulging in "vote-bank" politics and claimed that only the country's oldest political party fulfills its promises made to the people. Addressing a press conference, Phogat said former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit was the first to implement the Jat OBC reservation in the capital. "The Congress has always stood with every section of society. When the BJP introduced the three central farm laws, AAP supremo and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was the first to give his nod to them. They are against farmers, Jats, and Dalits. They only indulge in vote-bank politics," the wrestler-turned-politician said. Phogat further criticized the BJP in Haryana, saying that the ruling party had promised to give Rs 2,100 per month to women, but it has been three months since the assembly elections and the amount has not been paid. Similarly, she pointed out, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had promised to give Rs 1,000 per month to every woman in Punjab, but the promise has not been honored even after three years of the party being in power in the state.

On the other hand, Phogat emphasized that the Congress has fulfilled all its promises made in any state. She added that if Delhiites want development, they should once again place their faith in the grand old party, which will honor its promises.

Congress targets AAP-BJP with five key promises in Delhi polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday alleged that the national capital has become a football in the "noora kushti" (fixed fight) between AAP and BJP ahead of the assembly elections. Addressing a press conference, AICC Media and Publicity Chairman Pawan Khera said the five guarantees announced by the Delhi Congress for the people of Delhi ahead of the first Cabinet meeting after Congress returns to power in the capital. "Delhi has witnessed a series of frauds ever since the change in governments in 2013 and 2014. Whatever started happening with Delhi in 2013-14, I would call it an act of fraud—a double fraud. The first fraud was initiated by the Delhi government, and the second fraud was committed against Delhi when the new government came to power at the Centre. The 'double-engine fraud' governments—one at the Centre and the other in Delhi—have turned Delhi into a football with their constant bickering and shadow boxing over the past 10 years," Khera alleged during the press conference. He assured that the Congress will fulfill its promises in the first Cabinet meeting after coming to power. "Delhi has fulfilled our dreams. It has become a football in the 'noora kushti' (fixed fight) of these two (AAP and BJP). Delhi won't tolerate this anymore. It has determined the fate of the entire country and given direction to the nation. Delhi experimented, and now they are once again look-



ing to the Congress," Khera claimed. The Congress party has already announced five guarantees ahead of the assembly elections. On Thursday, the party said it would provide Rs 500 for LPG cylinders, free ration kits, and free electricity up to 300 units to city residents if voted to power in Delhi. On January 6, the Congress announced its 'Pyaari Didi Yojana,' promising a monthly monetary grant of Rs 2,500 to women

if the party is voted to power. On January 8, the party unveiled its 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana,' under which it promised to provide free health insurance of up to Rs 25 lakh. Additionally, the party pledged to provide Rs 8,500 every month to educated unemployed youth in Delhi for one year. Polling for the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5, and votes will be counted on February 8.

DU approves increased PhD seats

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi University (DU) Executive Council (EC) on Friday approved a move stating that UGC NET scores from June 2024 and December 2024 will be considered for admission in the second phase of PhD admissions for the academic session 2024-25. The EC also authorized Professor Anil Kumar Aneja, Head of the Department of English and the University representative in the Governing Body of St. Stephen's College, to establish communication between the University of Delhi and St. Stephen's College to resolve any issues, keeping in mind the provisions of the Act, Statutes, and Ordinances of the University, as well as UGC Regulations, as amended from time to time. On the suggestion of EC members, Vice Chancellor Professor Yogesh Singh also included two EC representatives, Aman Kumar and Raj Pal, along with Professor Aneja, in the committee. Regarding PhD admissions, candidates who have passed NET + JRF will be given preference. Additionally, the EC decided that the number of seats for PhD admissions should increase by 20-25% compared to the previous round of admissions.

Similar to undergraduate admissions, the reservation of additional seats for single girl children in postgraduate programmes at DU was also approved by the DU Academic Council (AC). Under this provision, one seat in each PG programme will be reserved for single girl children under the additional quota. Furthermore, it was decided that DU employees will be provided medical facilities at Railway Hospitals, including OPD, IPD, diagnostic, and operative services on a reimbursement basis at CGHS rates in Northern Railway Hospitals. The DU EC also passed revised guidelines and norms for donations to institute scholarships, awards, and capital assets. Under this, the establishment of scholarships at DU will be allowed by government entities, trusts, corporate houses, PSUs, NGOs, and other national and international organizations, as well as individuals. The minimum amount required for establishing any scholarship will be Rs 5 lakh for a period of 10 years and Rs 10 lakh for a period of 20 years. Two percent of the total scholarship amount will be transferred to the DU Endowment Fund at the time of establishment.

AAP councillors switch to BJP ahead of polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a setback to the AAP ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, two of its councillors, Ravinder Solanki and Narendar Girsra, joined the BJP on Friday in the presence of Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra. West Delhi MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat was also present when Solanki, an MCD councillor from Barapola ward, and Girsra, from Manglapuri, officially joined the BJP. Both wards fall under Sehrawat's constituency. Sehrawat stated that both councillors were among the founding members of the Aam Aadmi Party but had become disillusioned with the party's national convener, Arvind Kejriwal's politics and policies. "Solanki and Girsra have not changed sides; Kejriwal has changed, which forced them to leave the party," she explained.



AAP Councillors Ravindra solanki and Narendar Girsra join BJP in presence of Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva. Ranjan Dimri

that every plan of the Delhi government has been marred by corruption. "As the election date nears, those committed to improving Delhi and contributing to the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi are aligning themselves with the BJP," he said, praising Girsra and Solanki for their service to their wards and constituencies. He highlighted the trust and recognition they have earned through their work. Delhi BJP President Sachdeva added, "On February 5, when votes are cast, the end of AAP's disaster will begin. Delhi will witness a double-engine government, leading to development work progressing at double the speed."

Kalkaji set for a fierce contest between AAP, BJP, and Congress

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's Kalkaji assembly constituency is set to witness a high-octane battle as all three parties have fielded strong candidates for the seat. The AAP has nominated the incumbent Chief Minister Atishi, who currently holds the seat; the BJP has chosen two-time former South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri; and Congress has selected All India Mahila Congress President Alka Lamba. The constituency, which is named after the renowned



Kalkaji Temple dedicated to the goddess Kali, was reconstructed and formed by the Delimitation Commission in 2008. Kalkaji is part of the South Delhi Lok Sabha constituency, which includes nine other assembly constituencies: Bijwasan, Sangam Vihar, Ambedkar Nagar, Chhatrapur, Deoli, Tughlakabad, Palam, Badarpur, and Mehrauli. The seat sees a mix of demographics, with both businesspeople and lower-income groups residing there. It has a sizeable population of voters belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and



Punjabis, who make up 27% and 22% of the voter share, respectively. This is followed by 12% Scheduled Castes (SC) voters, 8% Pandit voters, 7% Sikh and Vaishya voters, and 3% Muslim and Gujjar voters. Located in the south-east district of Delhi, the constituency has a total of 1,94,515 voters, with a higher number of male voters at 1,06,893, compared to 87,617 female voters, according to the Election Commission of India. The assembly constituency



has gained prominence in recent years due to being represented by Atishi. In the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections, Atishi from the AAP won the seat with 55,897 votes, followed by BJP's Dharmveer with 44,504 votes,

and Congress' Shivani Chopra, who garnered 4,965 votes. In the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections, Avtar Singh from AAP won with 55,104 votes, while BJP's Harmeet Singh Kalka secured 35,335 votes and INC's Subhash Chopra received 13,552 votes. Since 1993, the seat has been seven assembly elections, with Congress winning three times, AAP winning twice, and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and BJP each securing one victory. Despite this, the South Delhi parliamentary constituency, of which Kalkaji is

a part, has been a BJP bastion, with the party winning the seat eight times in the last nine elections. BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri won the seat with comfortable margins in 2014 and 2019. In 2024, BJP was victorious again, with Ramvir Singh Bidhuri winning the Lok Sabha elections from South Delhi. Despite being denied a ticket for the Lok Sabha, Ramesh Bidhuri has been tasked with defeating the incumbent Chief Minister in the assembly elections. Residents of three wards in the Kalkaji constituency—Sri Niwas Puri, Kalkaji, and Govindpuri

have raised concerns about various civic issues that require urgent attention. A resident of Govindpuri highlighted the issue of poorly maintained by-lanes, which flood during the rainy season, making it dangerous to commute. The area also frequently suffers from the problem of encroachment, as vendors set up shop on the side of the roads, leading to significant congestion. "The problem is made worse by people parking on the roads. We have complained to authorities multiple times, but nothing gets done," a resident of the area said.

Rajnath underlines need to strengthen India's offensive and defensive responses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday here underlined the need to strengthen India's offensive and defensive responses in view of the turmoil being witnessed in the rules-based international order. Addressing an event, organised to commemorate 2024 as the Year of Naval Civilians, he highlighted the increasing complexities for the Armed Forces due to the tense geopolitical security scenario and pitched to increase the critical capability of the country at the earliest.

"If we assess the entire decade from a defence and security perspective, we can say that it has been a volatile decade. We are witnessing conflicts and wars in different regions across

the world. Keeping these things in mind, we need planning, resourcing and budgeting for our security.

There is a need to adopt a consultative approach. We need to take inputs from all the stakeholders on how to face future challenges. Our forces should be equipped and ready according to the changing times," Rajnath Singh said emphasising that the civilian workforce, an integral part of the Armed Forces, will play a crucial role in the planning process.

He stressed that the military is surging forward with a big mandate and complex structure and the civilian workforce "soldiers without uniforms" play a pivotal role as they work behind-the-scenes to provide significant strength to the troops.

In view of India's strategic



location and its geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), defence minister reiterated the resolve of the Government to strengthen the Navy, terming it as a necessity in today's times. He termed the ships as a symbol of India's empowerment.

"India's economic prosperity is linked to maritime security. It is, therefore, necessary to protect our territorial waters, ensure freedom of navigation, and keep sea routes, which are our maritime highways, safe. In recent years, major naval powers have reduced their presence in IOR, while the Indian Navy has increased it. There is a possibility of increase in threats in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and the sea areas adjacent to East African countries. In view of this, the Indian Navy is working towards increasing its pres-

ence further," he said.

Rajnath Singh described cyber security as an important aspect of maritime security in today's times, stating that ignoring cyber attacks can prove to be detrimental/fatal. He laid stress on the need to run a special awareness campaign on cyber security in the Armed Forces.

In his welcome address, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi acknowledged the critical role that the Naval Civilians play in supporting various facets of the Indian Navy's operations including technical assistance, administrative management and logistics support. Their support is essential to the Navy's combat readiness and operational success, he said.

The event commenced with a special photo and painting exhibition that displayed the artistic talents and achieve-

ments of Naval Civilians. The artworks depicted scenes of life at workplace and various contributions of civilians in the operational support of the Navy.

A special moment of the ceremony was the introduction of the recipients of Prime Minister's Shram Awards to the defence minister. The Shram Awards are presented annually to the individuals who have shown extraordinary devotion and outstanding contributions in their respective roles.

In recognition of exemplary service and contributions, Rajnath Singh presented nine meritorious awards and 16 cash awards to Naval Civilians who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and professionalism in their line of duty.

Private bodies providing essential public services have to be under RTI Act, says CIC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Advising the Delhi government to stop ex post facto renewal of licences of private hospitals, the CIC has said private entities providing essential public services have to be brought under RTI Act in a state-specific amendment of the transparency law. Information Commissioner Vinod Kumar Tiwari made these observations while hearing the case of an RTI applicant who was allegedly given "exorbitant bills" by a private hospital for the treatment of his wife in 2023.



RTI applicant Sanjeev Kumar had approached Delhi government's Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) seeking details of licence issued to Artemis Hospital, where his wife underwent treatment, among other information in a 12-point application.

Not getting satisfactory response, he approached the Central Information Commission with his case. "...Core contention of the appellant in the instant appeal was non-receipt of correct and accurate information from the PIO and also arbitrary practice adopted by the Artemis Hospital in raising unjustified demands/ bills during hospitalisation which gets facilitated by respondent's (DGHS) clandestine practice of renewing the licence with retrospective effect as a matter of routine," Tiwari noted.

Artemis being a private hospital is not covered under the provisions of the RTI Act. "Entities providing Public Services being essential for the citizens have to be included in the definition of the 'Public Authority' by bringing in a state-specific amendment of the RTI Act which is a concurrent list subject," Tiwari said.

During the hearing, Kumar had alleged that the recognition certificate dated August 01, 2023 of Artemis Hospital provided to him by DGHS, in response to his RTI application shows that the hospital had no valid license on dates of hospitalization of his wife on April 07-08, 2023.

"...It is noted from the oral submission of the respondent (DGHS) that registration of hospitals is being renewed retrospectively, which essen-

tially means that private hospitals have an option to withdraw renewal requests should they get caught in malpractices," Tiwari pointed out. He said despite repeated directions from the Commission during pendency of this case, DGHS has not uploaded the relevant legal/executive order authorizing such a back dated/ex post facto issuance.

"... The fact remains that allegation of appellant regarding exorbitant prices/bills raised by the Artemis Hospital cannot be ruled out in entirety as the respondent as well as the third party i.e. Artemis Lite Hospital have failed to file any counter submission to buttress the arguments of the appellant, therefore, the balance of convenience favours the appellant," Tiwari said.

The DGHS claimed that the plea that Artemis Hospital did not possess valid registration certificate at the relevant time is not acceptable since as per their normal practice the registration certificate under process is "deemed to be considered as a fact that registration of Hospital is still valid".

"The Commission considering the submission of the parties concluded that the reply furnished by the PIO in the first instance and the submission given during the course of hearing are contradictory. This casual conduct of the PIO causes unwarranted obstructions to the appellant's right to information and is a grave violation to the provisions of the RTI Act," the CIC noted while issuing a show cause notice to the CPIO.

The CIC imposed a penalty of

Rs 15000 on the CPIO Sandeep Kumar Agarwal and awarded a compensation of Rs 45000 to Kumar for the hardships to be paid by DGHS.

Tiwari said Kumar was made to suffer mental and financial harassment by making him to run from pillar to post at this very old age for the treatment of his wife by imposing exorbitant medical bills merely for the purpose of generation of profits.

"In view of the above, an advisory under Section 25(5) of the RTI Act is issued to the Respondent Public Authority (DGHS) to amend the applicable regulations governing renewal of licenses of private hospitals so as to afford an opportunity of hearing to the citizens affected by the deeds of the hospitals besides stopping the practice of issuing ex post facto renewal of license," Tiwari said in the order, a copy of which was also marked to Delhi Health Secretary.

He said many state governments are bringing the Right to (Public) Services Act to ensure delivery of public services to ensure entities providing services are held accountable for deficiencies.

"Such legislations are complementarity to the Right to Information Act because they rely on flow of information to determine deficiencies," Tiwari said.

He said, in contrast to it, DGHS by declaring hospital running under them as private entities and hence, being outside the purview of the RTI Act has defeated the very purpose of such social welfare arrangement and the Act.

PM Modi to distribute more than 65 lakh SVAMITVA property cards today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Saturday distribute more than 65 lakh property cards under the SVAMITVA Scheme, the Panchayati Raj Ministry said. According to senior officials of the ministry, beneficiaries from more than 50,000 villages in 10 states -- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh -- and two Union Territories -- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh -- will receive the cards. SVAMITVA, a scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, provides a 'Record of Rights' to village household owners with the issuance of legal ownership cards to the property owners by mapping land parcels using drone technology, it said.

The prime minister will preside over the event through video-conferencing, where he will interact with selected beneficiaries and also deliver a nationwide address, the ministry said in a statement.

This event will mark a major milestone of crossing more than 2.24 crore property cards preparation and distribution under the Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas (SVAMITVA) scheme and distribution of about 65 lakh property cards in a day.

Union Minister of Panchayati Raj Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan,' Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj S P Singh Baghel, and Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj Vivek



Bharadwaj will be present at the event. It will be attended virtually by several chief ministers, Union ministers, ministers in the concerned states, and Panchayat representatives, the ministry said.

