

## ROY GUILTY IN RG KAR MURDER CASE In another first, poll freebie for Delhi tenants



Police personnel keep vigil as Sanjay Roy, accused in the alleged rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital, is brought to the Sealдах court in police vehicle on the day of the verdict, in Kolkata

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**

A Kolkata Sessions Court on Saturday held prime accused Sanjay Roy guilty in the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder case.

The quantum of punishment will be pronounced on Monday, District and Sessions Judge of Sealдах Court Anirban Das told Roy in a 12-minute hearing, adding that he had been held guilty in the case and could be condemned to death or imprisonment for life. Roy was convicted of rape under Section 64 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), and murder under Sections 66 and 103(1). The body of the victim, a 31-year-old postgraduate lady doctor working in the Chest Medicine Department of the RGMCH who was brutally raped and murdered, was discovered inside the seminar room of the said hospital in the wee hours of August 9 last year, triggering nationwide protests.

Subsequently, on the basis of the CCTV footage, the Kolkata Police on August 10 arrested Sanjay Roy, a civic volunteer with the police. He was seen entering the seminar hall and coming out of it after about half an hour.

The judgment was delivered 57 days after the trial commenced in-camera on November 12, during which 50 witnesses were examined. The hearing in the case concluded on January 9.

"When the Court held Sanjay Roy guilty of the crime of rape and murder, he continued to call himself innocent and a victim of conspiracy. The honorable Sessions Judge told him that he had been found guilty of the crime which could invite capital punishment like death or life imprisonment... the quantum of punishment shall be given on Monday when the Judge will also hear out the convict," the advocate of the victim's family said, adding that justice will not be fully complete until other people who might have been involved in the case were punished.

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

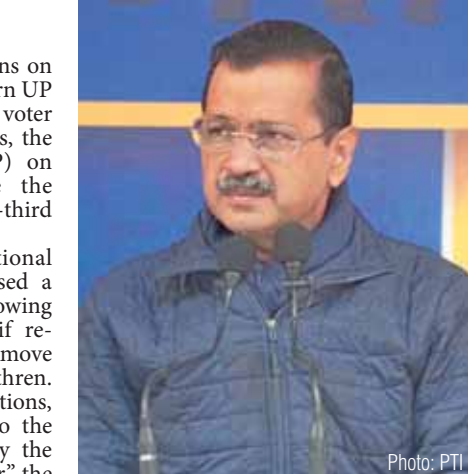
A few days after casting aspersions on the residents of Bihar and eastern UP by claiming that the BJP had faked voter lists in the names of Poorvanchalis, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday attempted to assuage the mollification directed at the one-third chunk of electors in Delhi.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal promised a freebie guarantee for tenants, allowing them free electricity and water if re-elected to power, stating that the move would benefit the Poorvanchali brethren. "We will ensure that after the elections, tenants, many of whom belong to the Purvanchal region, will also enjoy the benefits of free electricity and water," the former Delhi CM said.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal stated that tenants have been unable to access the free electricity and water scheme for several reasons. He emphasized that tenants are also part of Delhi's population, and the AAP will extend these benefits to them. The announcement comes as the Aam Aadmi Party ramps up its campaign for the Delhi assembly elections slated for February 5.

"Wherever I go, I meet people living on rent who say they benefit from good schools and hospitals but are deprived of free electricity and water schemes. Across Delhi, we have provided free electricity and water to residents. However, it is unfortunate that tenants do not get these benefits. Today, I want to announce that after the elections, if our government is formed, we will introduce a system ensuring tenants also receive free electricity and water," Kejriwal said.

The ruling AAP has proposed freebies including the Mahila Samman Yojna, Sanjeevani Yojna, free metro, free scholarships to Dalit students, salaries for pujaris and grannis, free metro rides for students, waivers in water bills, and funds for residents' welfare associations to recruit security guards,



Arvind Kejriwal speaking at a press conference.

adding to its existing schemes and programs such as revamped government schools, mohalla clinics, and free electricity that the AAP government offers to citizens in Delhi.

In competition, the BJP, in its manifesto released on January 17, announced several aids, keeping women at the center of its poll pitch. The manifesto emphasizes women and promises Rs 2,500 monthly aid under the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana'.

The BJP, in its manifesto, also announced Rs 21,000 and six nutrition kits for every pregnant woman under the 'Chief Minister Matritva Suraksha Yojana'. The party has also promised LPG cylinders at Rs 500 for the poor, with one free cylinder on Holi and Diwali.

**Continued on page 2**

### Kejriwal car convoy attack; AAP, BJP exchange blows



Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders sitting at a table.

With campaigning for the Delhi Assembly elections heating up, claims and counterclaims erupted between AAP and BJP as the former alleged that AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal's car was pelted with stones in New Delhi constituency on Saturday. However, BJP leader and New Delhi candidate Parvesh Verma refuted AAP's allegations, saying the AAP chief's car hit three youths who had been protesting against him. Verma claimed it was Kejriwal who asked the driver of the car to crush them.

"Fearing defeat, BJP panicked, got its goons to attack Arvind Kejriwal," the AAP, which has been ruling Delhi since 2013, posted on X within minutes of the attack on its leader.

The AAP convener also said the Delhi Police on Saturday stopped the screening of the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) documentary Unbreakable on January 18, citing non-compliance with election guidelines. AAP convener and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of using the Delhi Police to stop the screening. However, the Delhi Police denied these allegations. The Delhi Police said that "no permission" was taken for the screening of the documentary. The police emphasized that political parties must apply for permission for such events through a single-window system at the District Election Officer's (DEO) office. It further added that such permission could not be granted or rejected by the police at this time.

The documentary Unbreakable, which explores AAP's journey during Kejriwal's leadership and the party's activities during and after his imprisonment, was scheduled to be screened at Pyarelal Bhawan, ITO, at 11:30 AM.

**Continued on page 2**

### Butcher of Delhi arrested

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhi Police Crime Branch has apprehended Chanderkant Jha, a "serial killer" who had terrorised the national capital between 2006 and 2007 and evaded arrest for more than a year, an official said on Saturday.

His case received a significant media attention and was the subject of an OTT platform documentary "Indian Predator: The Butcher of Delhi". "Jha was on the run after jumping parole in October 2023. The 57-year-old was arrested from Old Delhi Railway Station on Friday following an intensive operation," Additional Commissioner of Police (crime branch) Sanjay Kumar Sain said.

Jha, who had been serving a life sentence for three murders, carried a bounty of Rs 50,000 for his capture, he said. The officer further said the Crime Branch formed a team which included senior police officers to locate Jha.

"Over six months, the team traced Jha's network of family, friends, and associates. They conducted reconnaissance at his previous crime spots and interrogated individuals in fruit and vegetable mandis across Delhi-NCR, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where Jha had once worked," said the Additional CP.

Analysing voluminous call data records, the team identified a suspicious mobile



remains were then packed in plastic bags and transported using his modified cycle-rickshaw before being dumped at pre-determined locations, often near Tihar Jail," Sain added.

He said adding to the horror, Jha would leave handwritten notes with the dismembered bodies, taunting the police and challenging them to catch him.

Jha's first recorded murder dates back to 1998 when he killed Mangal alias Aurangzeb in Adarsh Nagar, Delhi, dismembering the body and scattering its parts. Arrested in 1998, he was released in 2002. After his release, he resumed killing, police said.

In June 2003, Jha murdered his associate Shekhar in Haiderpur for being a drunkard and liar, disposing of the body in Alipur. In November 2003, Umesh, a migrant from Bihar, was killed for alleged betrayal, and his body was dumped near Tihar Jail. In November 2005, Jha killed Guddu for his habits, including smoking marijuana and disposed of his body in Mangolpuri, police said.

In October 2006, Amit, accused of womanizing, met a similar fate, with his body left outside Tihar Jail. In another case Upendar was murdered in April 2007 for a love affair deemed inappropriate, his remains left near Tihar's Gate No 3.

**Continued on page 2**



Israeli soldiers work in staging area on the Israel-Gaza border after returning from the Gaza Strip

### Israel-Hamas ceasefire to go into effect on Sunday

**PTI ■ CAIRO**

The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel will go into effect in less than 24 hours, Qatar's foreign ministry said on Saturday.

In a post on X, foreign minister Majid al-Ansari said the ceasefire will start at 8:30 am local time (6:30 GMT) on Sunday, and advised people to exercise caution and wait for directions from officials.

Early Saturday morning, Israel's Cabinet approved the deal for a ceasefire in Gaza that would release dozens of hostages and pause the 15-month war with Hamas, bringing the sides a step closer to ending their deadliest and most destructive fighting ever.

Despite the ceasefire news, sirens sounded across central Israel on Saturday, with the army saying it intercepted projectiles launched from Yemen.

The Iran-backed Houthis have stepped up their missile attacks in recent weeks. The group says the attacks are part of its campaign aimed at pressuring Israel and the West over the war in Gaza.

There were also continued Israeli strikes into Gaza. The Palestinian health ministry said at least 23 people were killed the previous day.

Under the first phase of the ceasefire, 33 hostages are set to be released over the next six weeks, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The remainder, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second phase that will be negotiated during the first.

**Continued on page 2**

### Saif attack suspect arrested in Chhattisgarh

**TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel detained a 31-year-old suspect in the Saif Ali Khan attack case at the distant Durg railway station in Chhattisgarh on Saturday afternoon, offering a ray of hope to the Mumbai police, who had been searching for over 48 hours for the elusive assailant.

Acting on a lead provided by the Mumbai police, RPF officials detained the suspect, identified as Aakash Kailash Kanolja, from the Mumbai-Howrah Jnaneswari Express when the train arrived at Durg railway station at 2 pm.

"We identified the suspect based on a photograph, train number, and location details sent to us by the Mumbai police. He was sitting in a general compartment. A Mumbai Police team will soon arrive here to take him into custody," a senior RPF official said at Durg railway station.

Enquiries by the RPF revealed that the suspect was travelling without a ticket. When questioned, he initially stated that he was going to Nagpur but later corrected himself, saying he was on his way to Bilaspur.

During the initial questioning, the suspect claimed that he stayed in Byculia, south Mumbai. The RPF officials arranged for him to speak to the Mumbai police via video call. A Mumbai police team is expected to take custody of the detained suspect late on Saturday and bring him to Mumbai for further investigation.

However, there was no formal statement from the Mumbai police regarding the suspect detained by the RPF at Durg railway station.

Earlier, fresh CCTV footage aired by some television channels showed the assailant at Dadar in north-central Mumbai at 9 am on Thursday, buying a pair of headphones before heading to the railway station.

So far, five CCTV clips have surfaced, including two purportedly from the staircase of the actor's building "Satguru Sharan," showing him going up and then coming down, one at Bandra station with a change of shirt, and two more from Dadar.

Saif 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) in north-west Mumbai. The knife attack on the actor took place between 2 am and 2:30 am on Thursday, following a failed burglary attempt by the yet-to-be-identified intruder.

After being admitted to Lilavati Hospital, the actor underwent surgery to remove a knife lodged in his spine and to plug a spinal fluid leak. "The actor was brought to our hospital with six injuries, two of which were deep. We performed 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**

## Thanks to Maha Kumbh, Uttar Pradesh's 75 districts unite to reap economic rewards

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

The Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj is not just a religious event; it has transformed into a massive economic engine driving growth across Uttar Pradesh. With preparations in full swing to welcome over 400 million pilgrims, the event has become a source of livelihood and opportunity for artisans, traders, and entrepreneurs from all 75 districts of the state. Over its 45-day duration, this mega-event is expected to generate economic activity on a scale that rivals the GDP of some countries, with small-scale artisans and micro-enterprises alone securing orders worth Rs 10,000 crore.

"This is not just an event for the

faithful; it's an economic festival," said Mahendra Goyal, Uttar Pradesh head of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT). "The state government's Rs 7,500 crore investment will generate at least ₹25,000 crore in revenue and facilitate business worth Rs 2 lakh crore. It is a win-win for faith and the economy."

The demand for basic necessities such as groceries, edible oils, vegetables, dairy products, bedding, and hospitality services has surged. Entrepreneurs from districts like Kanpur, Varanasi, and Gautam Buddha Nagar are leading the charge, with key sectors like groceries expected to generate Rs 4,000 crore and dairy products contributing Rs 4,200 crore. Speaking about the influx of opportunities, Ravi Tiwari, a vegetable supplier from Kanpur, shared, "The orders I have received for the Maha Kumbh are more than what I usually supply in six months. This event is a game-changer for small businesses like mine."

Employment opportunities have also multiplied across various sectors. Neeraj Singhal, National President of the Indian Industries Association, remarked, "The demand for services such as hotels, restaurants, food stalls, air travel, railways, and road transportation has increased by nearly 80 times. Construction, security, sanitation, and healthcare services are employing over 10,000 workers and unskilled laborers, with many of them coming from districts like Kushinagar, Ballia, and Maharajganj."