Events are also being organised in more than 230 districts for the physical distribution of property cards. It is expected that around 13 Union ministers will physically join from designated locations to oversee the distribution ceremonies.

Training-cum-orientation programmes and distribution pro-

grammes will also be conducted in more than 25,000 Gram Panchayats across these 12 states and Union Territories, highlighting the scheme's impact and reinforcing its role in empowering rural communities.

Ministry officials said under the scheme, over 90 per cent of the drone mapping has been done, covering around 3.17 lakh of the over 3.44 lakh villages that were the target. This includes full saturation in the Union Territories of Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Delhi, Daman and Nagar Haveli and Damian and Diu, as well as the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.

In addition, property cards have been generated for all inhabited villages in Haryana, Uttarakhand, Puducherry, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, and Tripura, highlighting significant advancements in implementation. The scheme's targets are likely to be achieved by 2026.

A survey of rural land in India

for Settlement and record of rights had last been completed many decades back. Moreover, 'abadi' (inhabited) areas of villages were not surveyed in many states. Hence, no 'Record of Rights' could be created for the village 'abadi' areas.

The scheme aims to provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India. The demarcation of inhabited land in rural areas would be done by the use of drone technology with the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Revenue Department, State Panchayati Raj Department, and Survey of India.

The outcome would include creating and updating the 'Record of Rights' in the revenue registers and issuance of property cards to the owners. So far, 31 states and Union Territories have joined the scheme. Of these, Sikkim, Telangana and Tamil Nadu had participated only in the pilot phase. West Bengal, Bihar, Nagaland, and Meghalaya have not joined the scheme.

Wildlife Department to serve notices to illegal constructions surrounding Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Wildlife Department will soon serve notices to over 100 illegal construction owners who built illegal structures in the restricted area of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary in Gurugram.

For this, the department has written a letter to the Tehsildar and sought information about all the people doing illegal construction.

After getting the information, notices will be issued to everyone to remove the illegal construction within 15 days. After this, a demolition drive will be conducted. Notable, any kind of construction work is banned within a 5 km radius of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary located on Jhajjar-Farrukhnagar Road. Despite this, builders and dealers have illegally built over 100 illegal constructions farmhouses and societies.

Last year, a survey was conducted by the Department. It was revealed that over 100 constructions have been done without the permission of the Ministry of Environment within the 5 km restricted area of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary. These include nine societies



mos, most of the farmhouses and a school.

The central government has declared Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary as an Eco-Sensitive Zone-1 (environmentally sensitive area). In such a situation, construction within a radius of 5 km has been completely banned.

The Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department has issued licenses to nine builders to build group housing societies. The license has a condition that they have to obtain a no objection certificate (NOC) from the Ministry of Environment.

But without taking prior permission few builders made construction in the restricted zone.

The survey has also revealed

the collusion of the officials of the concerned department. Nine societies have been built within this area.

It is being said that the TCP Department approved the maps of these societies without checking the NOC. Occupancy certificates were even issued to most of the societies. Now, about 7,000 families have started living in the flats built in these societies.

However, after the survey conducted by the Wildlife Department, the construction work of the two societies has been stopped.

These societies are being built under the Affordable Housing Policy, which has about 1500 flats. These societies have been built in villages Dhorka, Wazirpur and Gopalpur.

Law officer censures ED for 'half-baked' reply, says miscommunication later in SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an unusual turn of events in the Supreme Court, a law officer criticised the ED for filing a "half-baked" reply in a bail matter and later termed it a miscommunication while urging the court to proceed with the hearing. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan was hearing an appeal of Arun Pati Tripathi, an Indian Telecom Services officer, challenging the October 25, 2024 order of the Chhattisgarh High Court denying him bail in connection with the high-profile Chhattisgarh liquor scam.

Additional solicitor general SV Raju, appearing for the Enforcement Directorate (ED), said, "There is something hanky-panky as far as my department is concerned. Without consultation, a half-baked affidavit has been filed even before we made an appearance." Taking note of the shocking submission, the bench expressed dissatisfaction on the situation, calling it a "serious matter" questioning the accountability of ED and the agency's advocate-on-record (AoR).



"The counter must have been filed by your AoR," Justice Oka said to which Raju said the AoR could not be blamed for the oversight. Subsequently when the matter was taken up for hearing, the bench asked Raju, "You (ED) have filed a counter affidavit. Can you disown it now? What is going on?" He responded, "I am not disowning. I am only saying it was filed without proper vetting so I will have to verify."

The bench termed it a "sad thing" and said it was like casting an aspersion on the AoR. "I am not casting any aspersion. Some miscommunication has happened," said the law officer, insisting the AoR was not to be blamed. Raju then requested the bench to proceed with the matter, but the court posted the hearing on February 5.

Political parties give multitude of reasons for selecting candidates with criminal records: ADR data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Political parties have given reasons, such as "strong administrative capacity", "commitment to public service" and claims of cases being "politically motivated", for selecting candidates with criminal records in the 2024 Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly elections, poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said on Friday.

In many cases, the parties dismissed alternative candidates as lacking experience or the ability to connect with voters, using these explanations to side-step questions about their choices, ADR said.

It has analysed the Form C7 of 1,286 candidates, who contested the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly polls.

Form C7 requires candidates to declare their criminal antecedents, if any.

An ADR report revealed that such reasoning often failed to meet the Supreme Court's directive requiring detailed, merit-based justifications for selecting candidates with criminal backgrounds. Instead, statements like "the candidate is young and energetic" or "cases were filed due to public agitation" were repeatedly used.

Despite these assertions, 29 per cent candidates in Maharashtra and 20 per cent in Jharkhand had no justification published for their selection, a direct violation of the Supreme Court's orders.

For instance, in Maharashtra, Digamber Rohidas Aagwaha of the Rashtriya Samaj Paksh, facing 35 criminal cases, was described as an "influential



leader" dedicated to the poor, with no viable explanation for bypassing candidates without criminal records.

Similarly, the selection of Congress's Sanjay Chandukaka Jagtap and Bunty Baba Shelke, facing 27 and 26 cases respectively, as candidates was justified on grounds of administrative experience and alleged political victimisation.

The report also highlighted non-compliance with mandatory disclosures. In Maharashtra, the NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar faction and the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) failed to provide justifications for any of their candidates with criminal cases.

Similar lapses were noted in Jharkhand, where the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) did not disclose reasons

for selecting any of its candidates with criminal records. The ADR has called for urgent reforms, including deregistration of the non-compliant parties, disqualification of candidates with serious criminal charges and stricter monitoring by the Election Commission (EC).

In Maharashtra, 48 per cent of the analysed candidates (503 out of 1,052) declared criminal cases, with 32 per cent facing serious charges.

In Jharkhand, 45 per cent candidates (105 out of 234) declared criminal cases, with 35 per cent facing serious charges. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Babul Marandi, facing 15 cases, was praised for his social service credentials and allegations against him were dismissed as politically driven.

The report criticised political parties for prioritising "winnability" over integrity and accused the EC of failing to enforce compliance effectively.

The ADR report also revealed significant non-compliance with disclosure requirements. It pointed out that in Maharashtra, 83 per cent of such candidates were crorepatris, including the BJP's Prashant Ramshekhar Thakur, who declared assets worth Rs 475 crore.

In Jharkhand, Congress candidates dominated the list of the wealthiest, led by Krishnan Nand Tripathi, who declared assets of Rs 70 crore.

The ADR emphasised that systemic reforms are essential to address the deep-rooted nexus between money, muscle power and politics.

Hounded by media, IIT Baba leaves Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Hounded by the media, Abhay Singh, famously known as IIT Baba, has abruptly left the Maha Kumbh and the Shri Panchdasham Juna Akhara in Prayagraj. His departure on Thursday night has left both the ashram sadhus and his family in a state of concern, as his current whereabouts remain unknown. Abhay's parents, including his father Karan Singh—an advocate and former head of the Jhajar Bar Association—arrived at the Ashram the same night searching for him, only to discover he had already departed. According to ashram sadhus, Abhay was struggling with increasing mental stress caused by continuous media interactions and controversies over some of his statements. Unable to cope, he decided to leave the ashram, switching off his phone and cutting contact with devotees and media personnel. Abhay Singh, a resident of Jhajar, Haryana, is an aerospace engineering graduate from IIT



Bombay. After a stint working at an airplane manufacturing company in Canada, he returned to India and subsequently disappeared from his family's sight. His family first learned of his spiritual journey through viral videos from the Maha Kumbh, where he was seen explaining spiritual concepts with the help of pictures and diagrams. Despite gaining popularity as Engineer Baba, the media spotlight and associated pressures ultimately led to his departure. Abhay Singh, nicknamed Engineer Baba, gained attention at the Maha Kumbh for his unique approach to spirituality. An alumnus of IIT Bombay, he earned a degree in aerospace engineering and later became a sanyasin associated with the Juna Akhara. Known for simplifying complex spiritual concepts for devotees, he used visual aids to communicate his insights. However, his journey highlights the challenges of adapting to a spiritual life while under intense public scrutiny. Abhay Singh's sudden exit from the Maha Kumbh has added to ongoing discussions about the mental and emotional challenges faced by individuals transitioning into spiritual roles. His story underscores the impact of media attention on the sanctity and personal struggles of modern-day ascetics, raising questions about the pressures associated with public expectations in deeply traditional spiritual settings.

The making of Naga Sadhus begins at Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The process of initiating new Naga Sadhus has commenced at the Akharas along the banks of the Sangam as part of the preparations for Mauni Amavasya during the Maha Kumbh. Both Udasi Akharas and the seven Shaivite Akharas, including Juna, Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Atal, Agni, and Awahan, are set to welcome more than 1,800 new Naga Sanyasis into their fold. The intricate rituals began today at Juna Akhara and will culminate in the Tang Tod (breaking of ties) ceremony within 48 hours. For the Akharas, the Kumbh Mela is not only an occasion for the holy Amrit Snan but also a crucial opportunity for expansion and spiritual renewal. The initiation of new Naga Sanyasis is a significant event, especially during the Maha Kumbh, which holds immense importance for trainee ascetics. Mahant Ramesh Giri of Juna Akhara shared that the rituals began on January 17 with a 24-hour period of dhawaja (religious flag), during which the aspirants abstain from food and water. Following this, the candidates are led to the Ganga banks by the Akhara Kotwal to commence the initiation



process. The initiation begins with the aspirants taking 108 dips in the sacred Ganga, symbolizing purification. This is followed by a head-shaving ceremony and the Vijay Havan (victory offering). The Acharya Mahamandleshwar of the Akhara leads the Sanyas Diksha (renunciation initiation), wherein five senior gurus bestow essential items upon the aspirants. The final rituals will take place on the morning of

January 19, when the aspirants will shed their loincloths and fully embrace their new identities as Naga Sanyasis. While some may choose to remain Digambar (clothed only by the sky), others are given the option to retain clothing but participate in the Amrit Snan as Nagas. Two key rituals define the transformation into a Naga Sadhu. First is the cutting of the braid, which symbolizes the severing of all social ties. Once

this ritual is performed, the individual cannot return to worldly life. The second is Tang Tod, the final ritual signifying the breaking of all earthly attachments. Unlike other ceremonies, this is performed by a fellow Naga Sadhu under the Guru's guidance, cementing the initiate's commitment to asceticism. Akhara Hierarchy and Responsibilities: Becoming a Naga Sadhu is essential for assuming leadership roles within the Akharas. Positions such as General Secretary, Secretary, Shrimahant, Mahant, Thanapati, Kotwal, and Pujari are reserved exclusively for Nagas. The Akhara's internal committee thoroughly evaluates each candidate before bestowing this responsibility. Mahant Yamuna Puri of Mahanirvani Akhara revealed that while their exact dates for initiation are undecided, the rituals will be completed before Mauni Amavasya. Similarly, Udasi Akharas are preparing for their initiation ceremonies. The initiation of over 1,800 new Naga Sadhus during Maha Kumbh 2025 highlights the enduring significance of this ancient spiritual tradition. The newly initiated Nagas will participate in their first Amrit Snan alongside their respective Akharas on Mauni Amavasya, marking the culmination of their transformative journey. For the Akharas, these rituals reinforce their spiritual legacy and expand their cadre of ascetics who bear critical administrative and financial responsibilities. As the Sangam witnesses this sacred event, the Maha Kumbh continues to uphold its reputation as a confluence of faith, tradition, and renewal.

BJP felicitates sanitation workers at Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders in Uttar Pradesh distributed copies of the Constitution to sanitation workers at the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, calling the religious congregation a 'great celebration of unity' that reflects the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The initiative is part of the BJP's nationwide 'Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan' campaign to celebrate 75 years of the Indian Constitution. As part of this outreach, the party is felicitating Dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) across the state. After garlanding sanitation workers and handing them copies of the Constitution, Uttar Pradesh BJP secretary Abhijit Mishra remarked, "We came here to honor those who were reduced to a mere vote bank by non-BJP parties and

governments. Now, with a strong and sensitive leader at the nation's helm, we are witnessing transformative change." Talking to reporters, Mishra further claimed, "Other political parties have always treated Dalits and OBCs as vote banks. In contrast, our party reveres and empowers them. The Maha Kumbh is a grand celebration of unity, a principle the Constitution guarantees. By distributing copies of the Constitution, we aim to reinforce the vision of unity that our founding fathers had, which our opponents often seek to undermine." The BJP's initiative comes in the backdrop of political sparring with the opposition. During the last Lok Sabha elections, the opposition accused the BJP of pursuing a massive mandate to alter the Constitution—an allegation the ruling party has vehemently denied. Despite falling short of its "400 paar" tar-



get, the BJP managed to form the government with support from regional allies. Meanwhile, the opposition INDIA bloc made surprising gains, bolstering its presence in the Lok Sabha. Adding to the political dynamics, the Samajwadi Party (SP) recently announced plans to install a bust of its founder and prominent OBC leader, late Mulayam Singh Yadav, at the Maha Kumbh. The Congress, on the other hand, is set to launch its 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally on January 27, aiming to corner the BJP over its alleged stance on the Constitution. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati, who has been striving to regain her political foothold, is also engaging in outreach efforts, criticizing the BJP over alleged denigration of Constitution framers and Dalit icon BR Ambedkar. In 2019, during the previous

Kumbh Mela, Prime Minister Narendra Modi famously washed the feet of sanitation workers as a gesture of respect. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also initiated educational programs for the workers that year. This year, Modi described the Maha Kumbh as "Ekta ka Mahakumbh" (a Maha Kumbh of unity) during a recent visit to Prayagraj. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath echoed this sentiment, referring to the congregation as "Samajik Samta Ka Mahaparv" (a mega festival of social equality). The government has also unveiled a giant statue of Lord Ram embracing Nishad Raj, a king revered by the politically significant Nishad community, at Shringverpur's Nishad Raj Park. The gesture is seen as an attempt to woo the OBC riverine community, which has been pushing for Scheduled Caste (SC) status. A senior RSS leader

downplayed the political undertones, stating, "You can draw your own political narratives, but we stand for unity. The Maha Kumbh is a classic example of caste harmony, where all differences are bridged. That is the unity the prime minister must have been referring to." Political analyst Sudhir Panwar, who once contested elections on an SP ticket, noted, "The BJP faces a dilemma over the issue of caste census, which has united opposition parties and many of its OBC allies. While it has performed well in recent by-polls, the shock loss of the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat lingers. Measures like the community outreach at Maha Kumbh are part of its strategy to regain lost ground." As the Maha Kumbh unfolds, the event not only remains a spiritual hub but also a platform for political narratives, reflecting the interplay of faith and electoral strategies.

VHP to push for 'liberation of temple' at Maha Kumbh congregation



BISWAJEET BANERJEE LUCKNOW

The ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela has become a focal point for diverse discussions ranging from spirituality to socio-political issues. Adding to its significance, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has announced a high-profile meeting of its Margdarshak Mandal, where saints and spiritual leaders will deliberate on key issues including the "liberation of temples" from government control and Hindu claims over historical sites. This four-day congregation, scheduled from January 24 to 27, is expected to see robust participation from saints across the nation. According to VHP spokesperson Vinod Bansal, "Freeing temples from government control will be the primary agenda, as it directly impacts the sanctity and autonomy of our religious institutions." The VHP is currently running a nationwide campaign advocating for temple autonomy. Bansal elaborated, "The Margdarshak Mandal baithak will not only address temple-related concerns but also deliberate on contemporary

issues affecting the Hindu community, such as 'love jihad,' 'ghar wapsi,' and religious conversions. These discussions aim to foster unity among Hindus, transcending caste and regional barriers." In addition, the VHP's Pranyas Mandal, its Board of Trustees, will meet after the Margdarshak Mandal session to further refine and implement decisions made during the gathering. "The Maha Kumbh is a perfect backdrop for fostering unity and social harmony," Bansal noted. Highlighting the symbolism of the Kumbh, he added, "It is here that people from all walks of life gather, setting aside social and economic differences. This unity is what our community and nation need to overcome the challenges posed by our colonial past, including the entrenched caste system." A key focus of the discussions will be countering what the VHP calls the "divisive politics" of caste-based narratives. "Our goal is to build a united Hindu society that stands strong against such political agendas," Bansal said. The meeting coincides with

growing tensions over Hindu claims to certain historical sites. In recent months, petitions have been filed regarding the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, and the Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan. These claims have sparked legal and social debates, with some incidents escalating into violence. A senior RSS leader, speaking on the condition of anonymity, remarked, "The Maha Kumbh represents the essence of unity, bridging divides of all kinds. While narratives can be drawn politically, the event's true purpose lies in fostering harmony and reinforcing our cultural ethos." The VHP's initiatives also come against the backdrop of heightened political activity. The opposition has been vocal about caste-based census demands, which have garnered support from several of the BJP's allies. Political analyst Sudhir Panwar observed, "The BJP faces challenges in maintaining its support base among OBCs, especially after recent setbacks like the Faizabad Lok Sabha loss. Initiatives like this are part of its strategy to consolidate its standing."

Fake bank accounts: Gurugram police arrest two criminals

STAFF REPORTER GURUGRAM

The Gurugram police have arrested two criminals for allegedly opening fake bank accounts in the name of 'Jan Dhan Yojana' and making them available to cyber thugs, police said. The suspects have been identified as Shaun, a resident of village Kiranki, Gurugram and Azharuddin alias Azru, a resident of Punhana, Nuh. The police have also recovered five bank pass book, fake rent agreement and electricity bills from them. The complainant told the police on Monday that he had met two persons who told him that they opened bank accounts



under 'Jan Dhan Yojana', of which Rs 7,000 is given by the government every month. After this, the accused opened a bank account for the victim. After opening the bank account, he took the victim's

ATM cards and mobile numbers registered in the bank account and said that after going to the government office and registering under 'Jan Dhan Yojana', they would get their ATM cards and mobile

numbers back. "When the bank did not return the victim's ATM card and mobile number for several days, he went to the bank and enquired, and then he came to know that a lot of money had been transacted from his bank account," Priyanshu Diwan, ACP, cyber crime said. Based on the victim's complaint, a case was registered under the relevant sections of the IT Act at the cyber police station (west), Gurugram. During the investigation, the police team led by Inspector Sandeep, SHO of the said police station nabbed the accused from Sector-10 on Wednesday. During police interrogation, it was found that both the accused used to open bank

accounts under 'Jan Dhan Yojana' by telling people that the government would deposit money in these accounts. "To open a bank account, the accused used to get fake agreements and electricity bills prepared. After opening the bank account, they used to take the bank ATM card and registered mobile number from the bank account holder in the name of registering the bank account in the government office. After that, they used to sell those bank accounts to another accused for Rs 10,000," he said. Accused Sahun has been taken on one day of police custody and remanded from the Court for further interrogation and recovery, police said.

12 Naxalites neutralised in fierce encounter with security forces in Bijapur

PTI BIJAPUR

The 12 Naxalites neutralised in a fierce encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday were from the Maoist organisation's strongest unit in the Bastar region, police said on Friday. The identity of the killed Naxalites is yet to be ascertained but preliminary information suggests they belonged to Maoists' People's Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) battalion no. 1 and Central Regional Committee company, a police official said. PLGA is the armed wing of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist). According to police, the PLGA battalion no. 1 is considered the strongest formation of the Maoists in the tribal-dominated Bastar region and is headed by Deva. It has orchestrated several deadly attacks on security personnel in south Bastar in the past. Previously the formation was headed by Hidma, believed to



be the man behind many big strikes against security forces in the Bastar region, which comprises seven districts. Twelve Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in the dense forest of the Pamed-Basaguda-Usoor axis of Bijapur district on Thursday. Besides the bodies, weapons were also recovered from the site, he said. A search operation is still underway in the area and the security forces are likely to return to their bases on Friday evening, the official said. Personnel belonging to the

District Reserve Guard (DRG) from three districts, five battalions of CRPF's elite jungle warfare unit CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) and the 229th battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) are involved in the operation, he said. During the same operation, two CoBRA commandos were injured when a pressure improvised explosive device planted by Naxalites went off near the Putkel CRPF camp under Basaguda police station limits on Thursday, police said.

18-year-old NEET aspirant hangs himself in hostel room

PTI KOTA

An 18-year-old NEET aspirant hanged himself in his hostel room here, police said on Friday. Officials said that no suicide note was recovered from the room. The incident occurred in Ambedkar Colony, Vigyan Nagar area on Thursday night. According to police, Abhijeet Giri, hailing from Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, had been preparing for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) at a coaching institute since April, 2024. The incident came to light when around 8 pm when a mess worker went to deliver food to Abhijeet's room, a police officer said. Upon receiving no response, the mess worker along with a few hostellers forcibly opened the door and found him hanging from the ceiling fan, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI)

Lal Singh Tanwar said. A police team reached the spot and sent the body for post-mortem, which will be conducted after his family arrives. They have been informed about the incident, the ASI added. He said that no suicide note was recovered from the room and the reason behind the suicide is yet to be ascertained. The ceiling fan in the hostel room was not equipped with suicide prevention device, mandated by the district administration to prevent suicides in student accommodations, the officer said. Preliminary investigations suggest that Abhijeet was good in studies and attended his coaching classes regularly, he said. This is the third suicide by a coaching student in Kota this year. The city, a prominent hub for coaching institutes, saw 17 such cases in 2024.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bonanza before budget

The Cabinet has greenlit the 8th Pay Commission, setting the stage for a revision of salaries of central govt employees

The Union Cabinet's approval of the 8th Pay Commission ahead of the budget marks a significant step toward revising the salary and pension structure for over 49 lakh central government employees and nearly 65 lakh pensioners. Chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the decision emphasises improving quality of life and stimulating economic activity through enhanced consumption. The 8th Pay Commission will be tasked with revising salaries, allowances and pensions for central government employees and pensioners. Consultations will be held with central and state governments and other stakeholders before finalising its recommendations. The Commission's chairman and two members are to be appointed shortly, and its findings will replace the existing 7th Pay Commission framework, whose term ends in 2026. Historically, pay commissions are constituted every decade to address inflation, economic growth and employees' changing financial needs.



Prime Minister Modi underscored that the revised pay structure will boost consumption by increasing disposable incomes. Higher salaries and pensions are expected to lead to increased spending on goods and services, driving demand in sectors such as retail, real estate, and automobiles.

This consumption surge could further stimulate production and employment, creating a positive feedback loop in the economy. The Commission's recommendations are expected to address the rising cost of living and improve the financial wellbeing of central government employees and pensioners. While the revisions will inject liquidity into the economy, they will also impose a significant financial burden on the exchequer. Increased salary outlays may necessitate budgetary adjustments, potentially impacting allocations for other sectors like infrastructure and welfare. Although PSU and state government employees are outside the direct purview of central pay commissions, the 8th Pay Commission's recommendations often set a benchmark. Many state governments and PSUs align their pay scales with central government standards, amplifying the financial impact across the broader public sector. This could also have adverse effect on the economy. Higher disposable incomes could lead to demand-pull inflation, particularly in essential goods and services. Managing inflation will require a balanced monetary policy. Besides, the exclusion of PSU employees and 'gramin dak sevaks' from central pay commission benefits may intensify demands for similar revisions, potentially leading to unrest and political pressure. Increased spending on salaries and pensions may constrain the government's ability to invest in capital-intensive projects, potentially slowing long-term economic growth. Despite challenges, it can serve as a catalyst for the economy by generating demand and boosting production.

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PICTALK



Tourists at Mall Road amid snowfall, in Manali

A spectacle of faith, unity and cosmic significance

The Kumbh Mela highlights the blend of tradition and modernity. It links cosmic phenomena with earthly rituals while fostering community feeling



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The grand Maha Kumbh Mela, one of the most magnificent spiritual gatherings in the world, is here. The Uttar Pradesh government has meticulously prepared to host this sacred festival – happening once every 12 years – with Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally monitoring the developments. Began on January 13, 2025, the Maha Kumbh is anticipated to draw an awe-inspiring congregation of over 45 crores – a footfall of around 450 million pilgrims, saints, ascetics and tourists – devotees.

At the heart of this divine celebration, is the (coming together) 'Sangam' – the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mystical Saraswati rivers. Millions of devotees will come together to take a holy dip, seeking spiritual cleansing and blessings. The Maha Kumbh is a timeless testament to faith, unity, and the eternal connection between humanity and the divine, that owes its origins to mythology and history. Devotees believe that a dip during the auspicious planetary alignments cleanses sins and paves the way for Moksha (liberation). Swami Sivananda, the Yoga Guru, and a proponent of Vedanta, rightly pointed out that "The holy dip at the Kumbh Mela is not just a ritual; it is a profound surrender to the divine." Mythologically connected, the legend of 'Samudra Manthan', or the Churning of the Ocean, is the cornerstone of its mythological significance. According to ancient scriptures, gods and demons churned the ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality (Amrit). As the Gods carried away the nectar, a few drops fell at four locations – Haridwar, Prayagraj, Nashik and Ujjain – and these places became sacred. Thus began the tradition of the Kumbh Mela. Scholar Diana Eck, professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University notes that "The Kumbh Mela reflects the Indian ethos of integrating mythology with geography, turning the mundane into the sacred." References to Kumbha appear in Vedic texts like the Rigveda,



Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. It is also linked to the zodiac sign Aquarius, an astrological interpretation influenced by Greek ideas in the late 1st millennium CE. 'Mela' means "assembly" or "gathering" and signifies fairs or communal celebrations, as found in ancient Hindu texts. Together, Kumbha Mela refers to a "gathering centered around water or the nectar of immortality." Historically, the first recorded mention of the Kumbh Mela can be traced back to the writings of the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century CE. Hiuen Tsang documented several key events during Harsha's (Harshavardhana ruled over much of northern India from 606 to 647 AD and his reign is regarded as one of relative peace and prosperity) reign. Tsang also documented the Kumbh Mela festival in Prayag which Harsha attended. Over centuries, the festival evolved from a modest gathering of ascetics to a colossal event that attracts millions. The historical transformation of the Kumbh Mela underscores its resilience and adaptability, blending spiritual fervour with societal changes. A defining feature of the Kumbh Mela is the presence of saints, seers, and spiritual leaders



REFERENCES TO KUMBH APPEAR IN VEDIC TEXTS LIKE THE RIGVEDA, YAJURVEDA, SAMAVEDA, AND ATHARVAVEDA. IT IS ALSO LINKED TO THE ZODIAC SIGN AQUARIUS, AN ASTROLOGICAL INTERPRETATION INFLUENCED BY GREEK IDEAS IN THE LATE 1ST MILLENNIUM CE

who guide the masses. Various 'Akharas' (monastic orders) play a pivotal role in preserving and propagating Sanatan Dharma. The ascetics, often clad in saffron robes or ash, symbolise the renunciation of worldly desires. The ritual bath in the rivers further holds deep symbolic meaning. It signifies the washing away of one's ego and sins, allowing a fresh spiritual beginning. Historian William Dalrymple observes, "The saints at the Kumbh Mela are the custodians of India's timeless spiritual heritage." The Kumbh Mela beautifully embodies the fusion of religion and science. Its timing, rooted in precise astronomical calculations, reflects the profound significance of Hindu cosmology. When Jupiter enters Aquarius and the Sun moves into Aries, planetary alignments create an auspicious period for spiritual connection. This sacred festival links cosmic phenomena with earthly rituals, highlighting the deep interconnection between the universe and human spirituality. Aryabhata's pioneering work in celestial phenomena, including planetary motion and eclipses, continues to influence the Kumbh's timing. The Kumbh Mela is also a melting pot of cultures,

philosophies, and humanity. Participants range from reclusive ascetics to common people and even international visitors. This diversity underscores the universality of the quest for spiritual enlightenment. Sociologist Sudhir Kakar once wrote that the "Kumbh Mela is not merely a religious event but a grand celebration of human interconnectedness." The exchange of ideas, rituals, and philosophies at the Mela fosters a unique sense of global unity. Hosting millions of pilgrims at the Kumbh Mela demands meticulous planning, leveraging cutting-edge technologies like AI-powered crowd management systems, drone surveillance for security, and mobile health clinics to handle medical emergencies. Mobile apps and live-streaming services ensured smooth communication and global accessibility for devotees. The 2025 Kumbh will span an expanded area of 800 hectares, featuring 1.8 lakh tents and 101 smart parking facilities for five lakh vehicles daily. Despite the challenges, the event seamlessly blends tradition and modernity. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISRO'S DOCKING MISSION SUCCESSFUL

Madam — ISRO docking two fast-moving spacecraft in space is a highly complex operation with numerous benefits. Docking enables the assembly of modular space stations, telescopes, or other large structures in orbit that cannot be launched in one piece. Example: Docking was essential in constructing the International Space Station (ISS). Docking allows for the transfer of astronauts and cargo between spacecraft or from a spacecraft to a space station. This supports long-term missions, resupply and the exchange of crew. This extends the operational life of expensive assets like communication or scientific satellites. Docking technology allows spacecraft to refuel in space, enabling longer missions or supporting reusable spacecraft. This is crucial for deep space exploration missions. Docking is a critical step for assembling spacecraft or transferring crew for missions to the Moon, Mars, or beyond. Modular spacecraft for such missions often require multiple launches and dockings to combine their components. Docking facilitates international cooperation, as different countries can launch modules or experiments that dock with a shared platform, like a space station. Docking provides a means for evacuation or rescue in case of emergencies aboard a spacecraft or space station. Spacecraft like crew capsules (e.g., SpaceX Dragon, ISRO's Gaganyaan) rely on docking to connect with orbital stations, making them reusable and cost-effective. Successfully executing docking operations demonstrates technological prowess, boosts national pride, and establishes the country as a leader in space exploration. Docking operations are a cornerstone of space exploration and mission sustainability, enabling long-term presence and work in space. This achievement has placed India in the exclusive and elite league of the US, Russia, and China! This docking was successful on January 16, 2025!