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh takes a holy dip at the Sangam during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

Artisans and manufacturers have seen unprecedented demand for their products. The Small Industries and Manufacturers Association reported a significant rise in sales of food, worship materials, clothing, and souvenirs. Entrepreneurs from regions such as

Unnao, Ghaziabad, and Mirzapur have directly benefited. Rajeev Mishra, an artisan from Mirzapur, said, "This is the busiest we have been in years. Orders for clay ware and handicrafts have poured in, and we are working round the clock to meet the demand."

The infrastructure developed for the event has also brought economic benefits to districts like Meerut, Hapur, and Lucknow, where workers have been employed to build roads, ensure sanitation, and maintain utilities. Tourism, transport, and the sale of worship materials have further benefitted regions such as Mathura and Hardoi.

Vinod Pandey, a hotel owner in Varanasi, noted, "We have been booked solid for months. The influx of pilgrims is not limited to Prayagraj only. After taking a dip in Sangam they are coming to Varanasi. This huge footfall has not only boosted my business but also created jobs for locals."

Additionally, major brands have tapped into the opportunities presented by the Maha Kumbh. A total of 82 Uttar Pradesh-based brands and 178 national brands have created 9,000 temporary jobs for youth. The tent city set up for the event alone has generated over 2,000 permanent positions.

The Maha Kumbh 2025 has proven to be a unifying force, not just spiritually but economically, with its impact felt in every corner of the state. As Ashok Kumar, a shopkeeper from Prayagraj, aptly said, "The Kumbh doesn't just bring pilgrims; it brings prosperity."



# Seventh Delhi Assembly convened for just 74 days over its five year term: Report

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 The Seventh Delhi Assembly convened for just 74 days over its five-year term, the lowest number compared to all previous assemblies, according to a report by the think tank PRS Legislative Research. The report states that the assembly sessions were called every year and divided into several parts. Within each year, sessions were adjourned without prorogation and were divided into parts. This resulted in the House meeting for only one or two days on several occasions, the report said.

Of the 74 sitting days, Question Hour was held on nine days. Members are required to submit questions 12 days in advance. On other occasions, Assembly meetings were announced with seven days' notice on average, giving insufficient time for questions to be submitted. Between 2020 and 2025, MLAs asked 219 questions a year on average. Between 2019 and 2024, MPs in Lok Sabha asked 8,200 questions in a year on average, the report said.

While the Lieutenant Governor summons and prorogues sessions, it is the Speaker who calls for sittings during a session, the report added. The first session of the 7th Delhi Assembly began on February 20, 2020, and was prorogued on March 3, 2021, after being held in five parts.

The second session commenced on March 3, 2021, and was prorogued on March 8, 2022, after four parts. The third session began on March 8, 2022, and was prorogued on March 9,



2023, also after four parts. The fourth session was called on March 9, 2023, and prorogued on February 7, 2024, again held in four parts. The fifth session was called on February 7, 2024, and has not been prorogued yet.

Over the five years, only 14 bills were passed, the lowest number since all its previous terms. Of the 14 bills, five were related to the salaries of legislators. All the bills were either passed on the same day or the next day, the report noted.

In 2021, the Committee on Questions examined the response to a question and concluded that the response was incorrect, amounting to a breach of privilege. It recommended that the matter be referred to the Privileges Committee. In 2022, sitting days on which question hour

was held the Speaker referred the matter of unsatisfactory replies to questions to the Privileges Committee. The matter is currently pending with the Committee.

During the Winter Session in 2024, the Speaker observed that departments such as revenue, services, land and building, and home do not submit replies to questions, undermining Question Hour. State Assemblies often have separate discussions on the annual budget and expenditure budget of ministries. The Delhi Assembly combined these discussions. During this term, on average budget discussion lasted for four hours.

The Assembly has 33 Committees. House Committees oversee issues such as daily business, petitions and privileges.

Financial Committees examine CAG reports. Standing Committees examine working of ministries.

The Committee on Petitions presented four reports; it had presented 27 reports in the previous term. It looked at issues such as disbursement of old age pension and functioning of OPD counters in Delhi government hospitals.

The Assembly had 62 male and 8 female members. Female MLAs had an average attendance of 83%, compared to 79% for male MLAs. Male MLAs participated in 20 debates on average, female MLAs participated in 16 debates. MLAs asked 15 questions on average. MLAs from the BJP asked 40 questions on average, and MLAs from the AAP asked an average of 11 questions

## AAP attempts to borrow BJP's soft-Hindutva policies ahead of Assembly polls

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 In the run-up to assembly elections next fortnight, the ruling AAP is making several attempts to borrow the soft-Hindutva policies of the major opponent BJP. From announcing monthly salary for the temple priest, to forming temple prakoshth the APP led by Arvind Kejriwal which catapulted to power 12 years ago by poaching on the Congress' minority votes, has now asked the candidates, sitting MLAs, Ministers to glorify their temple presence. So far in the run-up to the February 5 election, the Aam Aadmi Party has been seen to be coasting along a religious course, in an apparent bid to force the BJP, a Hindu hardline party, to defend its turf.

The Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP recently announced a monthly honorarium of Rs 18,000 to temple priests and the granthis of gurdwaras under a 'Pujari Granthi Samman Yojna' -- to be implemented if the party returns to power in Delhi.

The BJP, in its turn, is likely to announce 500 free units of electricity monthly to worship places, including temples and gurdwaras.

Both parties have accused each other of shortchanging the poor and marginalised Hindus while patronising the illegal migrants to beef up a vote



bank. Recently, while addressing a rally at the city's Jawaharlal Nehru stadium on the first anniversary of the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, Union Home Minister Amit Shah raised the slogan 'Jai Shri Ram' and urged the slum dwellers to become Delhi's 'liberators' by changing the government.

The BJP accused the ruling party of filing applications for the deletion of the names of 44 voters in the Valmiki Mandir area, accusing Kejriwal of being 'anti-Dalit.'

On January 14, BJP's Parvesh Verma, pitted against Kejriwal

from the New Delhi constituency, alleged that the Election Commission 'at the instance of Kejriwal,' was verifying voters in the Valmiki Mandir area but doing nothing about mosques and dargahs. He said the EC must refrain from 'targeting and defaming' Hindus at the instance of the AAP chief.

The AAP supremo, a self-proclaimed 'Hanuman Bhakt,' filed his nomination papers from the New Delhi seat after praying at the Valmiki Temple and Prachin Hanuman Mandir. Chief Minister Atishi started her nomination procession after offering prayers at Kalkaji

bearers for the 'Sanatan Sewa Samiti,' which is supposed to oversee the implementation of its grant scheme.

The BJP has fielded its Mandir Prakoshth head, Karnail Singh, from Shakur Basti against AAP leader and former minister Satyendar Jain.

Earlier, the Delhi government issued an order restricting the admission of Bangladeshi immigrants in Delhi schools aligns with the BJP's long-standing narrative against illegal immigration.

This is not the first time AAP has played the BJP's game against it.

During the Jahangirpuri violence, Kejriwal maintained a calculated silence while his party subtly painted Muslims as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and Rohingyas, indirectly blaming the BJP for their presence. This tactic allowed Kejriwal to appear neutral publicly while appealing to the Hindutva sentiments of a section of voters.

The elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are going to be held on February 5. The BJP, out of power in Delhi since 1998, has been making all-out efforts to dethrone the AAP, ruling the city since 2015.

## Maken asserts Congress should have no alliance with AAP

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Congress leader Ajay Maken said on Saturday that his party should have no alliance with the AAP in Delhi, but left the option open, saying this is his personal view. Asked whether the Congress will lend support to the Arvind Kejriwal-led party, if need be, after the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, Maken said, 'It is my personal view that there should be no alliance with AAP.'

'I also feel that there should not have been any support (from the Congress) to the AAP in 2013 and neither any alliance for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. But this is my personal view,' the All India Congress Committee (AICC) treasurer said, without speaking any further.

Addressing the first press conference at the new Congress headquarters at Kotla Road, Maken, who hails from Delhi and has done his politics here, said he stands by his earlier remark that Kejriwal is 'anti-national' and the AAP's strengthening in the capital will only help the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).



Asked about his 'anti-national' remark against Kejriwal, Maken said, 'I had given my personal view and I still stand by it.' He said the people of Delhi suffered due to the Congress's support to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in 2013 and its alignment with the Kejriwal-led outfit in 2024.

'When the people of Delhi suffered, the BJP benefitted. But this is my personal view,' Maken said. On whether the Congress would still go with the AAP, he said, 'I feel that Kejriwal getting prominence in Delhi helps the BJP. To fight the BJP, it is important to have a strong Congress at the national level.'

Maken said if a national party like the Congress is not strong at the national level, it is difficult to fight against the BJP. 'By weakening the Congress, one cannot fight the

BJP,' he said.

Noting that Delhi is not an insignificant state politically, Maken said it is known that whichever party wins the Lok Sabha seats in the capital goes on to form its government at the Centre. 'The AAP has failed to fight against the BJP in Delhi,' he claimed.

Maken said both in Haryana and Delhi, the Congress wanted to have an alliance with the AAP, but soon after his release from jail, Kejriwal himself announced that his party will contest all 90 Assembly seats in Haryana, whereas 'we were in an advanced stage of discussion for an alliance.'

'As far as Delhi is concerned, Kejriwal himself announced soon after the Lok Sabha polls that they will fight the Delhi election on their own, he added. Maken said when the Congress had its government in Delhi, led by Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, it won all the seven Lok Sabha seats in the capital and stopped the BJP here. 'By stopping them in Delhi, we stopped them from assuming power at the Centre as whosoever wins Lok Sabha seats in Delhi goes on to form the national-level government,' he noted.

# Kejriwal remembers tenants only during elections and then forgets them: BJP

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Delhi BJP on Saturday took a dig at AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal after his promise to provide free electricity and water to tenants stating people of national capital now understand that he remembers tenants only during elections and then forgets them.

Making this assertion state BJP president Virendra Sachdeva also responded to former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's recent statement, stating that 'A wooden pot does not work repeatedly.'

Sachdeva said, 'Since 2017, Kejriwal has been showing dreams of free and affordable electricity to tenants but has delivered nothing.' He further remarked that in 2013, during



his first election campaign, Kejriwal formed a tenant cell in his party, but he deceived them too, which is why they eventually joined the BJP.

Referring to Kejriwal, Sachdeva said, 'The saying fits him perfectly -- a thief may stop stealing but not deceiving.' He accused AAP leader of betraying all of Delhi and noted that 'Delhi knows that whenever

Kejriwal speaks, he lies. His words have lost their significance, just as he has lost his political ground in Delhi.'

He also charged Kejriwal of colluding with power discoms to exploit the people of Delhi, particularly over electricity bills. Referring to Kejriwal's claims of free water, Sachdeva remarked, 'The people of Delhi have been left to suffer for every drop of water, with dirty water being supplied, pushing them towards diseases and even death. Kejriwal has no right to comment on water supply issues.'

Highlighting the struggles in slum clusters, the BJP leader said, 'Women in these areas have to queue for six hours at water tankers and manage to collect just one or two pitchers of water.'

## BJP cites Sisodia's affidavit, questions his loan in wife's name

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Citing the AAP leader's affidavit filed in Jangpura Assembly constituency, the BJP questioned former Delhi deputy chief minister and senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia who sent his son for higher education in Canada by taking personal education loans of Rs 1.54 crore in his wife's name. The loan has been given to Sisodia's homemaker wife by three individuals -- Romesh Chander Mittal, Guneet Arora and Deepali. Sisodia has declared the educational loan in the name of his wife Seema, who has multiple sclerosis, and needs care.



The affidavit identifies his son Meer Sisodia as a dependent and gives details of Scotiabank, 392 Bay Street, Toronto, where the AAP

leader has opened three separate accounts to park funds for his son's education. The affidavit also shows foreign exchange assets of

about Canadian \$3,980 (Rs 2.4 lakh) in the foreign bank. Leaders in the BJP are now raising questions on the terms on which Sisodia, an accused in the excise policy case out on bail, has taken personal loans of Rs 1.54 crore, considering that he has declared his family's total assets to be worth only Rs 57 lakh.

The BJP asked why the former education minister of Delhi didn't send his son to any government school in the national capital, which AAP claims to have revolutionised in the last decade. BJP spokesperson Amit Malviya criticized the AAP leader's actions,

suggesting that the party's claims to be champions of education were not reflected in Sisodia's personal decisions. 'Not only this, Manish Sisodia took a loan of Rs 1.5 crore for his son's education, but not from a bank, but from individuals. Why so? All the leaders and ministers of AAP are hypocrites. They only do politics in the name of students but do nothing for them,' Malviya stated.

Sisodia's affidavit also mentions his sources of income as salary from ministry, house property and author royalty. His wife's income has been mentioned as rental.

## Congress's Dikshit blames AAP Government for air, water pollution in city

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit on Saturday blamed the AAP government for the air and water pollution in the national capital, claiming it did nothing over the past 10 years while in power in Delhi.