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

India strengthens its naval fleet



After two days of the inauguration of the strategically important Z-Morh or Sonamarg Tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated to the nation three frontline naval combatants—the destroyer INS Surat, the frigate INS Nilgiri and the Scorpene-class submarine INS Vaghsheer on their commissioning at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai on the occasion of Army Day on

Wednesday. It is for the first time that all three frontline platforms have been indigenously developed in the country. The simultaneous commissioning of these vessels is a shot in the arm for the Indian Navy, which is preparing itself to challenge China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. Equipped with the advanced technology, all three vessels have boosted the Indian Navy's capabilities to respond to various maritime challenges more effectively. In fact, public sector shipyards such as GRSE Kolkata, MDL Mazgaon, CSL Kochi, GSL Goa and HSL Vizag Besides immense contributions to defence preparation, the Indian Navy has contributed immensely to boosting operational preparedness of the Indian Navy by completing various shipbuilding projects in a very efficient and time-bound manner.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

ACTOR SAIF ALI KHAN ATTACKED

Madam — Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan was stabbed six times after confronting an intruder, who had a confrontation with Khan's maid before the actor intervened, resulting in a physical struggle, in his Bandra residence early Thursday morning. The intruder fled after a violent altercation, and Khan was rushed to Lilavati Hospital by his son, Ibrahim and a caretaker, where he has successfully emerged from surgery and is now out of danger. The actor is currently recovering, with doctors closely monitoring his condition. People wonder how an intruder can enter the building and reach the 11th floor in a high-profile building that is well guarded and then escape also. Moreover, all in Bandra. An area that has the highest concentration of celebrities, which is supposed to have adequate security. No doubt 54-year-old Saif is a fit person, so he could face the intruder. Wishing Saif Ali Khan a speedy recovery, trusting that the law will take its course and those responsible will be held accountable.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

HAMAS-ISRAEL TRUCE DECLARED

Madam — The ceasefire accord emerged after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the US to stop the war that began with deadly Hamas attacks on Israel and saw Israeli forces kill tens of thousands of Palestinians and devastate Gaza. It is a welcome move. As per the deal, Israel and Hamas have agreed to halt the war in Gaza and see the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. It is the most significant breakthrough in 15 months of war that began in October 2023. Firstly, hostages in Gaza and Palestinian prisoners in Israel would be freed, and Gazans who have been displaced would be allowed to start returning home. During this period, Israeli troops would pull out of all populated areas in Gaza while the Palestinians would also return to their neighbourhoods in all the areas of Gaza. The second stage would be a permanent end to the war, according to Biden.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The silent struggles of a daughter-in-law: A call to change

Allowing a daughter-in-law to flourish in her own right doesn't diminish the family's unity—it strengthens it

Living in a joint family is rarely simple, but for a daughter-in-law, it may be a delicate balancing act filled with judgement and criticism. In many households, the role of a daughter-in-law is laden with unspoken expectations, leaving little room for her individuality. It's time we acknowledge these silent struggles and push for a more inclusive and empathetic family dynamic. A daughter-in-law often steps into a household as an outsider, expected to adapt seamlessly to a new way of life. From changing her surname to understanding the intricacies of family traditions, she embarks on a journey of transformation. Yet, the term "in-law" itself can feel like a trap—a constant reminder of her peripheral status in the family. For many, this word symbolises the invisible cage of societal expectations and sacrifices that are seldom reciprocated. "It feels as though I'm constantly being watched," shares Anonymous, 37, who recently relocated to live with her in-laws following her marriage. "It can be exhausting to sense scrutiny at every corner,



whether it's about your outfit or your manner of speaking." These tales are not one of a kind. Across the nation, countless women grapple with the challenge of fulfilling the expectations of others while striving to maintain their sense of self. Some of my friends and cousins have admitted to bending the truth just to carve out a little time for themselves—a brief coffee catch-up or a quick getaway to relax with friends. Some even refer to it as a means of 'escaping' the steadfast pressures of family life. But why should it come to this? Why must a daughter-in-law justify her need for a breather?

The narrative that has been perpetuated for generations—that she must be the glue holding the family together—needs an overhaul. Living in a joint family should not mean sacrificing one's freedom or sense of self. It's high time families rethink the dynamics and extend the same courtesy of individuality and space to their daughters-in-law that they offer their sons. Empathy and equality within a household aren't luxuries; they are necessities for harmony. Allowing a daughter-in-law to flourish in her own right doesn't diminish the family's unity—it strengthens it. Moreover, it sets an exam-

ple for future generations, teaching them to prioritise respect over rigid roles. Transformation begins with dialogue. It is essential for families to recognise the contributions a daughter-in-law makes and to foster open communication regarding shared responsibilities. Partners also hold a crucial position in connecting their spouses with their families, making certain that everyone feels appreciated and heard. At its core, a family is about mutual love, respect, and support. Let's replace the stifling word "in-law" with something more inclusive—perhaps "in-love," symbolising acceptance and belonging. After all, isn't that what a family should truly be about? For daughters-in-law across the world, the message is clear: You are not alone in your struggle. For families, the challenge is to listen, adapt, and foster a space where everyone, regardless of their title, feels at home. It's not just about rewriting roles—it's about rewriting the narrative for a more equitable tomorrow. (The writer is a freelance writer; views are personal)



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

FIRST COLUMN

OUR ACTIONS
SHAPE OUR LIVES

Karmaphalas—the results of our actions—are an undeniable force shaping our lives



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We all should know about karmaphalas. These are the results of both good and bad karma (acts) done by us in the past with our minds, words and bodies. I have mentioned minds separately from bodies because karmas done by the mind are subtle. And they can be quite lethal. What is a mental disease? You have guessed right; it is caused by our minds. Similarly, words are no less dangerous. Yes, words can be very deadly, as experienced by all of us, when we choose to speak foolishly. And these bad karmaphalas can manifest at any age but they hurt the most in old age when we are weak and not left with many options.

This is when a person laments about his bad luck and there are not many sympathisers. Aren't we written off as we age? This article describes what we can do about it. We are not so helpless after all. The first step is to stop doing all bad acts right from this moment. And we know what these are. Goodness has to increase in us by doing all acts of goodness.

We must speak pleasantly; we should see goodness programmes; we should stick to foods in goodness; and so on. What this will do is protect us from the ill effects of our present acts, to begin with. Controller mental must be curbed; one must become realistic because there is only one controller and that is God. If it wasn't so we will obtain whatever we desire, which hardly even hap-



pens. The ego must be curbed because there is only one superior entity, which is God. All our lives we try to prove our superiority and what happens? We become very unpopular with others, especially with our family members, whom we desperately need in our old age. Spiritual practices must be started in the right earnest. They will make a lot of sense if we realise that we are souls, parts of God.

Shouldn't parts be dependent on the whole? Should we not be respectful towards God, just like a son is supposed to be towards his father? Don't we thank others when they do us some favour? God is forever doing us many favours. To begin with, He has provided all essentials free like the light of the sun, water, air containing oxygen, etc. God has to help ultimately because fate cannot be changed by anyone else. He also doesn't, but helps to deal with bad karmaphalas; we won't end up badly. (9.31) This is a very big 'kripa' but more important is His mercy in protecting us from our good karmaphalas, when we are most likely to hurt ourselves badly. Because it is hard to tolerate good times. And God and only God can help in improving our nature, which is also part of our fate. Doesn't our nature let us down time and again? We see people destroying themselves by angry acts, lusty behaviour, envious attitudes, etc. God protects us from foolish acts, if we remain in His shelter. I am very scared about the prospect of ill fate in my old age when I am already weak. God has to protect me.

I am not taking any chances; I have taken God's shelter. Only God is the one who can help, being the owner and controller. God can intervene and God does for His devotees. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 18.58) Wouldn't this make us peaceful? It has made me gradually as my connection with God is getting strengthened by my spiritual practices. Please don't take chances.

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

Reverse brain drain: A game-changer for growth



WASEEM JAVED

By harnessing the knowledge, networks and expertise of these returnees, India is laying the foundation for a resilient and competitive economy

India has witnessed a mass exodus of talent for decades, as highly skilled professionals and students left the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This phenomenon, known as 'brain drain', has historically deprived the country of its brightest minds. However, the tide is reversing, with individuals returning to their home country, as seen in the recent past. With acquired skills and rich experience, the 'reverse brain drain' is increasingly becoming a powerful force in India's economic growth and development. This comes against the backdrop of India's fast-paced economic growth, combined with government initiatives and an evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem that has made the country an attractive destination for global talent, including those who once left its shores. This shift is not about just people coming back; it's about knowledge transfer, innovation, and global networks essential to building a competitive and resilient economy.

Economic and Entrepreneurial Opportunities Driving Return

In most cases, what has caused this reverse brain drain is the prospect of available opportunities in India. The growth pattern of India as a country with an upward economic trajectory brings with it demand for science, technology, and innovation skills from professionals in their fields.

Returnees easily get absorbed in suitable roles since their international experience puts them on top of the sought-after candidates at startups, large multinational companies, and research centres. Government initiatives like Make in India, Startup India, and Atmanirbhar Bharat have further made India more attractive. These initiatives encourage entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and innovation by offering financial incentives, regulatory support, and access to infrastructure. Thus, many Indian professionals who had earlier worked in global hubs such as Silicon Valley are returning to start their startups or take up leadership roles in Indian enterprises.

For example, several Indian entrepreneurs who have returned from the United States or the United Kingdom are at the helm of billion-dollar startups in India today. They cut across fintech, e-commerce, health tech, and renewable energy among other sectors that create jobs and spur economic growth. Their global networks and access to venture capital give them a competitive edge that will allow them to scale their businesses quickly and effectively.

The Role of Overseas Education in Shaping Talent

Education in foreign lands serves as the core of the reverse brain drain. In 2024, more than 13.35 lakh students from India pursued education abroad, of which the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Germany were among the top destinations. In general, courses in engineering, business management, medicine, and technology attract Indian students with promising career avenues. This international education equips students with advanced knowledge, technical skills, and a global perspective. Many also gain valuable work experience abroad before deciding to return to India.

A key facilitator in this journey has been the rise of AI-powered consultancy plat-



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES LIKE MAKE IN INDIA, STARTUP INDIA, AND ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT HAVE FURTHER MADE INDIA MORE ATTRACTIVE. THESE INITIATIVES ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SELF-RELIANCE, AND INNOVATION BY OFFERING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES, REGULATORY SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE

forms that streamline the process of studying abroad. These platforms help students identify the best courses, universities, and countries based on their aspirations and career goals.

They also help with visa processes, and education loans, and even offer post-admission help, so everything goes off smoothly. These consultancies not only empower students in terms of succeeding abroad but also lay the groundwork for their potential contributions upon returning to India while bridging the gap between students and global education systems.

Benefits of Reverse Brain Drain for India

The reverse brain drain is an economy-changing force for India, bringing skilled professionals back to drive progress across sectors. In the case of technology, returnees provide cutting-edge expertise in areas like artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and clean energy, which ensure that India is not left behind globally.

The knowledge that these returnees provide creates technological advances that benefit both industries and society. Entrepreneurship and innovation also pick up pace as returnees start new ventures, create jobs, and develop innovative products and services that address local and global challenges. This not only increases employment but also makes India a creative solutions hub.

Furthermore, these professionals enhance scientific collaboration by connecting Indian institutions with international research networks, thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources in areas such as healthcare and renewable energy. The economic impact is equally strong as the

reverse brain drain strengthens productivity, draws in foreign investment, and propels GDP growth.

Key Challenges and the Way Forward

Although reverse brain drain promises to boost Indian growth immensely, bureaucratic red tape, infrastructural inadequacies, and differing work environments in India versus the developed world will still prevent most professionals from coming back. This will only come true when registration procedures, tax regimes, and the regime for intellectual property become more simplified, paving the way for returnees to establish enterprises or meaningfully contribute to organizations. To tap into returning talent effectively, India must improve its infrastructure: world-class research facilities, modern educational institutions, and strong health care. More competitive incentives to attract international talent include tax breaks, grants for research, and easier access to funding. Only then will the reverse brain drain convert into practical input toward the nation's economic growth and innovation.

Government Initiatives and Policy Support

The Indian government has been proactively capitalising on reverse brain drain. By setting up innovation hubs, funding startup companies, and collaborating with world-class research institutes, the country is attracting much-needed talent as well as fostering innovation. Many countries have implemented policies and incentives to encourage skilled professionals to return to their home countries. For example, Taiwan created the Hsinchu Science Park and offered tax cuts to encourage the development of high-tech industries. Such poli-

cies not only encourage the return of skilled professionals but also provide them with a platform to flourish.

The Global Context and Its Implications

Interestingly, reverse brain drain is not an Indian phenomenon alone. Developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom are losing talent due to restrictive immigration policies and limited opportunities for career advancement. For example, America's flawed immigration policies have inadvertently driven away skilled professionals who are now contributing to India's growth.

This shift points to a wider paradigm wherein developing countries are transformational centres of innovation and economic activity. It could also help India emerge as a global leader in sectors ranging from technology to healthcare.

A Bright Future for Reverse Brain Drain

The reverse brain drain represents a new paradigm in India's journey to become a global economic superpower. In this new scenario, talent can be an asset to the country by nurturing innovation and fostering collaboration. With government support, private sector participation, and an emphasis on developing world-class infrastructure, the country is poised to turn reverse brain drain into a sustained growth driver. In doing so, this movement is not only for India but reshapes the global talent landscape with a new reality of importance— inclusive and dynamic economies in a more integrated and interconnected world.

(The writer is the founder and CEO of EduVib; views are personal)

Andhra Pradesh's journey towards zero hunger and inclusive education

The Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal scheme is a testament to the State's commitment to inclusivity and reforming the education system

Since Independence, food security has been a significant concern in India. Despite notable progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger, India still grapples with the challenge of undernutrition.

According to a United Nations report, the country accounts for nearly 195 million undernourished individuals, with children constituting 43 per cent of this population. Various initiatives, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the PM Poshan Mid-Day Meal scheme, have been implemented to address this pressing issue.

Historical Roots of Mid-Day Meal Schemes

The origins of the Mid-Day Meal scheme in India can be

traced back to the colonial era. In 1925, the Madras Presidency proposed the first-ever Mid-Day Meal initiative for underprivileged children. Tamil Nadu became the first state to implement this idea, with Sourashtra Boys Higher Secondary School in Madurai serving meals to children in 1955.

By the 1980s, this programme gained widespread acceptance, particularly with the introduction of the "Nutritious Noon-Meal Scheme" by Tamil Nadu's then Chief Minister, M G Ramachandran. This initiative aimed to provide food to 6.8 million malnourished children in the state. Over the years, the programme has demonstrated the strong correlation between nutritious meals and improved educa-



T V KATTIMANI

tion. For children in tribal and socio-economically disadvantaged communities, the scheme has proven to be a lifeline. Many of these children, previously engaged in household activities or income generation due to food insecurity, could now attend school and pursue their right to education. The programme also had a transformative impact on children from Socio-

Economic Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, De-notified Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, and girl children.

Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme

In a significant step forward, the Andhra Pradesh government recently launched the "Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme." This initiative, named after Dokka Seethamma—revered as Aparna Annapuram—provides free meals to students in junior colleges across the state. Seethamma, born in 1841 in Mandapet village, was renowned for her compassion and dedication to serving the needy. Despite limited formal education, she imbibed strong moral values through



stories and songs from her childhood. Along with her husband, Dokka Joganna, she provided food and shelter to travelers and disaster-stricken communities near the Godavari River. Her legacy of humanitarian service remains a beacon of inclusivity and maternal love.

The Dokka Seethamma scheme is the first of its kind in India, targeting intermediate students. Benefiting 148,419 students across 475 government junior colleges in Andhra Pradesh, the pro-

gramme aims to reduce dropout rates, enhance academic focus, and improve overall student health. By lessening the financial burden on low-income families, the initiative also promotes greater equity in education. It sets a model for other states to emulate, addressing hunger while fostering a nurturing environment for academic and personal growth.

Complementary Initiatives for Inclusivity

In addition to the Dokka Seethamma scheme, Andhra Pradesh has revived the "Anna Canteens" initiative. This program offers wholesome meals at just Rs 5 to economically disadvantaged individuals, significantly alleviating hunger and improving living standards. By ensuring affordable

access to food, the state aims to bridge socioeconomic disparities and support marginalised communities.

For tribal students, particularly girls, the Dokka Seethamma scheme has been a game-changer. Tribal communities often face acute food insecurity due to geographical remoteness and limited resources. Free nutritious meals enable tribal children to focus on their education instead of household chores or income generation. The scheme also addresses educational inequity by encouraging families to prioritise their children's schooling. For tribal girls, the program has a transformative impact. Social and financial pressures often force girls to leave school prematurely, but free meals reduce fam-

ily burdens and promote their continued education.

A Vision for a Better Future

The Mid-Day Meal scheme and similar initiatives signify more than just food distribution—they represent a commitment to empowering the marginalised and uplifting the underprivileged. These programs not only ensure access to nutritious meals but also encourage higher education, better living standards, and healthier lifestyles. By fostering cooperation among teachers, students, and staff, the scheme revives the ancient "Gurukula" system of holistic education, emphasising both mental and physical wellbeing.