Addressing a press conference, Dikshit -- the Congress candidate for the New Delhi constituency for the February 5 Assembly polls -- claimed there were around 5,500 Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses in 2013, but the number has now reduced to around 3,000.

'In 2013, 43 lakh people used to commute in DTC buses, but today only 41 lakh people travel in DTC and cluster buses. The numbers should have increased to around 60-65 lakh, given the rise in population, but it has dropped to 41 lakh. If these surplus 20-25 lakh people



are opting for private transport, it clearly adds to pollution levels,' Dikshit said. Dikshit also said that blaming stubble burning for Delhi's air pollution and placing the responsibility on farmers in neighbouring states was not justified.

'Stubble burning has existed for decades, but the main cause of Delhi's air pollution is the sharp spike in the number of vehicles on the

roads, the lack of a robust public transport system, and severe erosion of the green cover,' he said.

Between 1998 and 2013, the Congress government, headed by Sheila Dikshit, had increased the green cover, brought nearly one crore vehicles under CNG fuel, including DTC buses, expanded public transport and rapidly expanded the Delhi Metro, he added.

## CEO Vaz inaugurates 'Aagaz-e-Voting' in Connaught Place's Central Park

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Delhi's Chief Electoral Officer R Alice Vaz, on Saturday inaugurated 'Aagaz-e-Voting', a vibrant and energetic musical event at Central Park, Connaught Place. Organized as part of the voter awareness campaign for the upcoming Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2025, the event featured a mesmerising performance by the renowned Nizami Brothers.

Addressing the gathering, Vaz emphasised the importance of active citizen participation in the democratic process. She appealed to the citizens of Delhi to celebrate the festival of democracy by exercising their right to vote. 'Your vote is your voice. Let us come together and make our vote count,' she urged. The event aimed to engage citizens through music,



fostering a sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for the elections. Central Park, bustling with energy and excitement, became a hub for civic engagement as people of all ages joined the initiative to reaffirm their commitment to democracy. 'Aagaz-e-Voting' is an

initiative under the SVEEP program aimed at maximizing voter turnout and promoting informed voting.

As the Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2025 draws near, the event serves as a vital reminder of the crucial role each voter plays in shaping the state's future.

## Landlord held for murdering tenant for not repaying loan

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
 A landlord, who allegedly shot dead his tenant in outer north Delhi, for not repaying a loan was arrested on Saturday, police said.

On January 17, a body was found in a pond in Alipur area, which was later identified as Rakesh (29), a police officer said.

The victim had a gunshot wound to his head and blood stains were found on the roof of a nearby building, which had been partially cleaned, along with an empty bullet, he said.

Investigation suggested that Rakesh was shot on the rooftop and his body was disposed of in the pond, police said.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was immediately formed to investigate the case, the officer said. The victim's mother, Bhagwati Devi, told

police that Rakesh had left his home earlier that day with their landlord's son, Govind Ballabh.

She also mentioned about an ongoing property and financial disputes between them, the officer said. Govind, who owned the building where the incident occurred, was arrested, he added.

During interrogation, Govind confessed that the crime stemmed from financial disputes. Rakesh had allegedly taken Rs 5 lakh and a Mercedes car from Govind on a loan arrangement but failed to deliver the promised funds, leading to a heated dispute and the eventual murder, police said.

The victim's mobile phone was recovered, and efforts are underway to locate the weapon, which Govind claims to have disposed of in the pond, they added.

# PM Modi distributes more than 65 lakh property cards under SVAMITVA scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday distributed more than 65 lakh property cards under the SVAMITVA scheme, and said it will bolster economic activities and help in poverty alleviation. The prime minister virtually addressed the event and also interacted with some beneficiaries. He also said rural land digitisation is "furthering rural empowerment by leveraging the power of technology and good governance". The property cards are being distributed to beneficiaries across more than 50,000 villages in 10 states -- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and two Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Modi said the scheme will help people get loans and

benefits of other government schemes. "Around 2.24 crore beneficiaries in villages will now have SVAMITVA property cards after 65 lakh cards are distributed today," the prime minister said. "Property rights are a major challenge across the world. Years ago, the United Nations had held a study, which revealed people did not have legal documents for property rights in several countries. The UN has said property rights are important for poverty alleviation," he said. Modi said an eminent economist had opined that property in villages is a "dead capital" because people cannot do anything with it, and it can't help increase their income. "India was also impacted by this challenge. People in villages have property worth lakhs of crores (of rupees), but they did not have papers for it. There were disputes, properties were snatched, and even banks did not provide loans over it," he said. The prime minister



emphasized that no sensitive government could leave its villagers in such distress. "Previous governments should have taken steps to do something about it but nothing much was done," he said. Modi said Dalits, backward classes and tribals were the worst affected by this. Elaborating on the SVAMITVA Yojana, he said it involved mapping houses and

lands in villages using drones and providing legal documents for residential properties to villagers. He added that the benefits of this scheme are now visible. "India has over six lakh villages, with drone surveys completed in nearly half of them," Modi said. He highlighted that after receiving legal documents, lakhs of people had taken loans from banks based on

their properties and started small businesses in their villages. "After getting legal property rights, lakhs of people have taken loan. They have used this money to start their businesses. Many of these are farmers, for whom this property cards is a guarantee to financial security," he said. Modi said that once property cards are issued in all villages, the scheme will unlock

economic activities worth over Rs 100 lakh crore. He emphasized the substantial capital that will be added to the country's economy. Noting that earlier, land disputes were common for farmers and obtaining land documents is challenging, often requiring multiple visits to offices and leading to corruption, the prime minister said that land records are being digitized to

deal with these issues. Highlighting that SVAMITVA and Bhuaadhaar are foundational systems for village development, he said that Bhuaadhaar provides a unique identity to land, with around 23 crore Bhuaadhaar numbers issued, making it easy to identify land plots. "Over the past seven-eight years, approximately 98 per cent of land records have been digitized, and most land maps are now digitally available," Modi added. Later, in a social media post, the prime minister said rural land digitisation is "furthering rural empowerment by leveraging the power of technology and good governance". Union Minister of Panchayati Raj Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan', Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj S P Singh Baghel and Ministry of Panchayati Raj Secretary Vivek Bharadwaj were also present at the event. It was attended virtually by several chief ministers, Union

ministers and state ministers. Events are also being organised in over 230 districts for physical distribution of property cards. It is expected that around 13 Union ministers will physically join from designated locations from across the country to oversee regional distribution ceremonies of property cards. The SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas) scheme was launched in 2020 to enhance the economic progress of rural India by providing 'Record of Rights' to households owning houses in inhabited areas in villages through the latest drone technology for surveying. The scheme also helps facilitate monetization of properties and enabling institutional credit through bank loans; reducing property-related disputes; facilitating better assessment of properties and property tax in rural areas and enabling comprehensive village-level planning.

## Congress's new HQ narrates tale of party's 139-year history

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Several leaders who left the Congress and even mounted stinging attacks on it find a place in the pictorial representation of the party's history spread across the five storeys of its new 9A Kotla Road office. Ahead of a media tour of the office, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken Saturday told reporters at the first press conference at the Indira Gandhi Bhawan that the building was built at an estimated cost of Rs 200-225 crore with some dues still left to be paid to Larsen and Toubro (L&T) construction company. The Congress headquarters was inaugurated on Wednesday, as the grand old party turned a page in its history after operating from its iconic 24, Akbar Road premises for the last 47 years. Congress parliamentary party chief Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the plush building in the presence of party president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, and general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal, among other senior leaders. "Today we will introduce you to a temple of democracy - Indira Bhawan, the headquarters of the largest opposition party of the country at present," Maken told the press conference along with AICC general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh and party's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera. "The government of India allotted this land to us on November 19, 2007. Its foundation stone was laid in 2009 and finally we received the 'completion cum occupancy certificate' on January 14, 2025, while it was inaugurated on January 15," he said. Indira Gandhi Bhawan, designed by Hafeez Contractor, narrates the tale of the party's 139-year-old history with its walls adorned with pictures from the freedom struggle to the party's governance achievements. From VP Singh to Ghulam Nabi Azad and from Suresh



Pachouri to Rita Bahuguna Joshi, many leaders who left the party, including some who joined the BJP, and made stinging attacks on the party, find a place in the slew of photographs and pictorial representation of the party's history adorning the walls of the new office. As one enters the building, the wall in front adorns the pictures of the party's first president W C Benerjee and current chief Kharge. A striking picture on the ground floor is that of Sonia Gandhi leading a march with the likes of Pachouri, Joshi and P Sudhakar Reddy, all now in the BJP, accompanying her. Also there in the photograph is Ashok Tanwar, who left the Congress for the BJP, but returned to the party fold last year. In another epic picture, Rajiv Gandhi, when he was prime minister, is seen flanked by Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, PV Narasimha Rao and VP Singh (who all became prime ministers) and K R Narayanan (who became president later). On the fourth floor, which showcases the party's history from 2014-2023, a picture from 2019 adorns the wall in which Azad is seen standing with Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, taken at Rajghat during a protest against CAA and NRC. Another interesting photo that adorns the walls on the fourth floor is that of Sonia Gandhi and then president Sitaram Kesari during a campaign rally in Rohtak in January 1998. A few months later Kesari was forced out and Gandhi took over as party chief. Asked about party leaders

Bhawan not only symbolises the ambitions and aspirations of the country with the largest youth population in the world, but also that the party is also ready to play the role of a vigilant opposition and protect democracy," Maken said. In the times to come, such processes are being developed in Indira Bhawan so that Congress workers from all over the country are welcomed in this building and senior party office bearers can easily interact with them, he said. The objective of Indira Bhawan was to create a place that would not only be the headquarters of the party but also symbolise its heritage and values, Maken said. The design reflects the glorious history and democratic principles of the party while at the same time having the amenities of a modern workplace, he said. "We have sought to create a welcoming environment that encourages collaboration and participation, and that our headquarters is both inspiring and practical. In addition, special emphasis has been placed on incorporating elements of transparency and openness in the design to reflect the values of inclusion and democratic dialogue," Maken said. The building, spread over a total area of 2,100 sq m, has its own auditorium with 276 seats, numerous meeting rooms, and adequate seating arrangements for the officials of every frontal organisation and cell of the Congress, he said. There are 134 trees, 8675 plants and 264 art works and paintings, he said, adding that the cafeteria has paintings of Nand Lal Bose which were made on the request of Mahatma Gandhi for the Haripura Congress session of 1938. Maken said each floor represents an era in the history of the Congress. "The new Congress Bhawan is not a building, but a glorious legacy of freedom. At the base of this Indira Bhawan is an ideological movement and at its peak is the resolution to protect the Constitution," he said.

## US-India sign cybercrime pact

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days before it hands over power to President-elect Donald Trump, the Biden administration signed a pact with New Delhi that provides for boosting cooperation in combating cybercrime and related challenges such as terror financing and violent extremism. The agreement on cybercrime investigations, signed in Washington on Friday, allows the agencies concerned of the two countries to step up the level of cooperation with respect to cyber threat intelligence and digital forensics, according to an Indian readout. It is the second such move in the last few days by the outgoing Biden administration that reflected the overall upward trajectory of relations between the two nations. The US on Wednesday removed restrictions on three Indian nuclear entities -- Bhabha Atomic Research



Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR) and the Indian Rare Earths (IRE). The lifting of the restrictions is aimed at implementation of the historic India-US civil nuclear deal sealed around 16 years ago. The Memorandum of Understanding or MoU on cybercrime investigations was signed by Indian Ambassador Vinay Kwatra and Acting US Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Kristie Canegallo. "Cybercrime has intricate

linkages with the common security challenges faced by India and the US such as terrorism and violent extremism, terror financing, drug trafficking, organised crime, human trafficking, illegal migration, money laundering and transportation security," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in the readout. "The MoU on cybercrime investigations will enable further strengthening of India-US security cooperation, as part of our

comprehensive and global strategic partnership," it said. From New Delhi, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) of the Union Home Ministry will be responsible for execution of the MoU, the MEA said. From the US side, it will be the Department of Homeland Security, and its constituent agencies -- the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Homeland Security Investigations Cyber Crimes Center (C3) which are tasked to execute the pact.