(The writer is Vice Chancellor of Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh; views are personal)

How long will it take and how much will it cost to rebuild Gaza?

PTI ■ GAZA CITY

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are eager to leave miserable tent camps and return to their homes if a long-awaited ceasefire agreement halts the Israel-Hamas war, but many will find there is nothing left and no way to rebuild. Israeli bombardment and ground operations have transformed entire neighbourhoods in several cities into rubble-strewn wastelands, with blackened shells of buildings and mounds of debris stretching away in all directions.

Major roads have been plowed up. Critical water and electricity infrastructure is in ruins. Most hospitals no longer function.

The agreement for a phased ceasefire and the release of hostages held by Hamas-led militants does not say who will govern Gaza after the war, or whether Israel and Egypt will lift a blockade limiting

the movement of people and goods that they imposed when Hamas seized power in 2007.

The United Nations says it could take more than 350 years to rebuild if the blockade remains.

The full extent of the damage will only be known when the fighting ends and inspectors have full access to the territory. The most heavily destroyed part of Gaza, in the north, has been sealed off and largely depopulated by Israeli forces in an operation that began early October.

Using satellite data, the United Nations estimated last month that 69 per cent of the structures in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, including over 245,000 homes.

The World Bank estimated USD 18.5 billion in damage — nearly the combined economic output of the West Bank and Gaza in 2022 — from just the first four



the size of the Great Pyramid of Giza. With over 100 trucks working full time, it would take over 15 years to clear the rubble

remains.

Gaza's health ministry says thousands of people killed in airstrikes are still buried under the rubble.

The rubble clearance and eventual rebuilding of homes will require billions of dollars and the ability to bring construction materials and heavy equipment into the territory — neither of which is assured.

The ceasefire agreement calls for a three to five-year reconstruction project to begin in its final phase, after all the remaining 100 hostages have been released, and Israeli troops have withdrawn from the territory.

But getting to that point will require agreement on the second and most difficult phase of the deal, which still must be negotiated. Even then, the ability to rebuild will depend on the blockade, which critics have long decried as a form of collective punishment. Israel says it is needed to prevent Hamas from

rebuilding its military capabilities, noting that cement and metal pipes can also be used for tunnels and rockets.

Israel might be more inclined to lift the blockade if Hamas were no longer in power, but there are no plans for an alternative government.

The US and much of the international community want a revitalised Palestinian Authority to govern the West Bank and Gaza with the support of Arab countries ahead of eventual statehood.

But that's a nonstarter for Israel's government, which is opposed to a Palestinian state and has ruled out any role in Gaza for the Western-backed authority.

International donors are unlikely to invest in an ungoverned territory that has seen five wars in less than two decades, which means the sprawling tent camps along the coast could become a permanent feature of life in Gaza.

'Elon Musk's support for European far-right completely unacceptable'

PTI ■ BERLIN

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Friday that Elon Musk's support for the far-right in Europe is "completely unacceptable", adding to his previous criticism of Musk's interventions in the German election campaign.

Musk has said over the past month that only the far-right party Alternative for Germany, or AfD, can "save Germany".

Last week, the tech billionaire livestreamed on his social media platform X a chat with Alice Weidel, the party's candidate for chancellor in Germany's February 23 election, amplifying its message ahead of the vote.

His interest in Germany and politics elsewhere in Europe, after he poured money and energy into helping Donald Trump win the US election, has set off alarm bells among politicians across the continent.

The Tesla and SpaceX chief executive has also demanded the release of jailed UK anti-



Islam extremist Tommy Robinson and called British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government "tyrannical", claiming Starmer should be in prison.

Scholz has said it's important to "stay cool" over personal attacks, but that Germany's way forward "will not be decided by the owners of social media channels" but by German voters.

Asked on Friday about Musk's interventions, he said it's important to "criticise the

right thing." "What we must criticise is not that a billionaire, or a billionaire from other countries in a global world, expresses his opinion — but what he says," Scholz said at a news conference.

"He supports the extreme right throughout Europe, in Britain, in Germany, in many, many other countries, and that is something that is completely unacceptable."

"This endangers the democratic development of Europe, it endangers our community, and that must be criticised," Scholz said.

Polls show AfD in second place ahead of the election, with support of about 20 per cent, but Weidel has no realistic chance of becoming chancellor because other parties refuse to work with the party.

Centre-right opposition leader Friedrich Merz has also criticised Musk's endorsement of AfD.

Merz's Union bloc leads polls and he is the favourite to become Germany's next leader.

3 lawyers for late Russian opp leader Navalny jailed by court

PTI ■ PETUSKI

Three lawyers who once represented the late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny were convicted by a court Friday as part of the Kremlin's crackdown on dissent that has reached levels unseen since Soviet times.

Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Alexei Liptser were already in custody and were given sentences from 3 1/2 to five years by a court in the town of Petushki, about 100 km east of Moscow. They were arrested in October 2023 on charges of involvement with extremist groups, as Navalny's networks were deemed by authorities.

The case was widely seen as a way to increase pressure on the opposition to discourage defence lawyers from taking political cases.

At the time, Navalny was serving a 19-year prison term on several criminal convictions, including extremism.

He died in a Russian prison camp in February 2023. The independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported that Kobzev said in his final statement in court on Jan 10 that "we are being tried for transmitting Navalny's thoughts to other people".

The independent Russian news outlet Mediazona reported three journalists attending the sentencing were detained and taken to a police station.

Navalny's networks were deemed extremist following a 2021 ruling that outlawed his organisations — the Foundation for Fighting Corruption and a network of regional offices — as extremist groups.

That ruling, which exposed anyone involved with the organisations to prosecution, was condemned by Kremlin critics as politically motivated and designed to stifle Navalny's activities.

According to Navalny's allies, authorities accused the

lawyers of using their position to pass information from him to his team. Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and outspoken opponent of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested in 2021 upon his return from Germany, where he was recuperating from a nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He was ordered to serve 2 1/2 years in prison.

After two more trials, his sentence was extended to 19 years. He and his allies said the charges were politically motivated and accused the Kremlin of seeking to jail him for life.

In December 2023, Navalny was moved from a penal colony in the Vladimir region east of Moscow to one above the Arctic Circle, where he died in February at the age of 47 under still-unexplained circumstances. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, and members of his team alleged he was killed on orders from the Kremlin. Officials have

Pence calls on Trump to renew US support for Taiwan

Taipei (PTI): Former US vice President Mike Pence called on President-elect Donald Trump to renew his pledge to support Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.

Speaking during a visit to Taipei on Friday, Pence said China's annexation of the island would impact global trade, technology and nuclear proliferation.

"The fall of Taiwan would likely spark a new nuclear arms race," he said.

"Smaller Asian nations concerned about Chinese aggression would no longer be confident of American deterrence. American security commitments would be viewed as empty promises, destabilising not only this region, but the wider world."

He added that nations would feel "they had no choice but to develop their own nuclear arsenal", which would increase the risk of global nuclear confrontation.

Pence, who served as vice president during Trump's first term but had a falling out with his former boss over Trump's refusal to concede the 2020 election, sought to reassure Taiwanese people of Washington's continued support.

The US is Taiwan's main arms provider and favours maintaining the status quo between Taipei and Beijing, which has threatened to annex the self-ruled island, by force if necessary. On his campaign trail last year, Trump cast doubt over the US' continued backing of Taiwan, accusing the island of stealing the chip industry from the US and saying Taiwan should pay the US for protection against China.

Pence, speaking at an educational forum in Taiwan's capital, said he was convinced the US would never "abandon" its allies across the Pacific Ocean.

"I call on the new administration in Washington, and freedom-loving nations around the world to urgently renew our commitment for providing Taiwan with the support it needs to defend itself and its freedom," he said.

Pence also called on Trump's incoming administration to start negotiations for a free trade agreement with Taiwan, a development that's long been floated by various US and Taiwanese politicians and that would be sure to anger China.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority

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Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.in

नीलामी की विज्ञप्ति

मुख्य कार्यपालक अधिकारी, नवीन ओखला औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण की ओर से भण्डार क्रय विभाग सैक्टर-39 के भण्डार में जमा निष्प्रयोज्य सामग्री जैसा है जहाँ है के आधार पर दिनांक 04.02.2025 को प्रातः 11:00 बजे समिति के समक्ष नीलामी की जानी है। नीलामी में भाग लेने के इच्छुक व्यक्ति/संस्था, निष्प्रयोज्य सामान का निरीक्षण किसी भी कार्यदिवस में दिनांक 20.01.2025 से दिनांक 03.02.2025 तक कर सकते हैं। नीलामी में भाग लेने वाले प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को बोली बोलने से पूर्व रु. 90,791/- (रुपये नब्बे हजार सात सौ इक्यान्वे मात्र) धरोहर राशि एफ.डी.आर./डी.डी. के रूप में नवीन ओखला औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण के पक्ष में बोली बोलने की तिथि से पूर्व पैन नम्बर सहित भण्डार क्रय विभाग के कार्यालय में जमा करानी होगी। धरोहर राशि Refundable होगी। सबसे अधिक बोली लगाने वाले को नीलामी के तुरन्त बाद नीलामी राशि का 25% मुतातान तुरन्त जमा करना अनिवार्य है। सामग्री 20 दिन के अन्दर बाकी मुतातान करके उठाना होगा, अन्यथा धरोहर राशि एवं 25% मुतातान राशि जप्त कर लिये जायेगे। नीलाम होने वाली सामग्री की सूची भण्डार क्रय विभाग के नोटिस बोर्ड व सैक्टर-39 स्थित कार्यालय में कार्य दिवसों में देखी जा प्राप्त की जा सकती है। किसी भी प्रकार का अतिरिक्त कर देय होगा। सभ्य अधिकारी को किसी भी बोली को निरस्त करने का पूर्ण अधिकार होगा।

भण्डार क्रय अधिकारी, नौएडा
कार्यालय : सैक्टर-39, नौएडा

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

Lloyd Austin ends his term marred by Afghanistan but buoyed by Ukraine

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin will bid farewell Friday to the forces and personnel he has led through a tumultuous term that had three major military crises, a global pandemic and a personal brush with cancer that became a flashpoint for the way it was mishandled.

Austin, 71, spent 41 years of his life in a military uniform. He retired as a highly decorated four-star general who earned a Silver Star — an award given for gallantry in action — for leading troops from the front in the initial 2003 invasion of Iraq. He is one of the many Pentagon leaders who have served in combat and has "dust on his boots" — something President-elect Donald Trump's choice for defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, has falsely claimed is his distinction and why he is needed to restore a military

Graffiti on Assad's prison walls express Syrians' fears and loves

Damascus (PTI): Languishing in a dungeon cell of Syria's then-ruler Bashar Assad, an unknown prisoner scrawled a verse of Arabic poetry on his cell wall — an expression of pain and love amid his torment. "My country, even if it oppresses me, is dear. My people, even if uncharitable to me, are generous," he wrote.

It's a well-known verse, composed 800 years ago by a poet defying a tyrannical caliph. As you walk through the cold, dark cells of Assad's prisons, the graffiti on the walls cry out. They plead to God and yearn for loved ones. Often mysterious, they preserve fragments of what anonymous men were thinking as they faced torture and death. "Trust no one, not even your brother," someone darkly warns on a cell wall in Damascus' notorious Palestine Branch detention facility.

Since 2011, tens of thousands of Syrians vanished inside the network of prisons and detention facilities run by Assad's security forces as they tried to crush his opposition. Inmates went for years without contact with the outside world, living in overcrowded, windowless cells where their cellmates died around them. Torture and beatings were inflicted daily. Mass executions were frequent.

Most inmates would have fully expected to die. They had no reason to believe anyone would ever see the messages they scratched into the walls except future prisoners.

One wrote a single word in Arabic, "ashtaqtalak" - "I miss you" - a love letter that could never be sent to a beloved whose name only the writer need know.

More than a month after the prisons were opened by insurgents who ousted Assad in December, The Associated Press toured several facilities to view the graffiti left behind. Nothing can be known about the men who drew and wrote them. Only a few bear names, and few are dated. It's impossible to know who of them lived or died.

Some walls have layers of graffiti on top of each other, marking generations of suffering.

"Don't be sad, mother. This is my fate," reads one, dated Jan 1, 2024. Underneath it are traces of an older text, so faded that only a few words are legible: "... except for you" - a hint of longing for a loved one.

Many of the writings and drawings are cries to parents or loved ones. Someone drew a heart broken in two, with "mother" written in one side, "father" in the other.

समाचार पत्र में विज्ञापन द्वारा तामील के लिए सम्बन्धीत न्ययालय उपजिलाधिकारी/सहायक कलेक्टर (प्रथम श्रेणी), गाजियाबाद।

पत्रांक: 1432 फेब-एप्रैलसी03/01/2024 दिनांक: 13/01/2025

कम्प्यूटर वाद सं0-T202411280110791 वाद संख्या 10791/2024

अंर्नर्गत धारा- उत्तर प्रदेश राजस्व संहिता-2006,144 श्रीराम द्विचस प्राप्ति0 तहसील व जिला गाजियाबाद

बनाम
अजय सिंह यादव एवं 5 अन्य
ग्राम शाहपुर बम्हेटा, परगना हासना, तहसील व जिला गाजियाबाद

श्रीराम द्विचस प्राप्ति0 नीमपुर अगस्तूर कटक उड़ीसावादी

बनाम
1. अजय सिंह यादव पुत्र श्री अमर सिंह निवासी शाहपुर बम्हेटा, परगना हासना तहसील व जिला गाजियाबाद।
2. गजय सिंह यादव पुत्र श्री अमर सिंह निवासी शाहपुर बम्हेटा, परगना हासना तहसील व जिला गाजियाबाद।
3. सूरज मान पुत्र कल्लू निवासी शाहपुर बम्हेटा, परगना हासना तहसील व जिला गाजियाबाद।
4. शौर्य टावरल प्राप्ति0, बी-111, सैक्टर-5, नौएडा।
5. नगर निगम गाजियाबाद द्वारा नगर अस्वाक, नगर निगम गाजियाबाद।
6. उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार द्वारा कलेक्टर गाजियाबादप्रतिवादीगण

वादी ने आपके विरुद्ध उत्त वाद संविस्त किया है। उक्त वाद में मेरे न्यायालय में सुनवाई हेतु दिनांक 27.01.2025 निश्च है। अतः आप उत्तर देने के लिए व्यक्तिगत रूप से या अधिवक्ता के माध्यम से अपना उत्तर देने के उपसंहार हेतु के लिए सम्मन किया जाता है, जिसमें अस्पष्ट रहने पर आपके विरुद्ध एकपक्षीय सुनवाई/निस्तारण किया जायेगा। आज दिनांक 13.01.2025 को मेरे हस्ताक्षर से और न्यायालय की मुहर लगाकर जारी किया गया।

(अजय दीक्षित)
उपजिलाधिकारी
सहायक कलेक्टर (प्रथम श्रेणी), गाजियाबाद

UK orders 'rapid audit' of ethnicity in child sexual abuse

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government has ordered a "rapid audit" of the scale and nature of grooming gangs based child sexual exploitation, including an examination of ethnicity data to determine "cultural and societal drivers" behind the crimes.

UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper laid out the plans in a statement in the House of Commons on Thursday, also noting that many major investigations into the issue have involved "Pakistani heritage gangs".

Amid growing demands for a national inquiry into the scandal since Tesla CEO Elon Musk attacked the UK's handling of the historic scandal on his X platform, the minister told Parliament that the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce will immediately expand the ethnicity data it collects and publishes. "Many major investigations have involved



Firefighters watch a helicopter drop water on the Palisades Fire in Mandeville Canyon in Los Angeles, on Saturday.

that it was a 'far-right bandwagon' to raise these issues and call for a proper inquiry. Let me say this: it is not far right to stand up for rape victims, and smearing those who raised this issue is exactly what led to the victims being ignored and the crimes covered up in the first place," he told the Commons.