## Indian Navy participating in mega wargame 'La Perouse' with naval forces from eight other nations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy is participating in a mega wargame along with naval forces from eight nations including the US and France against the backdrop of increasingly fractious geopolitical environment and China's military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific. The naval exercise 'La Perouse' is underway in the straits between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as well as Malacca, Sunda and Lombok. These straits are largely considered as very crucial for global maritime trade. The nine-day exercise that

began on January 16 aims to enhance cooperation among the participating nations in areas of maritime surveillance, interdiction operations, air operations and information sharing. French Carrier Strike Group (CSG), led by nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle, is the mainstay of the mega exercise. India's indigenously designed and built guided missile destroyer INS Mumbai is part of the exercise, according to the Indian Navy. Besides, India, the US and France, naval forces from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the UK are participating



in the exercise. "The exercise provides an opportunity for like-minded navies to develop closer links in planning, coordination and information sharing for enhanced tactical interoperability," the Indian Navy said on Saturday. "The exercise will witness complex and advanced multi-domain exercises including surface warfare, anti-air warfare, air-defence, cross deck landings and tactical manoeuvres, as also the constabulary missions such as VBSS (Visit, Board, Search and Seizure) operations," it said in a statement. The Indian Navy's participation in the exercise

showcases the high levels of synergy, coordination and interoperability between the like-minded navies and their commitment to a rules-based international order in the maritime domain, it added. The Australian Navy has deployed its frontline destroyer HMAS Hobart, while Canada has sent its warship HMCS Ottawa. The United States deployed combat ship USS Savannah, Malaysia sent destroyer FFG Lekir and its embarked helicopter and the vessel Gagah Samudera. The United Kingdom is participating in the exercise with offshore patrol vessel HMS Spey and Singapore

with the patrol vessel RSN Independence. "Strengthening maritime security will be at the core of this exercise, with the development of interoperability and the ability to act collectively in the event of a maritime crisis, which will contribute to it," a French readout said. It said the planned interactions will enable work on a broad spectrum of maritime security operations. "The various forces distributed in the area will train to search for and then intervene on ships suspected of illicit activities; with suspect vessels being played by vessels of the force," it added.

## Christian man unable to bury father: SC raps Chhattisgarh Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court slammed the Chhattisgarh Government and sought its response on a plea filed by a Christian man who said he is unable to bury his pastor father in Chhindawada village as people have aggressively objected to it and police have threatened him with legal action. A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma expressed surprise that the body was lying in a mortuary in the district hospital and medical college, Jagdalpur since January 7, when the man died and the police have not taken any action since then. Bench rapped the Chhattisgarh Government while seeking its response on the plea filed by the son. "Leave the village panchayat, even the High Court has passed a strange order. What is the State Government doing," the bench said while issuing notice to the Chhattisgarh Government.



The matter will be heard on January 20. The top court was hearing the appeal filed by Ramesh Baghel, belonging to the Mahra caste, challenging an order of the Chhattisgarh High Court which disposed of his plea seeking burial of his father who was a pastor in the area specified for Christian persons in the village graveyard. Relying on a certificate issued by the gram panchayat's sarpanch that there are no separate burial grounds for Christians, the High Court denied him permission saying it may cause unrest and disharmony in the public at large. The pastor died due to prolonged old age illness.

## Import of refurbished medical devices not allowed, says CDSCO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a move aimed at curbing the influx of unregulated second-hand medical devices in the country, the apex drug regulator Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has informed the Customs Department that import of refurbished devices is not allowed. In a letter to the Principal Commissioner of Customs, the CDSCO said that all medical devices are regulated under the Medical Devices Rules, 2017. "However, there is no specific provision for regulation of refurbished medical devices under the said rules. Hence, no licence is issued for import of such devices and it cannot be imported under Medical Devices Rules for sale and distribution," the CDSCO said. Manufacturers of medical devices have welcomed the move, stating this decisive clarification reinforces the regulatory framework designed to ensure the highest standards of patient safety.

Dr Sudhir Srivastava, former Chair of the Medical Device Committee at PHDCCI, said that the decision by CDSCO marks a pivotal step towards reinforcing India's self-reliance in medical technology. "Allowing refurbished medical devices into the country would have jeopardized the quality of healthcare, disincentivized local innovation, and undermined the spirit of the 'Make in India' initiative," Srivastava said. Indian manufacturers are making significant strides in research and development, delivering "cutting-edge solutions tailored to our healthcare needs", he said. "By curbing refurbished imports, we not only protect the integrity of our medical ecosystem but also send a strong message to global investors that India is committed to building a robust, indigenous medical device industry. This move safeguards both the future of healthcare innovation in India and the well-being of our patients," he added.

# Sangam witnesses sea of devotees, 7.5 Crore take the holy dip in five days

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

The air thrummed with spiritual fervor as millions descended upon the Sangam, the sacred confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and mythical Saraswati rivers, for the Mahakumbh Mela. In just five days since its commencement, an astonishing 7.5 crore devotees have taken the holy dip, a testament to the enduring power of faith and tradition. On Saturday, the banks of the Sangam witnessed a breathtaking spectacle as over 19.84 lakh pilgrims, including over 10 lakh Kalpvasis dedicated to a month-long spiritual immersion, participated in the sacred bath. "It is truly humbling to witness this sea of humanity united in devotion," remarked Shri Ram Narayan Das, a revered sage attending the Mahakumbh for decades. "The energy here is palpable,

a powerful blend of faith, humility, and joy." The Mahakumbh, one of the largest religious gatherings on Earth, has transformed Prayagraj into a vibrant tapestry of colors, sounds, and spiritual experiences. From the chanting of mantras to the rhythmic beats of devotional music, the atmosphere is charged with an undeniable sense of collective upliftment. "I have traveled from the southernmost tip of India to experience the sanctity of the Sangam," shared an elderly woman, her eyes glistening with tears of joy. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to cleanse my soul and connect with the divine." Beyond the religious significance, the Mahakumbh also serves as a powerful testament to the unifying force of faith. People from all walks of life, irrespective of caste, creed, or social standing, come



Newly-initiated Naga sadhus perform rituals at the Sangam area during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 PTI

together to partake in this grand celebration of spirituality. "The Mahakumbh is not just a religious event; it is a celebration of humanity," stated Shri Ajay Kumar, District Magistrate of Prayagraj. "The administration has been working tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of all pilgrims, while also striving to maintain the sanctity of this sacred event." As the Mahakumbh progresses, millions more are expected to join the festivities, making this year's edition an unforgettable testament to the enduring power of faith and the timeless allure of the Sangam. Rajnath Singh takes a dip. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh arrived in Prayagraj on Saturday to attend Mahakumbh. He was received at Bamrauli Airport by MLA Minister Nand Gopal Gupta, with MP Sudhanshu Trivedi also accompanying him. Upon reaching Prayagraj, the Defence Minister took the sacred dip at Triveni Sangam, chanting slogans such as "Sanatan Ki Jai" and "Ganga Maiyya Ki Jai." Following the ritual, he visited Akshayvat, Patalpuri, and Bade Hanuman Ji temples and reviewed the preparations for the Mahakumbh. Later in the evening, the Defence Minister is scheduled to meet with Army officials to discuss security arrangements for the Mahakumbh. Speaking on the occasion, Singh remarked, "I consider it my great fortune to have taken a holy dip in the Sangam at Prayagraj today. The Mahakumbh is a grand spiritual and cultural festival that embodies the essence of Indianness. It transcends associations with any particular sect, community, or religion."



Devotees gather to take a holy dip at the Sangam PTI

## A night of service: Prayagraj police feed and comfort 24,000 stranded pilgrims at Maha Kumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

In a heartwarming display of humanity and dedication, the police in Prayagraj turned saviors for over 24,000 pilgrims stranded outside Prayagraj Junction station late Tuesday night. After taking the holy dip on Makar Sankranti, the devotees faced bone-chilling cold and long delays caused by thick fog disrupting train schedules. The night saw policemen not just managing the massive crowd but going beyond their duty to serve food, water, and tea to the weary pilgrims until 3 a.m. Wednesday. Blankets and quilts were also distributed to



shield them from the biting cold. Speaking about the efforts, ACP (Kotwali) Manoj Kumar Singh shared, "We saw elderly people and children shivering, some of them

hungry and tired. It was impossible to stand by and do nothing. With help from NGOs and generous locals, we made sure everyone was fed and kept warm." Many police officers personally pitched in to ensure the smooth distribution of food and supplies. Sub-Inspector Ravi Shukla, who helped prepare and serve meals, said, "When I handed over a plate of food to a young boy, his mother's teary 'thank you' made all the effort worth it. This is more than a duty; it is humanity." The chaos caused by delayed trains and miscommunication also left many pilgrims at the wrong stations.

## Mahakumbh to boost UP's economy by over one per cent, claim experts

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ**

Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj is poised to create a transformative cultural, social, and economic impact on Uttar Pradesh. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasized the event's potential to generate Rs 2 lakh crore in business, with experts estimating an economic boost of over 1% to the state's GDP. This monumental gathering is also expected to significantly increase GST collections, with projections suggesting a potential threefold rise during the peak months of December, January, and February. The influx of millions of

domestic and international pilgrims over 45 days is anticipated to stimulate demand, increase production, create jobs, and enhance financial flows for businesses of all scales. The state government, which is investing Rs 16,000 crore in the event, plans to channel the revenue into infrastructure development, aligning with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision of making Uttar Pradesh a one trillion-dollar economy. Economist and chartered accountant Pankaj Gandhi Jaiswal predicts Mahakumbh 2025 could boost both nominal and real GDP by 1%. With an estimated 45 crore visitors

expected to attend and average spending of Rs 10,000 per person, the total economic activity generated could surpass Rs 4.5 lakh crore. Even accounting for a 10% margin of error, the net contribution would remain above Rs 4 lakh crore. Such economic activity will not only bolster quarterly GDP but also contribute significantly to India's annual growth. "The state's investment will yield manifold returns," Jaiswal said. "An estimated Rs 4 lakh crore economic activity could result in GST collections of Rs 50,000 crore. Combined with income tax and other indirect taxes, the government's revenue

could exceed Rs 1 lakh crore." He further highlighted how this financial influx will stimulate sectors like tourism, transport, real estate, and retail, creating a cascading effect on economic growth. Chartered accountant Anil Gupta for Prayagraj echoed these sentiments, underscoring the significant economic contributions from infrastructure, transportation, and other sectors. Gupta noted the transformation of Prayagraj, which now boasts 5-star and 7-star hotels to accommodate global visitors, as a testament to the government's development initiatives.

## Digital media centre boosts global coverage of Mahakumbh, emerges as information hub

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

To showcase the grandeur of Mahakumbh to the world, an advanced Media Center equipped with state-of-the-art technology is operational in the Mela area under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership. Boasting high-quality professional cameras worth crores of rupees, the Media Centre facilitates flawless recording and live-streaming of every moment of the Mahakumbh. This ensures that viewers experience the event in real time, offering an immersive digital experience to devotees worldwide. High-resolution cameras, featuring lenses costing up to Rs 50 lakh, are

broadcasting updates and news about the Mahakumbh on digital platforms. So far, 30 international journalists have conducted special coverage of the event, highlighting its cultural and spiritual significance. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed officials to ensure that the Media Center provides all necessary facilities for both domestic and international devotees to stay informed. The demand for Mahakumbh-related news is particularly high in countries such as the USA, Russia, Germany, Japan, and Israel. Adding to its global reach, Mahakumbh programs aired on Swedish Radio have garnered significant



appreciation. The Media Center also features amenities such as tea, breakfast, and dining facilities, along with a well-equipped conference room. Comprehensive security arrangements have been implemented to ensure the safety and convenience of journalists and visitors alike.

## Railway Minister Ashwini inspects undersea bullet train tunnel work



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI/THANE**

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday inspected the work of the undersea tunnel of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Corridor, popularly called the bullet train project, and expressed satisfaction at the "good progress" on the mega multi-billion dollar project. The 21-kilometre tunnel, which includes a 7 kilometre stretch beneath the Thane Creek, will connect the Bandra Kurla Complex station to Shilphata. The undersea tunnel is the first of its kind in the country. The undersea tunnel has been designed and is being

constructed with great care, Vaishnaw told reporters at the site in Ghansoli in neighbouring Navi Mumbai. "The technology being employed and the design of the tunnel makes it possible for two trains to pass through at speeds of 250 kilometres per hour. Environment protection has been taken care of along with ventilation and lighting. The construction on 340 kilometres of the project has made good progress," the Union railway minister said. Trains can pass at much higher speeds in the undersea tunnel than Kolkata Metro's under-river tunnel, he told reporters. "The project is seeing significant advancements in bridge construction over rivers

and station infrastructure. The station at Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) is an engineering marvel, with a unique design featuring 10 underground floors and seven above-ground levels. The high-speed rail project is on schedule, with Japanese experts inspecting and approving the ongoing work," he said. The dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide an affordable, efficient transportation mode for the middle class is steadily becoming a reality, the Union minister remarked. The completion of the High Speed Rail route, the first in the country, will integrate the economies of the cities enroute, including Mumbai and Ahmedabad, and will greatly boosted urban development, Vaishnaw said. "The stations along the corridor will spur urban development and enhance daily commuters' productivity by significantly reducing travel time. Don't see the high-speed train as a transportation project, but as integration of the economy. It will elevate India's infrastructure and economic growth," Vaishnaw said. He lauded the efforts of Indian engineers, whose expertise has played a pivotal role in the project's success, adding it was a matter of pride for the entire country.