Cooper reiterated that the actions the government has announced this week covers the duty to report child abuse, proper penalties for any cover-ups, stronger sentences for grooming gangs, new rights for victims to get an independent review on reopening their case and new action to reopen historical police investigations.

The Home Office said the rapid national audit will begin soon and last three months.

It will be supported by an expert advisory board and draw on the views of victims

and survivors. This work, including the new Victims and Survivors Panel, will be backed by GBP 2.5 million in funding.

According to official estimates, of the 115,000 child sexual exploitation and abuse offences recorded in 2023 by police, over 4,000 of them were group-based offending.

Of those, around 1,100 involved abuse within the family, and over 300 involved abuse in institutions, whilst over 700 of them were group-based grooming gang offences.

"We are also urging police forces to look again at closed and unsolved cases on their files, to ensure they pursue criminals and put them behind bars so they cannot hurt anyone else," added Jess Phillips, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls in the Home Office.

China launches Pakistani satellite into space

Beijing/Islamabad (PTI): China successfully launched a Pakistani satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on Friday. The satellite, Pakistan's first indigenous Electro-Optical (EO-1), was launched at 12.07 pm (Beijing Time) by a Long March-2D carrier rocket and entered its planned orbit successfully, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Named PRSC-EO1, the satellite uses electro-optical sensors to collect data and images of the Earth's surface by detecting and measuring reflected sunlight or emitted radiation, according to Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO). "This remarkable milestone marks a giant leap forward in Pakistan's journey toward self-reliance and technological excellence in space exploration," SUPARCO said in a statement. It added that the satellite will boost Pakistan's ability to monitor and manage natural resources, respond to disasters

Xi, Trump hold talks over phone

Beijing (PTI): Chinese President Xi Jinping held a telephone conversation with US President-elect Donald Trump on Friday, official media here reported. The phone conversation between the two leaders comes just three days before Trump's inauguration ceremony on Jan 20. Xi has deputed Vice-President Han Zheng to attend Trump's swearing-in ceremony, marking the first time a senior Chinese official will be present at a US presidential inauguration, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

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PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mr. Parveen Sirohi is the owner of BUILT-UP PROPERTY BEARING NO. 26-A AREA MEASURING 62.5 SQ. YARDS, OUT OF RECT. NO. 16, KILLA NO. 281, SITUATED IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE KHURELI KHAS, ILLAQ SHAHDARA, DELHI-51. by virtue of CPA dated 28.08.2000, as Doc. No. 16752, AT&S Will, executed by Mrs. Madhu Bala, same to be finance by SMFG India Credit Company Limited (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Company Limited), General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present. Rahal Raj Pathak, Advocate SG Associates (Law Firm) F-18, Lala Pood Plaza, Vahla, Khana, Indraprastha, New Delhi-110034. E-mail: sgaoci@rediffmail.com. Ph: 91112754, 0124440390

CHANGE OF NAME: I, Madhumita Mishra W/o Mr. Ranjan Asthana R/o Flat No. 10115, on 11th Floor, ATS Happy, Trails Plot No. GH-02A, Greater Noida, West Rejesh Plot Chowk Sector-10, Bisakhilalapur, Gautambudh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, have changed my name from Madhumita Mishra W/o Mr. Ranjan Asthana to Madhumita Asthana W/o Mr. Ranjan Asthana. Henceforth I would be known by the name of Madhumita Asthana W/o Mr. Ranjan Asthana.

Public Notice: This is to inform the general public that Mr. Om Gulati is the owner of Residential Plot No. 241 area measuring 350 sq. Mtrs. situated at block C, sector-44, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar U.P. through GI Deed dated 06.10.2023 regd. as doc. No. 8950 executed by Mrs. Roma Gulati in favour of Mr. Om Gulati in respect of said plot. The above-said owner has misplacred the (1) Original Allotment letter issued by NOIDA in favour of Shree Krishna Tyagi in respect of Plot no. 241. (2) Original Possession letter issued by NOIDA in favour of Shree Krishna Tyagi in respect of Plot no. 241. (3) Original Lease Deed dated 11.12.1998 as doc. no. 2465 executed by NOIDA in favour of Shree Krishna Tyagi in respect of said plot. (4) Original Transfer Deed of Lease hold rights dated 04.02.1999 as doc. no. 272 executed by Shree Krishna Tyagi in favour of Smt. Roma Gulati in respect of said plot. Application No. 25002092025, registered at P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi on dated 16.01.2025 Any one who finds the above-mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager of SMFG India Credit Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Co. Ltd.), 3rd Floor, B-45/47, Connaught Place, Delhi-110001. Mr. Tejveer is in the process of mortgaging the said property with SMFG India Credit Co. Ltd. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 7 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 7-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 7-days period by contacting our office at the following address: (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +91120-3101683, e-mail: accounts@vnrh.in

Public Notice: This is to inform the general public that Mr. Tejveer is the owner of Plot area measuring 508.59 Sq. Yds., Gata No. 186, situated at Village Agwana, Sikandarabad U.P. 203205 through Sale deed dated 01.11.2021 regd. as doc. No. 10542 executed by Mr. Surendra Kumar & Mr. Shripa in favour of Mr. Tejveer in respect of said plot. The above-said owner has misplacred the (1) Original Sale Deed dated 17.09.2021 as doc. No. 9865 executed by Deepak Kumar in favour of Shripa in respect of area measuring 374.04 Sq. Yds. (2) Original Sale Deed dated 17.09.2021 as doc. No. 10542 executed by Deepak Kumar in favour of Surendra Kumar in respect of area measuring 134.55 Sq. Yds. of said Plot. Application No. 25002092025, registered at P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi on dated 17.01.2025 Anyone who finds the above-mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager of SMFG India Credit Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Co. Ltd.), 3rd Floor, B-45/47, Connaught Place, Delhi-110001. Mr. Tejveer is in the process of mortgaging the said property with SMFG India Credit Co. Ltd. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 7 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 7-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 7-days period by contacting our office at the following address: (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +91120-3101683, e-mail: accounts@vnrh.in

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE: TENDER NOTICE: PURCHASE OF PAPER SETTING PERFORMANS WITH ENVELOPES AS PER SPECIMEN COPY FOR INDIRA GANDHI UNIVERSITY, MEERUPUR, REWARI. Opening Date: 27.12.2024. Closing Date: 03.02.2025. Amount: 3 LACS. Website: www.gu.ac.in

SPACE INCUBATRICS TECHNOLOGIES LIMITED

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Particulars, 3 months ended 31.12.2024, Year ended 31.03.2024, 3 months ended 30.09.2024. Rows include Total income from operations, Net Profit/(Loss) for the period, Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax and Exceptional items), Total Comprehensive Income for the period, Paid-up equity share capital, and Earning Per Share.

NOTES: 1. The above Audited Quarterly financial results as reviewed by the Audit Committee were approved by the Board of Directors in its meeting held on 16.01.2025. The above results have been audited by the Statutory Auditors of the Company and they have expressed an unqualified audit opinion thereon. 2. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the quarterly financial results are available on the Stock Exchange website: www.bseindia.com & Company's website: www.spaceincubatics.com

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME: I, Yati Sirohiwal D/o Satya Prakash, R/o BH-67 East Shalimar Bagh New Delhi - 110088 State that my name has inadvertently got recorded in my passport as Yati Serohiwal, whereas in my other document my name reflects as Yati Sirohiwal. Yati Serohiwal and Yati Sirohiwal are names of the same person. PD(1273)C I, Sunita Kumari, W/o No.4283386K Hav Kanchan Kumar, R/o- Vill -Yadhuvanshi Nagar, PO-Digha Ghat, PS- Digha, Teh-Danapur, Dist- Patna, Bihar-840111, have changed my name from Sunita Kumari to Seema Thakur, vide affidavit dated 17/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1273)C I, Anshuman Sirohiwal D/o Satya Prakash, R/o BH-67 East Shalimar Bagh New Delhi - 110088 state that my name has inadvertently got recorded in my passport as Anshuman Serohiwal, whereas in my other document my name reflects as Anshuman Sirohiwal. Anshuman Serohiwal and Anshuman Sirohiwal are names of the same person. PD(1268)A I, Anshuman Sirohiwal D/o Satya Prakash, R/o BH-67 East Shalimar Bagh New Delhi - 110088 state that my name has inadvertently got recorded in my passport as Anshuman Serohiwal, whereas in my other document my name reflects as Anshuman Sirohiwal. Anshuman Serohiwal and Anshuman Sirohiwal are names of the same person. PD(1268)A I, Anshuman Sirohiwal D/o Satya Prakash, R/o BH-67 East Shalimar Bagh New Delhi - 110088 state that my name has inadvertently got recorded in my passport as Anshuman Serohiwal, whereas in my other document my name reflects as Anshuman Sirohiwal. Anshuman Serohiwal and Anshuman Sirohiwal are names of the same person. PD(1268)A

Public Notice: Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mr. Vijay Kumar S/o. Smt. Rina is the owner of BUILT-UP PROPERTY BEARING NO. 33-33, UPPER GROUND, Flat No. 2, Block-OP, Swraj Mandir, Baba Colony, Burari, North Delhi-110084, was lost a paper (A) Original Notarized AT&S, GPA & Will along with an Affidavit dated 12.02.1990, executed by Mr. Shyam Sunder S/o Mr. Atar Singh in favour of Mr. Sota Ram Gupta S/o Mr. Narotam Gupta in respect of the premises bearing a plot in land, measuring around 400 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No. 93/13. (B) Original Notarized AT&S, GPA & Will along with an Affidavit dated 20.05.1992, executed by Mr. Sota Ram Gupta S/o Mr. Narotam Gupta in favour of Mr. Madan Lal Gupta S/o Mr. Sita Ram Gupta in respect of the premises bearing a plot in land, measuring around 400 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No. 93/13. (C) RESIDENTIAL PLOT measuring around 80 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No. 93/13, containing a 2BHK flat, situated at Sector-5, Burari, Delhi, known as orchid apartment, these dadr, distt. Gautam budh nagar, up and deo FIR NO.249592/2023, and the said property is being mortgaged by the said property with SHUBHAM HOUSING FINANCE LTD., if anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 7 days of the present. DEEPIKA MISHRA (ADVOCATE) A-20-22 C BLOCK SOUTH CITY UCTANOWP UR-22625

Public Notice: This is to inform the general public that I, Sanjeev Malik, residing at B-56 Indir Puri New Delhi-110012, have been operating the MASS-Globe Service Station located at A-17, B-11, Extension MIDC, Mathura Road, Badarpur, Delhi-110044, as a partner along with Mr. Dinesh Pandey and Mrs. Manju Pandey since 08/02/2023. Due to personal reasons, I have decided to retire from the partnership of the said service station. I hereby declare that I do not desire to make any claim to my share in the MASS-Globe Service Station. I renounce all my existing and future rights in respect of the aforementioned ownership. Furthermore, I have no objection whatsoever to the transfer of ownership of the MASS-Globe Service Station in the names of Mr. Dinesh Pandey and Mrs. Manju Pandey. This public notice is being issued to inform all concerned parties and the public at large. Should anyone have any objections, they are requested to submit the same in writing to the undersigned within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. Kumar Abhishek Advocate Legal Access 132A, Anarkali Complex, Handewalan Ext. New Delhi

Public Notice: (Re: Entire First Floor without roof rights, (Hereinafter referred to as "the said floor"), Built up on Property Bearing No. 36, area measuring 25.90 sq. mtrs., in B-Block, Pocket (HUF) through its Karta Mr. Pawan Kumar (5) M/s Dharmender Kumar (HUF) through its Karta Mr. Dharmender Kumar and Mr. Dwarka Parshad are the joint owners of the said property. Our clients have informed us that the said property was owned by Mrs. (1) Rajni Gupta, (2) Mrs. Bharti Gupta, (3) Mrs. Rekha Gupta, (4) Mrs. Pawan Kumar (HUF) through its Karta Mr. Pawan Kumar, (5) M/s Dharmender Kumar (HUF) through its Karta Mr. Dharmender Kumar and Mr. Dwarka Parshad are the joint owners of the said property. 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Union Cabinet approves ₹11,440 Crore revival plan for Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The Union Cabinet has approved a Rs 11,440 crore revival plan for debt-laden Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), according to a statement released on Friday. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the revival plan for RINL for Rs 11,440 crore, it added.

The infusion includes Rs 10,300 crore as equity capital into RINL and conversion of Rs 1,140 crore working capital loan as 7 per cent non-cumulative preference share capital redeemable after 10 years to keep RINL as a going concern, the official statement said.

With this revival package, many of the legacy problems that RINL used to face will be resolved, Information and

Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said. The equity infusion of Rs 10,300 crore into RINL will help it overcome the operational problems related to raising working capital and start blast furnace operations in the most productive way, the statement said.

The revival package would allow the company to gradually reach its full production capacity, which is critical and is in the national interest to have stability in the Indian steel market by augmenting steel production and also save the livelihoods of employees (regular and

contractual) and those dependent on the operations of the steel plant. The revival plan envisages that RINI will start full production with two blast furnaces in January 2025 and with three blast furnaces by August 2025. Under the Ministry of Steel, RINL operates the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), the only offshore steel plant in Andhra Pradesh. It has an installed capacity of 7.3 Mtpa of liquid steel. As per the statement, the financial condition of RINL is critical. RINL has exhausted the sanctioned borrowing limits from banks for working capital and was not in a position to get further loans from banks. RINL also defaulted on the capex loan repayments and interest payments in June 2024.

Eight former, current Paytm officials pay ₹3.32 Crore to settle case with Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



As many as eight current and former officials of One97 Communications, which owns and operates Paytm, have collectively paid Rs 3.32 crore to markets regulator Sebi to settle allegations of flouting securities market norms. Those who have settled the case are the company's former compliance officer and company secretary Amit Khera; Ashit Ranjit Lilani, Neeraj Arora, Mark Schwartz and Pallavi Shardul Shroff, who were holding the positions of independent directors; and then non-executive nominee directors - Douglas Feagin, Munish Varma and Ravi Chandra Adusumalli, according to a Sebi order.

The order came after these officials proposed to settle the proceedings initiated against them through a show cause notice issued on May 17

"without admitting or denying of the findings." "In view of the receipt of settlement amount by Sebi, the instant adjudication proceedings initiated against the notices vide show cause notice...Dated May 17, 2024, are hereby disposed of," Sebi said in its settlement order. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) initiated adjudication proceedings in the matter of One97 Communications for the alleged violations of

provisions of LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) norms and ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations. It was alleged that independent directors being part of NRC (Nomination and Remuneration Committee) failed to discharge duties with unbiased and independent approach while decision-making with respect to matters involving benefits to

the company's MD and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma and his relatives, in violation of LODR Regulations, 2015. These directors allegedly approved and signed offer documents containing incorrect statements and incomplete disclosures, in violation of ICDR rules. Besides, other directors signed offer documents containing incorrect statements and incomplete disclosures with respect to the company, being a professionally managed firm having no identifiable promoter whereas the company having promoter Sharma, in violation of ICDR Regulations rules. These individuals settled the allegations by paying a settlement amount to Sebi. Individually, Lilani and Arora paid Rs 53.62 lakh each, Adusumalli, Schwartz, Shroff, Feagin and Varma remitted Rs 42.9 lakh each and Khera shelled out Rs 11.05 lakh.

India's economic growth poised to rebound, says RBI Bulletin

PTI ■ MUMBAI



India's economic growth is poised to rebound as domestic demand regains strength, though the stickiness in food inflation warrants careful monitoring, the latest RBI Bulletin released on Friday said.

An article on the 'State of the Economy' published in the January Bulletin also noted that the economic outlook for 2025 is divergent across countries with some loss of speed in the US; weak-to-modest recoveries in Europe and Japan; more moderate growth profiles in emerging and developing countries alongside a more gradual disinflation relative to advanced economies.

"In India, there is a conducive quickening of high-frequency indicators of economic activity in the second half of 2024-25, bearing out the implicit pick-up in real GDP growth for this period in the annual first advance estimates of the NSO," it said. It further said, the headline

inflation eased for the second successive month in December, although the stickiness in food inflation warrants careful monitoring of second order effects. The article has been authored by a team lead by Michael Patra, who demitted the office of RBI Deputy Governor earlier this month. "India's economic growth is poised to rebound as domestic demand regains strength. Rural demand continues to gain momentum, reflecting a resilience in consumption, supported by brighter

agricultural prospects," the article said. A revival in public capex on infrastructure is likely to stimulate growth in key sectors. It also noted that rising input cost pressures in the manufacturing sector, coupled with weather-related exigencies and global headwinds could, however, pose risks to this outlook. The central bank, however, said the views expressed in the Bulletin are of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India.

India's forex reserves drop by USD 8.714 Billion to USD 625.871 Billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI



India's forex reserves dropped by USD 8.714 billion to USD 625.871 billion in the week ended January 10, the RBI said on Friday. Earlier, the overall kitty dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended January 3, the Reserve Bank of India said.

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 volatilities 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 10, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 9.469 billion to USD 536.011 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by USD 792 million to USD 67.883 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 33 million to USD 17.781 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 4 million to USD 4.195 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed.

Gold jumps ₹700 to ₹82K per 10 gms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Rising for the third consecutive day, gold prices on Friday surged Rs 700 to trade near a record high at Rs 82,000 per 10 grams in the national capital due to persistent buying in the local markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 81,300 per 10 grams on Thursday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity continued to shine for the third straight day by jumping Rs 700 to Rs 81,600 per 10 grams against Rs 80,900 per 10 grams in the previous close. However, silver prices declined Rs 500 to Rs 93,500 per kg on Friday. The metal had ended at Rs 94,000 per kg in the previous trading session. On October 31 last year, gold of 99.9 per cent purity and 99.5 per cent purity hit a record high of Rs 82,400 and Rs 82,000 per 10 grams, respectively, in the local markets. Despite a weak trend in the international markets, the precious metal gained in the

domestic market, mainly due to higher demand from jewellers, traders said. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery declined Rs 424 or 0.54 per cent to Rs 78,802 per 10 grams. "Gold witnessed minor profit booking from higher zones on MCX, retreating towards Rs 78,800," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The decline comes as white flags emerge in the Middle East, signalling easing tensions, and the recent positive data from the US, including CPI, retail sales, and the Federal Reserve's dovish outlook, appear to have been largely priced in, Trivedi

added. Silver contracts for March delivery plummeted Rs 1,093 or 1.18 per cent to Rs 91,710 per kg on the MCX on Friday. Globally, Comex gold futures fell USD 21.10 per ounce or 0.77 per cent to USD 2,729.80 per ounce. "Gold dipped slightly below USD 2,750 per ounce ahead of upcoming US housing and industrial production data," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP of Commodity Research at Kotak Securities, said. Fed Governor Christopher Waller on Thursday said if economic data continues to weaken, the central bank might implement three or four rate cuts this year further stoking the optimism for rate cut expectations which lent support to the metal. Additionally, Comex silver futures quoted 1.47 per cent lower in the Asian market hours at USD 31.26 per ounce. Further, uncertainties surrounding US President-elect Donald Trump's trade policies and tariff plans should contribute to limiting losses for the safe-haven asset, according to commodities experts.

Cabinet approves refarming of 687 Mhz of spectrum, more to come: Scindia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The Union Cabinet has approved the refarming of 687 Mhz spectrum for mobile services and more will be done based on the study by a committee of secretaries put in place by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Friday.

Speaking at an event of industry body COAI, the minister said mobile services need 2,000 Mhz of spectrum by 2030 and the Cabinet decision takes the total quantum of radiowaves to 1,587 Mhz.

"Yesterday's Cabinet approved the refarming of 687 Mhz. This means this takes us from 900 Mhz to 1,587 Mhz. (of

which) 320 (MHz) will be released immediately, some by the end of next year and some by the end of 2028-29, which makes us ready for 2030," Scindia said at Digicom Summit 2025. The government, through refarming, earmarks or arranges spectrum of services based on the demand and where the radiowaves can be used efficiently.

The telecom industry has been demanding to make available 2000 megahertz of radiowaves available for mobile services in mid-bands, which are frequencies in the range of 1000 Mhz to 6000 Mhz. Scindia said the government will ensure that the requirement of the industry is met and there are no hurdles in the digital telecom landscape of the country. "That still leaves a gap of roughly 300 (Mhz). So, the ask is not over. The second round of this, the Committee of Secretaries, is working on it. The report will come by mid of this year. We will take that step to ensure that there are no bottlenecks for our digital telecom landscape to grow in India," Scindia said.

He said that telecom services are empowering people, and farmers, supporting several economic engines like digital payments and a backbone to the digital economy. Scindia said that it is his dream that India by 2030, transpends herself into a telecom product nation. "I am in conversation, as we speak, with our telecom majors and OEMs (original equipment makers) to see if there are possibilities to set up telecom manufacturing zones (TMZ). I think that time for TMZs has come," he said. The minister said that transformations in the sector are based on five key pillars, including policy level, technology, and ease of doing business.

Rupee ends one paisa down at 86.62 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI



The rupee traded in a tight range and settled 1 paisa lower at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as massive outflow of foreign funds and falling domestic equity markets dented investors' sentiment. A firm American currency and higher crude oil prices also weighed on the domestic unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.60, stayed range-bound between the high of 86.55 and low of 86.62 throughout the day and ended at 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback, 1 paisa down from its previous closing level. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 21 paisa to close at 86.61 against the US dollar.

In two back-to-back sessions, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the local unit had gained 30 paise from its lowest-ever closing level of 86.70 against the dollar. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee weakened on a negative tone

in the domestic markets and a surge in crude oil prices. "Importer demand may also pressurise the rupee. However, any selling of dollars by the Reserve bank of India (RBI) may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from industrial production and

housing market data from the US," he said and projected the USD-INR spot price to trade in the range of 86.55 to 86.95. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.09 per cent higher at 108.91. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.36 per cent to USD 81.58 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 423.49 points, or 0.55 per cent, to settle at 76,619.33 points, while the Nifty declined 108.60 points, or 0.47 per cent, to 23,203.20 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,341.95 crore on Thursday.

Rail operators likely to post double-digit growth in FY25: India Ratings

PTI ■ MUMBAI



Rail operators' revenue is expected to grow into double-digit, while warehousing sector is projected to log a 3-5 per cent year-on-year growth in organic rentals this fiscal even as the demand for Grade-A space may remain intact, ratings agency India Ratings said on Friday.

For sea transport, the ratings agency said, it is expecting port volumes will be supported by the coastal movement of goods and global container freight, with the easing of geopolitical tensions, including the Red Sea crisis and the normalisation of US-bound traffic. Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) for container freight stations is expected to remain range-bound due to the increase in

the proportion of direct port delivery and high competition intensity at large ports, according to Ind-Ra (India Ratings). Ind-Ra has also assigned an improving outlook for the logistics industry for FY26 and said that macro-tailwinds arising from the government's multipolar investments across ports, rail, road, and air transport are expected to bode well for the industry. Sustained investments and the resultant increased scale of operations are expected to improve cost efficiency and operational flexibility which could lead to higher profitability for Ind-Ra-rated integrated logistics companies, said Pratik Mundhada, Associate Director, Corporates, Ind-Ra. "In Ind-Ra's base case, we see double-digit revenue growth for rail operators in FY26, supported by huge private investments in rakes and dry

terminals in 2024. For warehousing entities, we project organic rental growth of 3-5 per cent year-on-year while demand for Grade-A spaces is expected to remain intact in FY26," he stated. Container freight stations' profitability, according to Mundhada, is likely to remain subdued in this fiscal due to intense competition. "Lastly, for freight forwarders, revenue growth and EBITDA

are likely to be impacted by a moderation in the global freight rates," he added. The ratings agency noted that initiatives such as the National Logistics Policy and the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan aim to enhance multimodal connectivity and foster interdisciplinary coordination. Further, it stated that public-private partnerships are expected to be expected to scale-

up the ports portfolio. Also, increased private capital expenditure towards the network expansion of trains, dry terminals, and warehousing will support the growth of the logistics market in India, it said and added that India's Logistics Performance Index ranking improved to 38 in 2023 from 44 in 2018, with an aspiration to break into the top 25 by 2030 as part of Maritime Vision 2030. This will necessitate a reasonable budgetary allocation towards logistics infrastructure in the upcoming budget, it said. Ind-Ra said it believes the full commissioning of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor will improve the utilisation of rakes and terminals, thereby enhancing the operating profitability of container train operators. On the flip side, increased competition and revisions of

haulage charges will remain key monitorable. The Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor is likely to improve supply chain efficiency for thermal plants, led by increased speed and scheduled train operations, it said. Ratings on logistics and supply chain companies are mostly on a "Stable Outlook", given the sustenance of operational performance, while maintaining a comfortable leverage profile, Ind-Ra said. "While we see capital investments by logistics infrastructure companies including warehousing, rail and dry terminals, their ability to raise long-term debt at a competitive pricing and Ind-Ra's expectation that these companies will be able to optimise the asset utilisation are supporting their credit profile and thereby the Stable rating Outlook," it said.

INBRIEF

NRDC SIGNS MOA WITH IISC TO DRIVE TECHNOLOGY COMMERCIALISATION

BENGALURU: The National Research Development Corporation (NRDC), a Government of India enterprise under the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), India's premier institution for advanced scientific research and education, have signed a landmark Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) to accelerate the commercialisation of IISc-developed technologies. The MoA was signed and exchanged today at IISc by Cmde Amit Rastogi (Retd.), CMD, NRDC and Prof. Govindan Rangarajan, Director, IISc in the august presence of key officials from NRDC and IISc.

GREAT PLACE TO WORK HONOURS BSES: A CULTURE OF TRUST AND INCLUSIVITY

BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) have been awarded the highly coveted "Great Place to Work" Certification, a globally recognised benchmark for workplace excellence. This certification underscores BSES' commitment to fostering a workplace culture rooted in trust, respect, and inclusivity. The recognition reflects the organisation's focus on creating an environment where employees feel valued, empowered, and inspired to excel.



CLAY SHAPED EMOTIONS



connection. The earthy textures and intricate details of the terracotta forms draw viewers into an intimate engagement with the art. Reghu's ability to blend Dravidian and African features results in works that feel rooted in tradition while addressing contemporary sensibilities. The energy within the sculptures invites viewers to pause and reflect, creating a quiet dialogue between art and audience. Reghu draws inspiration from ancient traditions, including the art of the Indus Valley and Harappan civilisations. His sculptures are not replicas of the past; they reinterpret these influences to explore identity and human emotion in a modern context. His figures, with their expressive stances and thoughtful

An exploration of life and emotion through G. Reghu's evocative terracotta sculptures at Art Magnum Gallery, says SAKSHI PRIYA

gestures, evoke narratives that are both universal and deeply personal. The exhibition showcases Reghu's mastery of terracotta as a medium, bringing his forms to life with an emotional resonance that remains long after one leaves the gallery. The contours and expressions of his sculptures suggest movement and thought, compelling the audience to engage with the works on a deeper level. Whether through the tension in a figure's posture or the serenity of a tilted head, each piece carries an emotional weight that connects with the viewer.

Touchable Emotions celebrates clay as a material with both historical significance and contemporary relevance. Reghu's work honours ancient traditions while pushing their boundaries, demonstrating the enduring power of this medium to express complex themes. Through his art, he creates a bridge between the past and the present, showing how heritage and innovation can coexist.

This exhibition is an invitation to reflect on universal themes of life and emotion.

Reghu's terracotta sculptures serve as a poignant reminder of art's ability to connect us to shared experiences. The world of G. Reghu's evocative terracotta sculptures, on display until February 15, 2025, at Art Magnum Gallery, New Delhi. Don't miss the chance to connect with his transformative journey from traditional pottery to emotionally powerful human forms.



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Art has the power to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, offering a language beyond words. Rainer Maria Rilke's observation, "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden for a long time," resonates deeply when considering the process of sculpting with clay. This medium, both humble and evocative, captures human emotions in their rawest form, narrating stories that connect with the core of our shared experiences.

The Touchable Emotions exhibition at Art Magnum Gallery features the terracotta sculptures of renowned sculptor G. Reghu. Curated by Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya, the exhibition rummages into themes of life, heritage and emotion. Reghu's relationship with clay is deeply personal, as he shapes it to express stories that reflect universal human experiences. Each sculpture explores facets of existence, joy, introspection and



Classical Singing at its Best

By SAKSHI PRIYA

What is it about music and dance that can stir our hearts and minds in ways words never could?

The Power of Classical Music:

The 26th Swami Haridas-Tansen Sangeet Nritya Mahotsav curated by Padma Bhushan Dr. Uma Sharma. The Festival opened with a captivating Dhrupad performance by Ustad F. Wasifuddin Dagar, whose renditions of Raag Kambhoji and Raag Adana drew listeners into a peaceful space. The stillness in the room was striking, as Dagar's music seemed to speak directly to the heart, offering a rare moment of calm in an otherwise busy world. His mastery of the Dhrupad tradition set a perfect tone for the evening, allowing the audience to experience the beauty of classical music in its purest form.

The night took on new energy when Ustad Shujaat Khan stepped on stage. His sitar playing was truly magical. The audience, enraptured by the fluidity of his performance, responded with a standing ovation. The smooth flow of notes and the intricate patterns he created with his strings left a lasting impression on everyone present. His performance was an experience that



pulled the listener into the depths of his artistry.

Following this, the legendary Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia brought a sense of serenity to the evening with his flute recital. His ability to draw emotion from the bansuri (flute) was clear as he moved through ragas with ease. The sound of his flute seemed to fill the room, evoking a wide array of emotions, from joy to contemplation, as he effortlessly navigated complex melodies. Each note he played invited the audience to listen closely and reflect on the feelings embedded in his music.



The Fusion of Traditions: Day two of the festival continued to impress, with Pt. Vishwamohan Bhatt and his son, Pt. Salil Bhatt, bringing a unique touch to the proceedings. Their performance on the Mohan Veena and Satvik Veena captivated with its fusion of classical and folk traditions. The melodies were rich and moving, connecting deeply with the audience. Along with the Manganiyars from Rajasthan, their performance was a journey through the cultural heart of India, showcasing the diversity and vibrancy of its musical heritage.

A standout moment on day two was the collaboration between Pt. Shubendra Rao on the sitar and Smt. Saskia Rao on the cello. Their

performance merged Eastern and Western classical music with remarkable ease. The fusion of sitar and cello was both unexpected and beautiful, offering a fresh perspective on the possibilities of musical collaboration.

Smt. Shubha Mudgal's vocal performance rounded off the evening, showcasing her remarkable ability to convey emotion through song. Her renditions in Raag Kedar and Raag Megh captured the essence of Indian classical music, leaving the audience in wonders of her vocal range and depth.

Kathak and the Divine Connection: The final evening was a celebration of Kathak, with Padma Bhushan Dr. Uma Sharma presenting a moving performance, despite health challenges. Her seated portrayal of Kathak Bhav in 'Maiyaa Mori Mein Nahi Maakhan Khayo' showcased the grace and power of the dance form. Accompanied by her disciples, Sharma's performance took the audience through a spiritual journey, demonstrating the depth and beauty of Kathak.

The festival closed with a powerful performance by Begum Parween Sultana, whose voice filled the space with an intensity that left the audience in standing ovation. Her final rendition was the perfect conclusion to a festival that had showcased the very best of India's classical music and dance. It was a celebration of tradition, passion and artistry, an event that will remain etched in the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to witness it.



KALP: Experience Life in Art

By TEAM VIVA

KALP (Phases), is an exhibition of exquisite artworks by artist Poornima Dayal from Mumbai. This exhibition is taking place at The Lalit Kala Academi, 35, Rabindra Bhavan, Ferozshah Road, New Delhi from 15th January 2025 to 21 January 2025. It was inaugurated on 15th January by Padam Shri Dr. Shovana Narayan, Amita Sarabhai, Joint secretary, Ministry of Culture, Nidhi Kulpati, M.D Ndtv. Poornima Dayal is an internationally acclaimed, award winning artist who has exhibited extensively across the globe.