## Simultaneous poll is unconstitutional, being brought with political motive: DMK

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI**

The Centre's initiative of 'one nation, one election' was 'unconstitutional' and was being brought with a political motive, DMK senior and Tamil Nadu Forests Minister K Ponmudy said on Saturday. Speaking at the DMK legal wing's third state conference that began here, he said "the move is unconstitutional and is being brought with a political motive." Terming the move to enforce simultaneous poll as an attempt to dispense with the five-year term of assemblies and



downsizing the states to union territories, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said states will not be in the picture at all if one nation, one election law was enforced. "It will destroy the very federal structure of our country. The preamble of the Constitution

says that India is a union of states. You have diminished the states... You are destroying the basic structure of the state, and trying for one nation, one poll, one language, political party, one religion," Sibal said during a discussion on the topic. "The move amounts to destroying the essence of democratic functioning of our republic. Cronies support the idea without a national debate on it. I don't think the people of India and Tamil Nadu will tolerate it," Sibal said and claimed that it would also affect the education, health and other state specific issues.

## CBI court convicts Himachal IG, seven other cops in custodial death case

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH**

A Special CBI court here on Saturday convicted the Himachal Pradesh Inspector General of Police and seven other policemen in the custodial death of an accused in the gang rape and murder of a minor girl in Himachal Pradesh's Kotkhai in 2017. The court of special judge Alka Malik will pronounce the quantum of punishment on January 27. The CBI court convicted IG Zahur Haider Zaidi, the then

deputy superintendent of police Manoj Joshi, then Sub-Inspector Rajinder Singh, then Assistant SI Deep Chand Sharma, then head constable Mohan Lal, Surat Singh, Rafee Mohammad and then constable Ranjit Sateta. The court acquitted the then Superintendent of Police DW Negi, his counsel Rabindra Pandit said. The accused have been convicted under various sections, including 302 (murder) read with 120-B, 330 (voluntarily causing hurt to extort confession), 348

(wrongful confinement to extract confession) and 195 (giving false evidence) of the Indian Penal Code, said CBI public prosecutor Amit Jindal. Zaidi and seven others were arrested in the custodial death case of Suraj, who was found dead at the Kotkhai police station on July 18, 2017. A 16-year-old girl went missing in Kotkhai on July 4, 2017, and her body was found in the Halaila forests two days later on July 6. The post-mortem report confirmed rape and murder and a case was registered.



Six Crore senior citizens brought under Ayushman Bharat, 45 per cent of population covered: Nadda

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD**

Ayushman Bharat has brought 6 crore citizens aged 70 and above under it, and the Centre's flagship health insurance programme now covers over 45 per cent of India's population, Union Health Minister JP Nadda said here Saturday. The Union Cabinet in October last year approved health coverage to all citizens aged 70 years and above irrespective of income under the 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana' (AB PM-JAY). "Under Modi 3.0, we have added 6 crore people above 70 under Ayushman Bharat. Now, more than 62 crore

people, or over 45 per cent of India's population, are covered, not in health insurance but under a 'health assurance' scheme with an annual coverage of Rs 5 lakh," he said. Speaking at the 'IIMA Healthcare Summit 2025' organised at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, he called the scheme a game changer and said it has benefited more than 4.2 crore citizens. "These are poor people - rickshaw pullers, street vendors, bus drivers, conductors, lift men, security guards, barbers, shoemakers - who perhaps would never have thought about caring for their health," Nadda said.







# BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE CAST



PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

### The cast of *Swipe Crime* breaks down their roles, with Faisal Malik giving fans hope for Prahlad Cha's return, says SAKSHI PRIYA

compelling character, adding another nuanced portrayal to his repertoire. Here, we dive into his thoughts on the series, his character and the lessons he's gathered along the way. In this gripping exploration of cybercrime, Faisal brings depth to a character that resonates with real-life personas. Here's a closer look at his journey with the show and the insights he shared about his craft.

**The Concept and the Draw:** For Faisal, the decision to join *Swipe Crime* was rooted in the script's quality and the universe it creates. "What inspires every actor to do it? The character is good. The universe he has created is good. And it's very relatable as well as beautifully written. That's what inspires me," he shared.

**Portraying His Character:** Faisal's character in *Swipe Crime* stands out for its layered personality. He described it as someone who is multifaceted depending on perspective. "A nice person, for myself only, not for the people around me. So for me, I

am a very nice, good person. But for my students, I am a badass. So they don't like me. And it's good for me," he explained. To bring authenticity to the role, Faisal drew inspiration from a real-life individual. "There is a teacher on my campus, Mr. Sharma. He was like this. So I have just taken him and done it here."

**Films vs OTT:** Having worked in diverse mediums, Faisal finds the OTT format particularly appealing for its depth in storytelling. "Not platform, but the medium of series is good. Because one can easily explore the character and the person. It's not hero-centric at all," he stated, reflecting on the opportunities OTT platforms offer.

**When Prahlad Cha Returns:** Fans of Faisal's character from *Panchayat* are eagerly awaiting the return of Prahlad Cha. Faisal shared some insight on this during the interview, saying, "Ready ho raha hai. 8 or 9 months lagega abhi." This indicates that while the wait may be long, there are plans for Prahlad Cha's return in the future.



**Lessons from the Industry:** The entertainment industry has taught Faisal valuable lessons, both professionally and personally. "For me, it's like to be good to people. Yeah, that's nice," he said, emphasising the importance of kindness and understanding. However, his journey also came with its challenges. "Someone told me a long time back to stop thinking about too much of anything. I used to produce shows and all. So in that entire journey, I was very bad to people. Because I was keeping my 24/7. So if some other person is not doing their work, then I become very bad. They all said don't do this. You are making enemies."

**Advice to His Younger Self:** When asked what he would tell his younger self, Faisal offered an honest and surprising answer. "That's the worst thing I have done in my life, to think about work. Otherwise, I would be a lazy person. I would be sitting alone. I don't want to do anything. This is what I want to do: doing nothing," he said with a smile.

**A Show That Resonates with Today's Audience** *Swipe Crime* is a thriller that mirrors society's growing dependence on technology and the vulnerabilities it exposes. The performances, led by Faisal Malik's gravitas, Rishab Chadha's depth, Diksha J Singh's charisma and Ronit Ashra's fresh energy, make it a must-watch for audiences of all ages. As Faisal Malik aptly put it, "Awareness is key. While technology evolves, it's up to us to use it wisely and protect ourselves." With a compelling storyline, powerful performances and a relevant message, *Swipe Crime* is set to leave a lasting impact on viewers, making them think twice about the digital footprints they leave behind.

### The Cast Reveals All! Insights from the Cast and Crew:

OTT platforms have brought forth a wave of fresh, engaging content and *Swipe Crime* is the latest show garnering attention. With its intriguing storyline and complex characters, the show has created a buzz among audiences. Here's an exclusive look into the world of *Swipe Crime* with the cast members, Rishabh Chaddha, Diksha Singh, Ronit Ashra and the celebrated Faisal Malik. Faisal Malik, known for his phenomenal work in *Panchayat*, shares his insights on the show, while the rest of the cast speaks about their challenges, character nuances and their experiences working together.

**Faisal Malik on His Role and Reflections from the Industry:** Faisal Malik, best known for his remarkable performances, takes on a Professor role in the series *Swipe Crime*. He has cemented his place in the industry as an actor who brings depth and authenticity to every role. In *Swipe Crime*, a gripping series exploring the dark corners of cybercrime, Faisal takes on a



**RISHAB CHADHA**  
Versatility and Dedication

Rishabh Chaddha, known for *Drishyam* and *Khoobsurat*, shines in *Swipe Crime*. Reflecting on his 18-year acting journey, he said, "I've spent so much time on my craft that nothing feels too challenging anymore. But this role was unique, requiring restraint and a transformation that I hadn't experienced before." On challenges, he shared, "A scene with alcohol and fire was intense. I unknowingly consumed alcohol, fainted post-shoot, but it's my best intro scene yet." Playing Vidhan Shastri, a shy yet ambitious UP engineering student, Rishabh drew from personal experiences and the director's vision, saying, "Understanding the director is key."



**DIKSHA J SINGH**  
From Model to Actress

Diksha J Singh is a multifaceted personality, an actor, model, and politician, best known for her role as Juhi in *Swipe Crime*. Talking about her character, she shared, "After a long time, I came across a script that offered so much for a woman to play, especially in a negative role from a college perspective. It's rare and refreshing." For Diksha, Juhi is mentally strong and incredibly clever, characteristics she found fascinating to portray. Though she did not share screen space with Faisal Malik, she expressed admiration for their performances and eagerly sought their guidance during promotions.



**RONIT ASHRA**  
From Social Media to Acting Debut

Ronit Ashra, celebrated for his mimicry and content creation, makes his acting debut in *Swipe Crime*. Transitioning from a social media sensation to an actor, he remarked, "Acting has always been my passion. It feels great to finally bring it to life in a show like this." Ronit plays Nikhil Saxena, the studious son of an ITian who wants to carve his own path. Describing his character, he said, "Nikhil is a mix of intelligence and ambition, with a lighthearted dynamic with his parents." Ronit shared amusing anecdotes from the set, especially his improvisations with Faisal Malik. "We'd often create moments on the spot, making the process incredibly fun," he said.



## Layers of Love and Craft

By SAKSHI PRIYA

Chandni Chowk has always been the heartbeat of wedding shopping in Delhi, and now, with the addition of *House of Surya* at *Omaxe Chowk*, bridal shopping has reached new heights of elegance. The store transforms this experience into an art form, showcasing timeless craftsmanship that speaks to the soul of traditional Indian fashion.

The *House of Surya* collection stands out with intricate details, from delicate hand embroidery to the rich textures of Banarasi silks and velvets. The colour palette spans from classic bridal reds to soft pastels and muted metallics, offering something for every bride and wedding celebration. Whether it's a grand lehenga for the main ceremony or a lighter outfit for pre-wedding events, the designs strike the perfect balance of luxury and wearability, catering to the vibrant celebrations that define Indian weddings.



The launch saw *Malaika Arora* bringing her signature grace and glamour, embodying the collection's ethos of confidence and elegance. Her presence highlighted how the designs resonate with today's brides, who seek a harmonious balance between tradition and individuality. Stepping into the store feels like entering a world of creativity and craftsmanship. The thoughtfully designed space invites customers into a world of creativity and detail. From ornate embellishments to the careful interplay of heritage and contemporary aesthetics, every garment has a personality of its own. The artistry and skill of Indian craftsmen shine through, with pieces that feel like heirlooms meant to be cherished. As wedding season peaks, this addition has quickly become a go-to for bridal wear that adapts to the varying needs of modern celebrations. From mehendi to reception, the collection caters to every event while maintaining the grandeur that Indian weddings are known for. The focus on craftsmanship is what makes this collection truly special. In a fast-paced world, it's refreshing to see a space that honours traditional techniques while keeping them relevant for the present day. For those stepping into the whirlwind of wedding preparations, this new destination is about connecting with a legacy of design and artistry. It offers not just garments but an experience, one that makes every bride feel unique and every occasion unforgettable.

# GRITTY PICTURE OF TIHAR



### Neflix's *Black Warrant* takes viewers into the life in Tihar Jail investigating power, corruption and survival in 1980s, writes ABHI SINGHAL



**B**lack Warrant is a crime drama series, premiered on Netflix. It has been adapted from the 2019 memoir 'Black Warrant: Confessions of a Tihar Jailer' by Sunil Gupta and Sunetra Choudhury, the series offers a portrayal of life inside India's Tihar Jail during the 1980s.

**Conspectus** The story revolves around Sunil Kumar Gupta, portrayed by Zahan Kapoor, a novice jailer who begins his tenure at Tihar Jail. As he becomes acquainted with the prison's operations under the guidance of Rajesh Tomar (played by Rahul Bhat), Sunil Kumar Gupta confronts the pervasive corruption and complex power dynamics among inmates and staff of Tihar Jail. The series excavates into Gupta's moral dilemmas and his interactions with notorious criminals, including serial killer Charles Sobhraj.