She is the recipient of the Winner prize Award by The Golden Duck Gallery, Hungary, Budapest in early 2024. She also has received the Honorable Awards and Talent Prize awards from Teravarna Art Gallery, Los Angeles. Poornima had the privilege of representing India at The Venice International Art Fair in 2023. Her artworks have also been displayed several times at the prestigious Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, Telangana Art Gallery, Hyderabad, The Bombay Art Society, Mumbai, The Nehru Centre Art Gallery, Mumbai, Amethyst and Jadoka Art Galleries, Chennai. The 'Vishwarang' program by the Government of India, The Rabindranath Tagore University of Art, Kolkata, The Peak Galleria, Hong Kong, The Holy Art Gallery, Athens and Paris respectively and The Line Contemporary, London. Having had the opportunity to exhibit at The Vienna Biennale, she has been



painting since 33 years. 'Abstract conceptual' is how she describes her style of art. 'I use a lot of textures and colors in my style of painting', continues Poornima. KALP, her latest Solo Exhibition at The Lalit Kala Academi is a depiction of life's journey through the various phases of life. In this exhibition, true to its name are exhibited different series of her Acrylics on Canvas, each representing a different phase. 'KALP' signifies the importance of living a life in reverence loving and accepting life. Of being grateful for everything has a Divine purpose. 'For me Art is very precious. It's something I respect. It is a way of self expression for me and I am grateful for it', quotes Poornima. A treat for Art Lovers the exhibition is on from 11 am to 7pm at The Lalit Kala Academi from 15 to 21 January 2025.



Australian Open: Naomi Osaka stops playing because of injury against Belinda Bencic

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Two-time Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka stopped playing because of a strained abdominal muscle after dropping the opening set of her third-round match against Belinda Bencic on Friday.

"I kind of have a history of it, since I was a teenager. At least once a year, I'd get an ab strain. For me, I want to say it's more the way my serve is — it's quite explosive," Osaka said, explaining that she got hurt at a tournament in Beijing, where she retired from a match against Coco Gauff on Oct. 1.

"Unfortunately, it carried on over to the beginning of this season." This was Osaka's first run to the third round at a major tournament since 2022. She missed time in recent

seasons because of mental-health breaks, then was off the tour while pregnant. Her daughter, Shai, was born in July 2023.

Osaka began 2025 by making it to the final of a tournament at Auckland, New Zealand, on Jan. 5, but she stopped playing in the title match there because of the abdominal injury.

Then, she said, the problem got "way worse" after her second-round win in Melbourne on Wednesday against 2023 French Open finalist Karolina Muchova.

"It was, I guess, a little inevitable, but I think the competitor in me just wanted to see it through to the end," Osaka said. "I just hope that I can figure it out and figure out how to get healthy in time" before the tour heads to events at Indian Wells and Miami in March, she added.



On Friday, Osaka — a former No. 1-ranked player who owns a total of four Grand Slam titles — was visited by a trainer during the changeover while she led 6-5. The trainer examined Osaka's abdominal area and gave her a pill to take, and play resumed.

Just before the tiebreaker began, Osaka went over to her court-side coaches' box and chatted briefly with Patrick Mouratoglou.

After Bencic claimed that set in a tiebreaker by a 7-6 (3) score, taking four of the last five points via unforced errors by Osaka, the chair umpire announced that the match was over after 57 minutes, "due to injury."

The two players hugged on the sideline, and Osaka left the court. She won the Australian Open in 2019 and 2021, and the U.S. Open in 2018 and 2020.

"Hopefully she'll be fine soon and be able to play the rest of the season," said Bencic, who won a singles gold medal for Switzerland at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. Bencic, who is also a mother, drew a heart on the lens of a court-side TV camera and wrote: "Get well soon Mama."

Next for Bencic will be a fourth-round match against 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff or 2021 U.S. Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez, who were scheduled to face each other on Friday night.

"I'll watch a bit, if I can," Bencic said, "but I think I'll do my cooldown and try to focus on my recovery."

Bencic, who returned to action last October after having her first baby, has never been past the fourth round in 11 past appearances at Melbourne Park.



Ranji Trophy: Kohli named in 22-member provisional squad for Delhi's next game

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star batter Virat Kohli has been named in Delhi's 22-member provisional squad for their next Ranji Trophy game against Saurashtra in Rajkot but doubts remain about his participation after it came to light that he is nursing a niggle.

It is learnt that Kohli has intimated the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) top brass that he has a neck niggle that he sustained in Sydney during the final Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test against Australia.

He was treated by the physio there and as of now, there is no clarity on availability for the Ranji match starting January 23.

Whether he will play or just fly down to Rajkot for a couple of days' training will be clear only after he details



his position to DDCA president Rohan Jaitley. Kohli had last played a red-ball game for Delhi back in 2012 against Uttar Pradesh in Ghaziabad. A year after that, the legendary Sachin Tendulkar played his last Ranji Trophy match against Haryana at Lahli.

Talismanic wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant will feature in a Ranji Trophy game after nearly seven years although it has been learnt

that he has declined captaincy, which means Ayush Badoni will continue in the role.

"Rishabh felt the existing captain (Badoni) should continue to lead the side. He feels that since he is not available consistently, one shouldn't tinker with leadership," a member of the DDCA apex council told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"When he was offered captaincy, he said that he is

very happy to play under Badoni. We have picked 22 players including five U-23, who would fly to Bhalai for their CK Nayudu U-23 match against Chattisgarh, starting January 25," he added.

The BCCI has made it mandatory for all centrally-contracted cricketers to play domestic cricket unless there is some compelling reason to skip the assignment.

The Board has warned that non-compliance would invite sanctions, including deductions from central contract retainer and ban on playing in the Indian Premier League.

Among the big names already confirmed for upcoming Ranji game is Yashasvi Jaiswal, who will turn up for Mumbai, and Shubman Gill who will represent Punjab in the next round.

D Gukesh to take on Anish Giri in Tata Steel opener

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

World champion D Gukesh will take on local star Anish Giri in the opening round of the 87th Tata Steel Chess tournament here on Saturday, marking his first competitive outing since claiming the coveted crown last month. Giri, the 2023 winner, holds the reputation of being a tough cookie thanks to his impeccable theoretical knowledge and research that has been the Dutchman's forte for many years now.

However, 18-year-old Gukesh, who likes to go with a no-draw approach in every game he plays, is in great form and can look forward to a solid campaign after the World Championship triumph over Chinese Ding Liren in Singapore.

Gukesh received India's highest sporting honour, the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna, in Delhi this morning from President Droupadi Murmu and left for the Dutch city immediately after the ceremony.

The five-player Indian contingent will see an all-Indian duel as early as round one as Arjun Erigaisi will face last-minute-replacement Pentala Harikrishna in the opener.

Arjun, known for his ability to complicate any position, will have an arduous task against Harikrishna who is super-solid with white pieces. Interestingly, Harikrishna came in the mix of things as another Indian Vidit Gujrathi withdrew due to personal reasons.

The most interesting battle of the first round is likely to be between R Praggnanandhaa who takes on Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. Praggnanandhaa did not have a great 2024 and would like to make amends by starting the year on a positive note.

The fifth Indian in the fray made it to the elite group after winning the challengers in 2024. Leon Luke Mendonca may not have the credentials of other four compatriots in fray but the youngster is certainly the dark horse, who can put anyone in a difficulty position on his day.

Dream is still alive to play for India: Karun Nair

PTI ■ BENGALURU

After a prolonged wait on the sidelines and a melancholic social media post nearly three years back, Karun Nair has made a sensational reunion with cricket, scoring five hundreds in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy and he is now cautiously optimistic about wearing the Indian jersey after eight years.

Karun, who has scored 752 runs at a mind-blowing average of 75.2 for Vidarbha, now looks hungry for runs, and is a far cry from the forlorn player who scribbled: "Dear Cricket, please give me another chance."

Will that opportunity come his way when the selectors announce India's ODI squads for the home one-dayers against England and the ICC Champions Trophy? Only time will tell, but he has good reasons to "dream."

"The dream is always to play for the country. So, yes, the dream is still alive. That's the reason we play this game, to play for your country. So, the one and only goal was to play for the country," Karun told PTI.

But as someone who has endured massive setbacks and near-misses in his career, Karun does not want to think too far ahead.

"I think this is my third comeback (laughs). And I need to keep doing what I am doing at the moment. Keep scoring runs whenever I can in every single game that I play. That's the most that I can do. Everything else is not in my control.

"But till it (selection)

happens, it's just a dream. It's still not there yet. But again, like I said, I would like to focus on one innings at a time," the 33-year-old said.

So, what has he done differently from the past to get back to his run-making ways?

"I've not done anything differently. There is no secret. I think it's just years of hard work and persistence, you know, the coming together of all of it. And probably you can say, taking each day as a new one and making sure that I respect every single innings that I play."

But there were days when the 33-year-old was apprehensive about his cricketing future, when runs totally dried up in domestic matches and in the IPL.

"I will be lying if I say I was not afraid. I think anyone would have those feelings. But I never had the thought that my career would end. I just had the thought of where it is going? What am I doing? How has this happened?"

"It takes a while for you to come out of that phase and to understand what is happening and then what you are supposed to do. So, I told myself that I need to start from zero again.

"And give myself a few years and see where it goes. And then I can decide what to do. So, that was my thought process," he explained.

But the tough passage made him more aware about himself and his game.

"It was a tough situation to be in. Emotionally, mentally. But yeah, it really taught me

a lot of things about myself as a person and about my cricket. So, I am really grateful for those learnings. Without that, I don't think I would be in this situation at the moment."

Shifting to Vidarbha was a good move

The first hint of change in his fortunes came along with a shift to Vidarbha from Karnataka ahead of the 2023-24 season.

"I am really grateful that I got this opportunity from Vidarbha Cricket Association to play First-Class cricket. First of all, without which, you know, I wouldn't be here. And for the platform they have provided and the environment they have created to, you know, welcome me.

"They treat me as a family and make me feel like I have been playing with them for many years.

"And I never got the feeling that I am a professional or an outsider. So, it was really comfortable. And very humble people. So, they all helped me get through each and every game with a smile and a positive environment," he said.

The right-handed batter also thanked former India pacer Abey Kuruvilla for facilitating his entry into Vidarbha squad.

"Abey Kuruvilla was the person I spoke to first. I just spoke to him saying that I just need a team to play. And he is the one who spoke to Vidarbha Cricket Association and put me in touch with them," he added.

Since then the runs began to steadily increase.

Bengaluru FC aim to revive campaign against bottom-placed Hyderabad FC

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Slipped to third on the table, former Champions Bengaluru FC will look to reignite their campaign when they meet bottom-placed Hyderabad FC in the ISL here on Saturday.

After a blistering start to the season, Bengaluru FC have faltered recently, suffering two consecutive losses, including a 0-1 defeat to debutants Mohammedan SC.

With 27 points from 15 matches, the Blues, who have nine games in hand, need a win to keep pace with league leaders Mohun Bagan and stay in contention for the Winners Shield.

Langishing at the bottom with nine points from 15 matches, the Nizams have struggled to score and defend consistently.

However, they will aim to leverage their home advantage, having remained unbeaten in their last three encounters here against Bengaluru FC.

Bengaluru went scoreless in their last match, which was a 0-1 loss to Mohammedan SC.

The previous time they went consecutive games without finding the back of the net were the last two matches before Gerard Zaragoza took over as the head coach in



December 2023.

Since then, particularly this season, there has been a smooth consistency in their frontline, as reflected with the Blues having found the back of the net 28 times, as opposed to 11 of Hyderabad FC.

Hyderabad FC's defence leaked 26 goals inside the box — the same number Bengaluru FC have scored from close range this season.

To counter this, Hyderabad might need to risk a high defensive line to disrupt Bengaluru's buildup play early.

Hyderabad have scored in their last two home games but struggled against Bengaluru at home, averaging just one goal per match in their previous three

meetings.

They'll need to sharpen their attack to exploit Bengaluru's recent struggles on the road.

Four of Hyderabad FC's 11 goals this season have come in their last five matches, where they have drawn twice and lost thrice.

A victory here will see Hyderabad FC extend their unbeaten home stretch against the Blues to four matches.

Bengaluru FC, on the other hand, are looking to avoid a third consecutive loss, in order to sustain pressure at their opponents in the upper half of the points table.

Veteran striker Sunil Chhetri with nine goals this season, will be eyeing double digits. He has a stellar record against Hyderabad, including two goals in the reverse fixture.

Despite not scoring, Hyderabad's Abdul Rabeeh has created 13 goal-scoring chances and dominated opposition boxes, highlighting his influence.

Hyderabad's interim coach Shameel Chembakath urged his team to focus on their own game rather than the opponents, while Bengaluru FC's Zaragoza emphasised playing entertaining football to delight their supporters.

Para-athletes take centre stage as President Murmu gives away National Sports Awards

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Manu Bhaker and D Gukesh provided a sprinkling of stardust but it was India's perseverant para-athletes who walked away with the most boisterous applause when President Droupadi Murmu bestowed the National Sports Awards in a regal ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Friday.

Double Olympic-medallist Bhaker, 18-year-old chess world champion Gukesh, men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar were presented the country's highest sporting honour — the Major Dhyan Chand Khel

Ratna.

The 22-year-old Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events in August last year.

"Slow and steady wins the race, and I firmly believe that. Khel Ratna is one of the most prestigious awards in our country. I am grateful to everyone who supported me," Bhaker said after the ceremony.

Harmanpreet was a part of the national sides that won bronze medals in the Tokyo as well as Paris Olympics. Praveen, on the other hand, upgraded his silver at the

Japanese capital to a gold in Paris. He was born with a short left leg.

The 18-year-old Gukesh was crowned the youngest ever chess world champion after he beat China's Ding Liren last month. He is only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to achieve this title.

He was also a crucial factor in India winning the men's gold in the Chess Olympiad in September last.

Thirty-two athletes were honoured with the Arjuna Award out of which an unprecedented 17 were para-athletes.

The athletes selected for the Arjuna award included Paris Olympics bronze medal-winning group of wrestler



Aman Sehrawat, shooters Swapnil Kusale and Sarabjot Singh (Bhaker's partner in the 10m air pistol mixed competition of Olympics) and the men's hockey team players Jarmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet

Singh, Sanjay and Abhishek. The para-athletes outnumbered the able-bodied ones in the list this time due to the magnificent Paris Paralympics performance in which they returned with 29

medals, including seven gold and nine silver.

President Murmu repeatedly broke from tradition to receive some wheelchair-bound athletes such as Pranav Soorma, who got the Arjuna for his Paralympic silver in club throw.

Petkar draws loudest applause

The most heartwarming moment of the ceremony was when India's first Paralympic gold-medallist Murlikant Petkar walked up to the President on crutches to receive the Arjuna award (lifetime).

Murmu met the 80-year-old war hero half way to present him the award.

Petkar was disabled waist down due to bullet wounds sustained during the 1965

battle against Pakistan. He was originally a boxer but turned to para-swimming due to the multiple injuries.

He fought the adversity to win a historic gold medal in the 1972 Paralympics in Heidelberg.

The veteran was welcomed with a rapturous applause that did not stop till he was seated back after collecting the award from the President.

One among those clapping for him at the Durbar Hall was actor Kartik Aryan, who played Petkar in a recent biopic titled 'Chandu Champion'.

Dignitaries, including sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya, parliamentary and minority affairs minister Kiren Rijju, sports secretary

Sujata Chaturvedi, were among those who attended the ceremony that lasted a little over an hour.

While the Khel Ratna comes with a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh, the Arjuna and Dronacharya awards include a cash prize of Rs 15 lakh.

Among the most prominent Dronacharya winners this year was shooting coach Deepali Deshpande, who mentored Kusale, and former national football manager Armando Colaco.

The Arjuna Awards are given to sportspersons who have demonstrated good performance over the past four years and have shown qualities of leadership, sportsmanship, and discipline.