**A Stellar Ensemble** The cast of *Black Warrant* delivers

outstanding performances, bringing depth to the series' deep story. Zahan Kapoor shines as Sunil Gupta, portraying a young, idealistic jailer coming to terms with the harsh realities of Tihar Jail. His portrayal of inner conflict and moral dilemmas adds a relatable human touch to the story. Rahul Bhat excels as DSP Rajesh Tomar, a hardened mentor who embodies the complexity of law enforcement in a morally ambiguous environment. Sidhant Gupta's performance as the cunning and calm Charles Sobhraj is a standout, effortlessly having a scary vibe of his own. Rajshri Deshpande adds gravitas as Pratibha Sen, a journalist investigating the murky waters of prison politics. Supporting actors like Tota Roy Choudhury and Joy Sengupta skillfully portray senior prison officials, highlighting the institutional dynamics and their often questionable choices. Each actor contributes to the authentic portrayal of a prison system marked by power struggles,

corruption, and humanity's darker shades. The ensemble's seamless chemistry elevates the series, making it a gripping watch. **Direction and Production** The series is a collaborative creation by Vikramaditya Motwane, Satyanshu Singh, and Daniel Sharma. Motwane, co-directs alongside Singh, Sharma, Rohin Raveendran Nair, and Ambiecka Pandit. **Episode Structure** "Black Warrant" comprises seven episodes, each ranging from 38 to 50 minutes. Each episode takes you through deeper into the challenges faced by Gupta as he sails the double crossing environment of Tihar Jail. **Critical Reception** The series goes good on the part of authentic depiction of prison life and compelling storytelling of the Tihar Jail. The storyline is gripping and showcases the major part of how things roll in Tihar Jail. The dark side of corruption, the setting of inmates with the

police, the violence inside the jail and the under trails is perfectly showcased in the film. With each episode centred on a different case, the show is meticulously scripted. Even if the majority of the plot seems authentic, it falls apart when Sunil is revealed as the system's sole saviour. It could have done better with the ending like the other episodes. **Closure** "Black Warrant" is notable for its honest and realistic depiction of the intricacies found in one of India's most infamous prisons. With excellent acting, especially from Zahan Kapoor and Rahul Bhat, the series explores themes of survival and division of power. *Black Warrant* is a notable addition to Netflix's library for fans who enjoy crime dramas based on actual events. **Rating - 4/5**

**SUGGESTED BINGES**

**PAATAL LOK SEASON 2**  
IMDB Rating: 8.9/10 (as of 18th Jan)  
OTT: Amazon Prime Video  
Director: Avinash Arun  
Cast: Jaideep Ahlawat, Ishwak Singh, Anurag Arora

**THE ROSHANS**  
IMDB Rating: 8.2/10 (as of 18th Jan)  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: Shashi Ranjan  
Cast: Rakesh Roshan, Hrithik Roshan, Rajesh Roshan

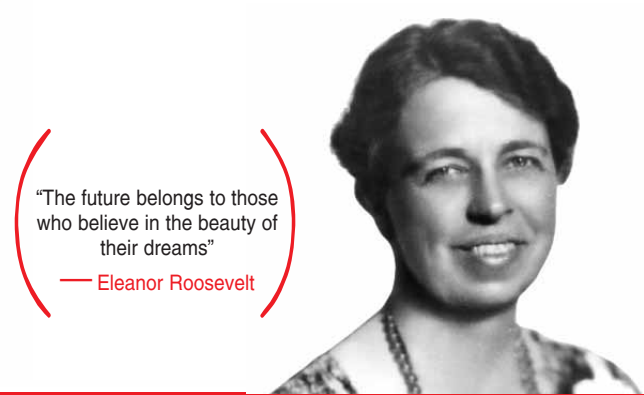
**BACK IN ACTION**  
IMDB Rating: 6.5/10  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: J.J. Perry, Kristina M. Peterson  
Cast: Cameron Diaz, Jamie Foxx, McKenna Roberts, Rylan Jackson

**XO, KITTY SEASON 2**  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: Katina Medina Mora, Steven Tsuchida, Anna Mastro  
Cast: Anna Cathcart, Minyeong Choi, Gia Kim

**WITH LOVE, MEGHAN**  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: Michael Steed  
Cast: Meghan Markle, Mindy Kaling, Prince Harry

Get in touch at vivacity@dailypioneer.com





# real-A-life action hero

From Bollywood star to philanthropic icon, Sonu Sood's journey in Bollywood is a classic example of perseverance and resilience, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

*@SonuSood who plays Villain in South and Bollywood, but he did such a thing in this tragedy that he is the biggest hero in my eyes. On a social platform like Twitter, by taking the details of the workers, they are arranging buses and transporting them to the own village.: Md Shah Nawaz Alam @alamktr00*

**M**d Shah Nawaz Alam was not the only person praising Sonu Sood for helping migrants reach their homes during Covid when lockdown was suddenly announced and people were stuck across the country. It was crazy time. No one knew what was in store and how pandemic would unfold. It was particularly hard on migrant workers with meagre resources walked endless journey to their hometowns. In this situation *Sonu Sood*, a known name in Bollywood for playing mean villain came forward to help people and making arrangements for traveling to these workers. The twitter was abuzz with people asking 'Sonu bhैया' help and getting it. His twitter handle became a virtual helpline. Tweets like these flooded his social media handle. And he ready came for help. Genuinely. It was a gesture people reciprocated with warmth and *Sonu Sood* became a household name. It was indeed a turning point in the life and career of the star. And since then he did not look back. *Sonu Sood's* journey in Bollywood is a testament to resilience, hard work, and the power of perseverance. From humble beginnings to becoming a household name, *Sonu's* story is not just about acting but also about his extraordinary contributions to society through his philanthropic efforts. His rise to fame and his journey of selfless giving have made him one of the most admired figures in India, both on and off the screen. Born on July 30, 1973, in Moga, Punjab, *Sonu Sood* was not always destined for the glitz and glamour of Bollywood. Growing up in a middle-class family, *Sonu's* early life was filled with academic aspirations. He completed his engineering degree from the Yeshwantrao Chavan College of Engineering in Nagpur. However, despite his technical background, his heart was always inclined towards acting. *Sonu* moved to Mumbai with dreams of making it in Bollywood. Like many aspiring actors, his journey was not without struggle. He started his career with small roles and often faced rejection. His initial years in the industry were difficult, and he struggled to find a breakthrough. He appeared in a variety of roles, including in films like *Kahan Hai Tu* (1999) and *Shaheed-E-Azam* (2002). These films, although not major hits, helped *Sonu* gain experience and sharpen his acting skills. *Sonu Sood's* breakthrough came with the film *Yuva* (2004), directed by Mani Ratnam. Playing the character of a strong-willed, determined man, *Sonu's* performance was well-received. This marked the beginning of his rise in the industry. His portrayal of negative roles in films like *Aashiq Banaya Aapne* (2005) and *Dabangg* (2010) further solidified his presence in

Bollywood. In *Dabangg*, his character, Chhedi Singh, was menacing, and his performance opposite Salman Khan earned him widespread acclaim. The turning point in his career came when *Sonu Sood* was offered roles that showcased his versatility. Whether as the villain or a complex character with shades of Gray, *Sonu's* consistent hard work and dedication to his craft saw him rise through the ranks of Bollywood's A-list stars. His powerful performances in films like *Jodha Akbar* (2008), *Simmba* (2018), and *Raju Chacha* (2000) earned him several awards and nominations. What sets *Sonu* apart is his ability to evolve with the changing dynamics of the film industry. He has played a range of characters, from a villain to a hero, from action-packed roles to romantic parts. His commitment to delivering quality performances, regardless of the scale of the film, has made him a dependable actor in Bollywood. While *Sonu Sood's* acting career has been remarkable, his philanthropic work during the COVID-19 pandemic made him a true hero in the eyes of millions. When the pandemic caused widespread suffering across the globe, *Sonu* didn't just stay confined to his home; he became the guiding light for thousands of people in need. *Sonu's* philanthropic efforts began when he started helping migrant workers stuck in different parts of India due to the lockdown. With his own funds and resources, *Sonu* arranged transportation for thousands of migrant workers to return to their homes, despite facing logistical hurdles and government restrictions. His initiative gained massive media attention, with people praising him for his quick and effective response to the crisis. In addition to helping migrant workers, *Sonu Sood* extended his support to the medical sector by arranging hospital beds, oxygen supplies, and treatment for those suffering from COVID-19. He provided financial aid to families who had lost their loved ones during the pandemic and launched multiple campaigns to help students, farmers, and the underprivileged access education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Through his organisation, the Sood Charity Foundation, *Sonu* has continued his philanthropic efforts, focusing on education, healthcare, and helping the underprivileged. He believes in the power of education and aims to provide quality education to children who do not have access to it. His efforts have not gone unnoticed, and he has received numerous accolades, including the prestigious International Humanitarian Award in recognition of his selfless work. *Sonu Sood's* success in Bollywood is a result of his unwavering dedication and hard work. He didn't come from a film family and had no Godfather when he reached Mumbai from his hometown Moga with just Rs 5000 in his pocket. He worked his way up to build his career from the ground up. His perseverance is a reflection of his commitment to his craft and his belief that success comes with consistent effort. What sets *Sonu* apart from many others in the industry is his work ethic and focus. He has worked in several regional film industries, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Hindi cinema, which allowed him to understand the nuances of different audiences and cultures. This versatility has been key to his success, as he is equally comfortable playing a hero or villain in different languages and genres. In an industry where many actors rely on luck or industry connections to secure their place, *Sonu* has demonstrated that talent, dedication, and hard work are the true pillars of success. His journey is an inspiration to aspiring actors and those who believe in the power of perseverance. *Sonu Sood* has not only made a place for himself in Bollywood but has also become a hero for countless people across the country. His legacy, both as an actor and philanthropist, will continue to inspire generations to come.



*Sonu Sood's journey in Bollywood is an incredible narrative of success, struggle and humanity. From a young man with dreams of becoming an actor to a respected figure in the Indian film industry, Sonu's dedication to his craft and his selfless philanthropic work makes him an iconic figure in India today. He was in Delhi at the premier of his latest offering 'Fateh' an action-packed film dealing with cybercrime. Sonu Sood talked to Gyaneshwar Dayal, about his acting, social responsibilities and future plans.*

**Could you tell us what scripts draw your attention?**  
I like to do the films which are close to common man, about his life and problems. Recently I did *Fateh* which deals with the cybercrimes which has become a menace in the country and people should know about it. So I thought why not make a film which would indeed not only entertain but also inform people about the dangers lurking in the digital domain. So I prefer films which are entertaining but also create awareness and talk about people's issues

**You are known for action. Do you like action roles?**  
Yes of course. In my films people get to see a lot of action sequences which are world class and are at par with Hollywood films. We can say that we make action sequences which are world class and perfectly choreographed. *Fateh* is case in point.

**How do you prepare for a role in a film?**  
Well acting comes naturally to me. I have always loved acting and so when I hear a character in the film I get the idea how to go about it. I can switch on and off between the roles and that is really important because Bollywood works like that. Yes, understanding of the role must be there so that you can do justice to it.

**You do a lot of philanthropic work. So what you prefer action for the people in their dire times or action on the screen?**  
See, life is more than just lights camera action. When there are no lights or camera action continues in the real life. It is a great feeling when you can help someone in need when there is no light no camera. It is important to be sympathetic and have empathy, because cinema is one aspect of life not the other way round.

**You have portrayed a range of roles, both positive and negative. Which type do you prefer, and why?**  
That's correct I accept all types of roles I think I can do justice to. But now on I want to do positive roles. I love playing positive roles and that is the kind roles I would be doing now on.



In *Sandburgs* you will find yourself immersed in an ambiance that feels straight out of America when they serve. The menu is crafted to teleport you to the street style of USA with their presentation, writes **TEAM AGENDA**



# SLICE OF AMERICA ON YOUR PLATE

When you step into *Sandburgs*, you're instantly transported to the bustling streets of America usually you might have seen in the web series. From the rustic interiors to the vibrant menu, every corner exudes classic American charm. And the food? It's a culinary celebration of comfort and indulgence. Here's a deep dive into the unforgettable experience that *Sandburgs* offers.



lovers. This unique offering combines marinated cottage cheese with fresh veggies like onion, tomato, and capsicum. The *SB special mint mayo* and *tandoori sauce* elevate the flavours, creating a blend of smoky, tangy, and herby notes in every bite. The warm, crisp bread completes the sandwich, making it a satisfying meal on its own. Other options you could explore in the Sandwiches category are *Peri Peri Cottage press Sandwich*, *Classic Pollo press Sandwich*, *North Pollo Press Sandwich* which are like awesome for the fast food lovers.

**BURGERS THAT SPEAK TO YOUR SOUL:** The *Garden Dreams Burger* is a masterpiece that deserves a standing ovation. The handmade veggie patty is perfectly crisp on the outside and tender within, paired with fresh lettuce, juicy tomato, and a generous dollop of homemade harissa mayo that gives the burger a delightful kick. The caramelised onions and melted cheddar cheese add layers of sweet and savoury goodness, all nestled in a soft, freshly toasted bun.

**SANDWICHES THAT STEAL THE SHOW:** The *Tandoori Cottage Press Sandwich* is a revelation for sandwich

**CHEESINESS YOU CAN'T SAY NO TO:** Cheese lovers, unite! The *The Grilled Cheese* is a triple-threat of mozzarella, parmesan, and cheddar cheeses melted



to perfection. The caramelised onions tucked inside add a hint of sweetness that balances the richness of the cheeses. Toasted in freshly baked milk bread, it's a nostalgic nod to classic American comfort food, oozing with gooey goodness. You could also satisfy your taste buds by ordering *Shroom & Cheese* with assorted mushroom ragu with caramelised onion, mozzarella and parmesan cheese toasted in a freshly baked milk bread, *Ham & cheese* with premium pork ham with sharp cheddar cheese and golden fried egg toasted in a freshly baked milk bread.

**SIDES THAT COMPLIMENT THE FEAST:** What's an American-style meal without crispy potato fries? *Sandburgs'* fries are golden perfection, crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside. The variety of dips, including the *Cheese Garlic Dip* and the *tangy BBQ Dip*, allow you to customise your experience. The *Spicy Dip* is a personal favourite, adding just the right amount of heat to the crispy fries.

**COOL DRINKS AND COFFEE:** The

beverages menu is equally impressive. The *Hazelnut Iced Latte* offers a smooth blend of nutty and creamy flavours, served over ice, making it a refreshing pick-me-up. The *Lemon Iced Tea* is a zesty and revitalising drink, perfect for pairing with the heavy-duty burgers and sandwiches. You could also try *Sundaes - Hot Chocolate Sundae* and *Salted Caramel Sundae* if you are an ice cream fan.

**DESSERTS AND BEYOND:** Although I didn't try the sundaes this time, their presence on the menu promises a classic American diner experience. The range of beverages, from *Coffee on the Rocks* to *Nice and Warm drinks*, ensures there's something for every palate.

*Sandburgs* deliver taste but on the promise of a true American-style dining experience. The presentation, flavours, and overall vibe make it a must-visit for anyone craving hearty comfort food. From the meticulous plating to the authentic taste, *Sandburgs* takes you on a culinary journey straight to the heart of America, one delicious bite at a time.



**FACTSHEET**  
Restaurant Name: Sandburgs  
Place: Unit 4/E-14, Upper Ground Floor, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi (outlets in Gurgaon as well)  
Price for 1: ₹700 approx

## Revolutionising Dining Experiences

*Japonico: Discover the joy of great food and creative flavours*



Pawan Soni  
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards



In a culinary world where new menus often blur into monotony, *Japonico* on Golf Course Road stands out as a beacon of creativity and authenticity. This is a place where innovation meets artistry, delivering a dining experience that surprises and delights even the most seasoned food enthusiasts. With a view of the bustling metro line on the golf course road, *Japonico's* interiors are a visual treat. The layout is thoughtfully divided: one side features a live wood Robata grill and family-style seating, while the other, overlooking the bar, offers a more high-energy vibe. Striking design elements, live projections on flowing water and giant pots, create a serene yet vibrant ambience. Subtle lighting is balanced by strategically placed spotlights, ensuring that every dish's presentation shines as brightly as its flavours.

**A COCKTAIL JOURNEY LIKE NO OTHER:** The experience begins with the drinks. *The Legacy*, a gin- and vodka-based martini, exemplifies the bar's mastery. Served with tobiko caviar, pickled radish, and an olive, each element adds depth: the tobiko bursts with wasabi and truffle notes, the radish enhances passion fruit flavours, and the olive ties it back to the martini's classic essence. *Japonico's* mixology programme promises a standard that few can match.

**CULINARY HIGHLIGHTS:** The meal starts strong with the *Mushroom Salad*, a delightful medley of textures and flavours. Crisp and dehydrated shiitake mushrooms pair beautifully with iceberg lettuce, red cabbage, mizuna, cucumber and avocado, all elevated by a goma dressing. The *Rocky Shrimp Tempura*, spiced with togarashi and creamy mayo, may not break new ground, but its flawless execution ensures it's devoured in no time. The dim sum, crafted with precision, leaves no room for leftovers. The star of the meal, however, is the *Atlantic Crab and Aji Chili Taco*. The sweetness of crab meat meets the heat of chilli and the crunch of a

perfectly crisp taco shell, all brightened by a hint of lemon. It's so irresistibly good, you might not want to share. If you're a crab lover, this dish alone is worth the visit.

From the Robata grill comes another standout: the Australian Lamb Cutlet, marinated in gochujang sauce for 24 hours. The result is tender, flavourful meat that melts in your mouth, delivering smoky richness with every bite.

**THE TEAM BEHIND THE MAGIC:** Great food and drinks require a great team, and *Japonico* is no exception. Restaurateur *Sahil Sambhi*, who I awarded the Best Restaurateur title in the 11th season of The Big F Awards, has honed his craft over the years, evolving from a nightlife innovator to a culinary trailblazer. Known for award-winning ventures like *Bawri* and *VietNom*, Sambhi's passion for innovation and excellence shines through in *Japonico*. At his side are talented mixologists *Chirag Pal* and *Jeet Rana*, and *Chef Roberto Blondi*, who brings Michelin-starred expertise to the table. Together, they've crafted a restaurant that's as much about the experience as it is about the cuisine.

**SETTING A NEW STANDARD:** As the first major restaurant launch of 2025, *Japonico* has raised the bar for the industry. It's not just a place to eat; it's a statement of what dining should aspire to be. Judging by the weekday crowd, diners agree, this is a benchmark that will be hard to beat.

### FACTSHEET

RATINGS (Out of 5)  
Food: 4.75 | Drinks: 4.75 | Ambience: 5.0 | Service: 4.5 | Overall: 4.75  
Address: Japonico, 2nd Floor, Tower D, Vipul Tech Square, Golf Course Rd, near Sector 42-43, Sector 43, Gurugram  
Phone: 9948000039

## From Mangalore to Delhi's Table

By **TEAM AGENDA**

Food has an uncanny way of transporting us. A single bite can take us to a vibrant street, a quiet kitchen or even the shores of a distant coast. At *Chor Bizarre Chef Shriya Shetty's Mangalorean* pop-up did exactly that, bringing the soothing flavours of Mangalore to the heart of Delhi.

The vegetarian journey began with *THINDI*, the *Jowar Tartlet* filled with *red amaranth* cooked in *coconut milk* and topped with *bajeel* (tempered beaten rice). This delicate appetiser was a celebration of earthy, creamy flavours and contrasting textures.

*KUNDAPUR* featured the *7-Hour Mushroom Ghee Roast*, served in *Bombay pao* with *ridge gourd tztziki*, *pomegranate* and *cilantro*. The slow-cooked mushrooms were rich and spiced, beautifully balanced by the refreshing *tztziki*.

The *BAFAT* offering, *Mangalorean Sweet Potato Bafath*, came with *sannas* and *tamarind reduction*. This dish delivered a balance of sweetness and tanginess, made complete by the softness of the *sannas*.

The vegetarian MAINS, served *thali-style*, included *Kori Roti*, *Peas* and *Potato Gassi*, *Red Amaranth Raita*, *Ridge Gourd*



paired with luscious *Banana Mousse*, *cacao nibs* and a *tangy pickle drizzle*. *Chef Shriya Shetty's* pop-up offered a delightful way to explore *Mangalorean* culture through its comforting curries, distinct spices and unique pairings. Whether you choose the vegetarian spread or the meatier options, each dish brought the flavours of *Mangalore* alive in every bite.



**FACTSHEET**  
Date & Time: January 19th, 2025  
Lunch: 12pm & 2pm  
Dinner: 7pm & 9:30pm  
Price: Veg ₹1,300 (All Inclusive), Non veg ₹1,600 (All Inclusive)  
Address: Broadway, 4/15 A, Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi, 110012

*Chutney*, *Raw Banana* and *Carrot Sukka*, *Ghee Rice* and accompaniments like *yoghurt* and *pickle*. The comforting *gassi* and *crispy kori roti* were the highlights, offering a fulfilling and balanced experience. For non-vegetarian diners, the *7-Hour Chicken Ghee Roast* from *KUNDAPUR* packed a flavourful punch, while the *Mangalorean Pork Bafath* from *BAFAT* delivered tangy notes with the *sannas* and tamarind reduction. The MAINS featured the *classic Chicken Gassi*, *Chicken Sukkha* and *Ghee Rice*, completing the hearty thali. The meal ended on a sweet note with the *DESSERT*, a warm, buttery *Ghee Cake*

# ESSENCE OF ASSAM



The Brahmaputra Carnival celebrates the Assamese heritage, and culinary delights, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**



**N**ortheast India, a treasure of cultural diversity and natural beauty, is a region where traditions and modernity coexist in harmony. Among its enchanting states, Assam stands out with its lush tea gardens, lively festivals, and the mighty Brahmaputra River. Assam is all alive with the *Brahmaputra Carnival*, a grand celebration that promises to showcase the region's rich heritage, arts, and cuisine. Set against the stunning backdrop of the majestic river, the carnival features cultural performances, adventure sports, food festivals, and more. It's a unique opportunity to experience the soul of Assam like never before.

A fun carnival that looks like a colourful masterpiece made from Assamese soul, river breezes, and sunshine. On the banks of the majestic Brahmaputra River, Assam culture is celebrated at the *Brahmaputra Carnival*. The river itself is serving as the stage for this festival, which is organised by the Assam Government and is a symphony of culture, adventure, and unadulterated delight.

To make your experience even more fun and adventurous is The *Lachit Ghat* is the site of the *Brahmaputra Carnival*, and *Sandbar Island* serves as the *Tent City* during the event. It takes 15 to 20 minutes by speed boat from the *Lachit Ghat* to *Sandbar Island*, and the journey is visually stunning. If you're considering a trip to the northeast, the sunny and windy weather is ideal for a getaway.

**A RETREAT ON THE RIVER:** Currently being held on the *Lachit Ghat*,



the carnival pulsates with energy, yet maintains a serene undercurrent. The *Brahmaputra*, ever unpredictable, adds a touch of wildness to the festivities, reminding us of the raw power of nature. It's a retreat for the soul, where the peace of the river's embrace melds perfectly with the excitement of adventure.

**GLAMPING IN STYLE:** The festival provides a luxurious glamping experience with three categories of tents

namely the *Royal Tents*, *Premium Tents*, and *Deluxe Tents*. All of the three options offer you a comfortable and stylish retreat, complete with modern amenities and breathtaking river views that would blow away your mind. Also, one would enjoy the foggy views as soon as you get up and look outside of your tents. The foggy layers engulfing the *Brahmaputra River* will want you to have a cup of tea or coffee with those views and chills. You would also experience the open-air cinema magic



at *Brahmaputra Carnival Tent City*. Movies, fresh air, and unforgettable moments await you. The main part of the stay is the hospitality provided at your new home. The hospitality by *Gias* and his team of boys at the *Tent City* would truly make you comfortable and at home providing everything handy and in need.

**ADVENTURES ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA:** For the adrenaline junkies, the *Brahmaputra* is



an irresistible playground. At the *Sandbar Island* you would experience the speedboat rides cut through the water like a knife, while kayaking and jet skiing offer a more intimate encounter with the river's currents with your own rapid and water fun. For those seeking a true test of courage, bungee jumping provides an exhilarating leap of faith. And let's not forget the thrill of *ATV rides* and the exhilarating descent on the river rapids during a white-water rafting expedition.

This is not the end. You could also experience the *hot air balloon* rides up into the sky for beautiful views, *beach volleyball*, *beach cricket*, *archery*, *river rafting* and *water roller*. These adventures offer a unique perspective on the Brahmaputra, allowing you to experience its power and beauty firsthand. At the *Lachit Ghat*, you would experience *Archery*, *River Rafting*, *Water Roller*, *Speed boat*, *Kayaking*, *ATV*, *Bungee Ejection*, *Mechanical Bull Ride*, *Bungee Trampoline*, *Air Gun Shooting*, *Zip Line*, *Rope Course* and *Zorbing*. All this will keep you hooked to the carnival and not wanting to leave it. *Take note that the water activities do not take place after the dark due to safety reasons.*

**A CULTURAL VIBE:** Beyond the thrills, the *Brahmaputra Carnival* is a celebration of Assamese culture. You would see vibrant performances of traditional dances like *Bihu*, *Satriya Nritya*, *Bagurumba*, *Bhortal*, and *Ojapali* showcasing the region's rich heritage. Apart from the dance culture you could get stalls at the *Lachit Ghat* to buy the Assam specialities like the printed *Gamucha*, *Mekhela Chador* for women and the *Dhoti-gamosa* for men.



The *Brahmaputra Carnival* also takes you through the musical ears of Assam as bands perform in the concerts in the evening at the *Lachit Ghat*. On the *31st January* the *Carnival* will be graced by the melodic singing of the famous singer *Papon*, on *19th February* it will be *Rupam Buyan* and *19 January* will be rocked by *Kanawz & Company*.

**THE TRADITIONAL TASTE:** At the *Brahmaputra Carnival* you can indulge in local delicacies that savour the flavours of authentic Assamese cuisine. The carnival has food stalls with authentic Assamese touch. You would see *chicken momos*, *chicken vodka momos*, *prawns*, *silkworms* and so much more that would satisfy your mouth watery taste buds.

**A JOURNEY TO REMEMBER:** The *Brahmaputra Carnival* is more than just a festival; it's an invitation to experience the soul of Assam. It's a chance to connect with nature, have some adventure, and discover the magic of a land where the river dictates the rhythm of life. So, pack your bags guys, and prepare to be swept away by the essence of the *Brahmaputra Carnival*.





**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week opens on a high note, bringing you much-deserved acclaim and a sense of triumph over challenges. At work, your innovative contributions, from fresh ideas to novel technologies, will be warmly embraced and celebrated, enhancing your professional stature. Your ability to explore and implement multifaceted solutions stands out, earning you respect and admiration from colleagues. As the week progresses, you may reconnect with a past acquaintance or visit a place steeped in nostalgic memories, enriching your emotional landscape. This period is marked by joyous family interactions, adding to the week's positive ambiance. Towards the week's close, you might feel a bit drained and concerned, yet your resolve remains unshaken, ready to tackle life's hurdles with confidence.

**Lucky number 22 | Lucky colour** Midnight Blue  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week is filled with potential and vibrancy, as you may encounter a blossoming relationship, heightened intuition, or a joyful addition to your family. Your innate sense of understanding allows you to identify issues before they are spoken, equipping you with the natural ability to offer timely and effective solutions. Midweek brings a surge of emotion accompanied by fresh hopes and decisive actions. This is a time when your deepest aspirations could begin to take shape, driven by a strong internal guidance. You might find opportunities for material prosperity, whether through professional endeavors or unexpected sources like a gift or legacy. As the week closes, you may find yourself reflecting on past events. It's essential to release these reflections and embrace the present opportunities and joys life presents.

**Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour** Green  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

The week begins under challenging circumstances but concludes with uplifting developments that will inspire you. You may encounter difficulties, errors, and disputes that could sap your spirit. Yet, this period also marks the start of a new phase marked by perseverance and effort. Focus on sharpening your mental acuity by engaging in educational activities or improving your communication skills. Midweek, your attention might shift to matters concerning children, such as securing their admission to reputable educational institutions or addressing their career aspirations. It is vital to offer support and encouragement, particularly to those engaged in rigorous academic pursuits. As the week draws to a close, familial joy and a sense of closeness prevail, bringing satisfaction and good health. The joy brought by family members, especially children, will enhance your well-being.

**Lucky number 14 | Lucky colour** Saffron  
**Lucky day** Monday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week holds promising prospects for those feeling grounded and practical. Expect significant career advancements, potentially through a promising job opportunity or a notable increase in earnings. For the recently married, joyful news regarding family expansion may arrive. Prepare for travel, as an upcoming journey could yield substantial financial rewards. However, exercise caution during your travels, as there are indications of potential loss or misleading situations. Protect yourself from negative influences, as it seems some undesirable attention could be directed your way. As the week concludes, a sense of security and happiness will envelop you, supported by the warmth and cooperation of your family. Memories of simpler times may surface, bringing with them a wave of nostalgia. Generosity will be both received and rewarded, enhancing both personal and professional financial situations.

**Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour** Coral  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**VirGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, you may find yourself frequently on the move, balancing work commitments with enjoyable activities. You're likely to encounter opportunities for new projects or responsibilities. It will be crucial to allocate sufficient time and energy to ensure their successful completion. Midweek brings a shift towards social engagements, with possible events like parties or community celebrations, offering a delightful break from daily stressors. These gatherings are a chance to unwind and cherish moments with friends and family. As the week concludes, be prepared for increased competition or conflicts in your professional sphere. Tensions could arise, potentially from individuals who may not favor your success. It's important to respond thoughtfully to any challenges, as impulsive reactions could undermine your hard work. Exercise caution and strategic thinking to navigate through any disputes effectively.

**Lucky number 25 | Lucky colour** Tangerine  
**Lucky day** Friday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, individuals typically characterized by diligence and a calm demeanor may find themselves quietly progressing toward their objectives, preferring a gentle approach. They may feel a strong sense of destiny guiding their actions more than their own efforts. Midweek could bring a sense of joy due to a significant financial achievement, marking a period of growth and prosperity in business endeavors. Income may increase from various sources, and many ambitious plans could be set in motion. Engagement in spiritual activities or rituals might also capture their interest, underscoring a period rich with favorable developments. Achievements will span several areas of life, including maintaining good health, family achievements, and an abundance of financial gains, all contributing to harmonious relationships with family and friends.

**Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour** Teal  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week brings unexpected financial rewards and introduces a compelling and profitable work project that could lead to significant recognition for your innovative ideas. You'll find yourself enjoying life's comforts and luxuries more than usual. Your hard work and perseverance are poised to elevate your professional status, supported by a sense of divine favor. This period also ignites a spiritual awakening, encouraging you to engage in reflective practices such as meditation, devotional activities, or charitable efforts. As the week concludes, a long-anticipated opportunity will present itself, offering the chance to pursue a cherished goal. Dedicate yourself fully to this endeavor to harness the full extent of your potential. Remember, perseverance and intelligence are key to capitalizing on this promising time.

**Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour** Turquoise  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week heralds a phase of abundance, accompanied by intellectual growth and a sense of fulfillment. Expect a strong foundation in your finances, ensuring stability and comfort. This could be the result of previous efforts or potentially from an unexpected source. Your discipline and achievements will not go unnoticed, earning you well-deserved recognition and pride. It's an opportune moment to initiate new ventures or relationships. Collaborations will flow smoothly due to your adept understanding of interpersonal dynamics. However, the latter part of the week might see a shift from clarity to uncertainty. It's important to avoid dwelling on past fears when facing the future. Rash decisions and confrontational behavior could complicate matters. Embrace calmness and clarity to navigate through any challenges, allowing you to find effective solutions effortlessly.

**Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour** Violet  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

This week begins amid unresolved challenges that are causing you stress. A sense of isolation and a heavy air of doubt might be overwhelming. You find yourself perplexed, seeking a way out of these difficulties without a clear solution in sight. It's important to reflect on your past actions and future direction. Gaining this perspective will help smooth your path forward and shift from a negative to a more positive mindset. Embrace and honor your emotions; they hold significant power to positively transform your circumstances. When there's harmony between your physical and mental states, remarkable achievements become possible. As the week closes, anticipate significant life changes that will bring some relief to your mental tension. Joyful events, such as significant personal milestones or professional successes, are on the horizon, offering you moments of happiness.

**Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour** Rose  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week, those with sensitive dispositions might find themselves grappling with fluctuating emotions and a lack of mental balance. Several pressing matters require their attention, demanding immediate and decisive actions to move forward effectively. Amidst this mental unrest, there's a tendency to multitask excessively, which complicates setting priorities and achieving clarity. It's essential to cultivate focus to avoid becoming mired in indecision. Embracing practices like spiritual reflection, meditation, or yoga could greatly benefit mental stability. An unexpected reunion with a familiar face from the past promises delightful moments of nostalgia, enhancing emotional well-being. Support and wise counsel from a respected mentor will provide much-needed guidance, making it easier to navigate challenges. By week's end, a sense of stability and well-being, both financially and emotionally, is likely to prevail.

**Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour** Pink  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, you may find yourself swiftly adapting to dynamic shifts in your life, which could include a sudden opportunity to join a new organization or company. This sudden influx of choices might leave you feeling uncertain and indecisive, but remember, a decision must be made. Expect a week brimming with activity and innovation. You are at the cusp of concluding one phase and embarking on a new, more profound phase of your journey. It's time to leave the past behind and set your sights on what lies ahead. A firm decision now will set the stage for a harmonious alignment of your thoughts and emotions towards the end of the week, enhancing your career prospects significantly. You'll emerge from this period feeling wiser and more emotionally mature.

**Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour** Lavender  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

You may find yourself embarking on an extended trip soon, which includes participating in various meetings or workshops. Challenges could arise in your professional environment, potentially involving competition or difficult obstacles, so tread cautiously. Emotional connections may also be strained during this period, possibly leading to feelings of rejection or disconnection. Remember to prioritize your wellbeing during these times, but rest assured that these challenges are only temporary. By the end of this period, you'll notice a restoration of order and balance in your life, signaling a shift towards more positive circumstances. The comforting presence of maternal affection will bring a sense of security and warmth. If you're hoping to nurture new relationships, career opportunities, or ventures, give them the attention and patience they require to flourish.

**Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour** Copper  
**Lucky day** Tuesday

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# The Power of Gratitude Journaling

THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

The positive effects of gratitude extend beyond mental health. Gratitude journaling helps with better sleep, reduced blood pressure and improved immune function.

Gratitude is often described as the quality of being thankful and the readiness to show appreciation for and return kindness. It is a fundamental human emotion, yet its potential to transform lives is frequently underestimated. *Gratitude journaling*, a simple practice of recording things you are thankful for, has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering emotional well-being, enhancing mental health, and even improving physical health. By consciously focusing on the positive aspects of life, gratitude journaling reshapes perspectives, rewires the brain, and cultivates happiness. The concept of gratitude has long been studied in psychology, particularly within the field of positive psychology. Researchers Dr. Robert Emmons and Dr. Michael McCullough are pioneers in studying gratitude. Emmons defines gratitude as a two-step process: recognizing that one has obtained a positive outcome and acknowledging that there is an external source for this positive outcome. This perspective connects gratitude not only to personal satisfaction but also to relational and societal harmony. Neuroscience supports the transformative effects of gratitude. Studies using functional MRI scans show that practicing gratitude activates the brain's reward system, specifically the medial prefrontal cortex. This area is associated with decision-making and the regulation of emo-

tions. Furthermore, gratitude enhances the production of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, often referred to as the "feel-good" chemicals. These changes not only foster happiness but also mitigate symptoms of anxiety and depression. *Gratitude journaling* involves regularly writing down things you are grateful for. This practice may appear simplistic, but its effects are profound. Research indicates that *gratitude journaling* can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. A 2015 study published in the journal *Psychotherapy Research* found that individuals who engaged in gratitude writing reported significantly better mental health outcomes compared to those who focused on negative emotions or did not engage in any writing practice. Gratitude helps reframe thoughts, reducing rumination and encouraging a focus on the positive. Putting gratitude on paper promotes emotional resilience by encouraging individuals to concentrate on their blessings rather than their shortcomings. This positive focus redirects attention away from stress and difficulties, fostering a mental buffer that strengthens the ability to navigate adversity. Research by Dr. Emmons highlights that gratitude significantly boosts optimism, a critical factor in building resilience. Reflecting on the kindness and support received from others through *gratitude*



*journaling* can significantly improve interpersonal relationships. By deepening appreciation for those around us, it strengthens social bonds. According to a study published in the journal *Emotion*, gratitude not only enhances feelings of connection but also inspires prosocial behaviour. The positive effects of gratitude extend beyond mental health. *Gratitude journaling* has been associated with better sleep, reduced blood pressure, and improved immune function. A study in the journal *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* found that participants who practiced *gratitude journaling* for two weeks experienced better sleep quality and longer duration, likely due to reduced stress levels.

Incorporating *gratitude journaling* into daily life is simple and requires minimal resources. Dedicate a specific time each day for journaling. Many people find that writing before bedtime helps them reflect on the day and end it on a positive note. Begin by listing three things you are grateful for each day. These can be as simple as a good meal, a kind word, or a moment of laughter. Rather than writing "I am grateful for my family," elaborate on a specific moment, such as "I am grateful for the conversation I had with my sister today, which made me feel understood." Dive deep into one or two experiences rather than creating a long list. This approach helps reinforce the emotional impact of the practice. Incorporate gratitude for challenges and lessons learned. This reframes obstacles as opportunities for growth. If you struggle to get started, use prompts such as, "What made me smile today?" or "What is something I take for granted but am truly thankful for?" The power of this practice is evident in countless personal stories. For instance, individuals recovering from trauma often find solace in gratitude practices. One such example comes from veterans participating in a gratitude program developed by the University of California, Berkeley. Many reported reduced symptoms of PTSD and improved overall well-being after weeks of *gratitude journaling*. Similarly, organisations like schools and

workplaces have embraced gratitude initiatives to foster a positive culture. Employees and students who engage in gratitude practices report higher satisfaction, productivity, and collaboration. In today's fast-paced, often overwhelming world, journaling serves as a grounding practice. Social media, while connecting people, can amplify feelings of inadequacy through constant comparison. *Gratitude journaling* counters this effect by focusing on intrinsic values and personal blessings rather than external validation. Moreover, technological advancements have made this journaling more accessible. Apps like "Gratitude," "Five Minute Journal," and "Day One" offer digital platforms for consistent journaling, making the practice convenient and engaging. *Gratitude journaling* is more than a habit; it is a transformative practice that rewires the brain, reshapes perspectives, and fosters holistic well-being. By consistently focusing on the positive aspects of life, individuals can enhance their mental and physical health, build resilience, and nurture meaningful relationships. Scientific research supports the profound impact of gratitude, making it a cornerstone of emotional intelligence and personal growth. In a world that often emphasises what is missing, *gratitude journaling* reminds us to cherish what we already have, transforming lives one thought at a time.