

# TRUMP IS BACK



President-elect Donald Trump, right, and Melania Trump clap during a fireworks show at Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Va., ahead of the 60th Presidential Inauguration. PTI

**PTI ■ WASHINGTON**

President-elect Donald Trump is spending the eve of his inauguration in a series of Washington events that celebrate his return to power and his "Make America Great Again" movement as he prepares to move back into the White House at a time of deep national political divisions. Washington has prepared in unprecedented ways to keep the unfolding events safe and secure. But unlike when Trump helped spark a mob of his supporters to attack the Capitol and tried to retain power in 2021 after his loss to Democrat Joe Biden, officials are not expecting massive protests, unrest and violence this time. Instead, the city is braced for crowds celebrating Trump's second term and MAGA's total control of the Republican Party. It is a remarkable turnaround after Trump left the nation's

capital four years in disgrace and skipped the inauguration of his successor. Trump blasted his way through the 2024 GOP presidential primary and won November's election by an Electoral College margin unseen since Democrat Barack Obama was reelected in 2012. Yet even with that comfortable victory and his party in full, albeit narrow, control of Congress, the incoming president remains one of the most polarising figures in US history, with nearly as many fierce detractors as ardent supporters. That means it could be difficult to fulfil postelection pledges about promoting bipartisanship while healing political differences. He told NBC News on Saturday that unity would be a theme of his inauguration speech Monday at the Capitol, along with strength and fairness. "January 20th cannot come fast enough!" he posted on his

social media site. "Everybody, even those that initially opposed a Victory by President Donald J. Trump and the Trump Administration, just want it to happen." Keeping to tradition, Trump spent Saturday night at Blair House, the president's official guest residence on Pennsylvania Avenue, across from the White House. He arrived there after a party at his golf club in Sterling, Virginia, about 30 miles west of the city, that illuminated the night sky. He had arrived in Washington from his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, aboard a C-32, the military variant of the Boeing 757, painted in the iconic presidential powder blue and white colour scheme. The aircraft that would be known as Air Force One if the president were aboard carried the president-elect as Special Air Mission 47. **Continued on page 2**

# Gaza ceasefire begins, handover of hostages started

**AGENCIES ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)**

A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas initiated in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, ushering in an initial six-week period of calm and raising hopes for the release of dozens of militant-held hostages and an end to the devastating 15-month war. A last-minute delay by Hamas put off the truce's start by nearly three hours and highlighted its fragility. First Red Cross convoy picked up three women Israeli hostages in Gaza. Even before the ceasefire took effect, celebrations erupted across the territory and some Palestinians began returning to their homes. Israel, meanwhile, announced the names of the first three hostages expected to return home later Sunday, in exchange for the planned release of 90 Palestinian prisoners. The truce, which started at 11.15 am local time, is the first step toward ultimately ending the conflict and returning nearly 100 hostages abducted in Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack. An Israeli official confirmed that Romi Gonen, 24, Emily Damari, 28, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, were set to be released later Sunday. Gonen was abducted from the Nova music festival, while the others



Displaced Palestinians flash V-sign as they return to Rafah, while a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas went into effect, in Rafah, Gaza Strip. PTI

were kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Damari is an Israeli-British dual citizen. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the

families had approved the publication of the names. Hamas was supposed to provide the names before the start of the ceasefire, originally planned for 8.30 am. It released the names about two hours later, citing technical reasons and saying it was still committed to the agreement. In the interim between 8.30 am and when the ceasefire took hold, Israeli fire killed at least 26 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It did not say whether they were civilians or fighters. The military has warned people to stay away from Israeli forces as they retreat to a buffer zone inside Gaza. **Continued on page 2**

## Valmiki Basti key to elite New Delhi seat

**SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI**

New Delhi's Valmiki Basti is set to play a pivotal role in deciding the fate for Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal, as well as BJP candidate Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma and Congress candidate Sandeep Dikshit in the upcoming Delhi elections. Residents of the Basti have expressed concerns over their sitting MLAs limited presence in the area and the negative impact of the excise policy on the rising problem of alcoholism. However, there remains a notable sympathy among the populace for the former Chief Minister Kejriwal who has faced jail time, alongside an appreciation for the ruling party's initiative that offers free bus rides to women. The area holds significant importance in both Delhi and national politics, as it was here that Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the 'Swachh Bharat' Abhiyan and former CM Arvind Kejriwal introduced the 'jhaadu' (broom) as the symbol of his party in 2013. Valmiki Basti comprises approximately 321 houses



File photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

and has a voter base of around 6,000 to 7,000 residents. A vendor named Ram Karan expressed his belief that Kejriwal was unjustly imprisoned by the BJP in connection with the money laundering charges linked to the excise policy case. "They have done him a great injustice by sending him to jail, and so far, they have been unable to prove the charges against him," he stated. **Continued on page 2**

## Sky clear, city air still poor

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

The national Capital's air quality index (AQI) dropped to the 'very poor' category on Sunday, with the city recording 368 as average AQI at 4 pm even as the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) stage 3 remains revoked by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM). The city recorded an AQI of 362 at 6 pm in the very poor category, taking a dip from Saturday when it was at 263 in the 'poor' category at 7 pm. The city woke up to a foggy morning, with the minimum temperature recorded at 9.1 degrees Celsius, 1.6 notches above the season's average. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the maximum temperature settled 6.5 notches above normal at 26.1 degrees Celsius. People will wake up to a less chill morning on Monday as the met department has predicted moderate fog on Monday, with the maximum and the minimum temperatures likely to settle around 24 and 11 degrees Celsius, respectively. The humidity level oscillated between 71 per cent and 100 per cent. Earlier on Friday, the CAQM had revoked the actions under Stage III ('Severe' Air Quality) of the GRAP following an improvement in the national Capital's AQI after it reached 302 a day before.

**WEATHER**

AQI 368  
MAX 26.1°C(+6.5)  
MIN 9.1°C(+1.6)

## No casualty in Mahakumbh fire; PM talks to Yogi



Smoke billows out after a fire broke out in a camp during Mahakumbh, at Sangam in Prayagraj. PTI

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

Prayagraj witnessed a massive fire on Sunday during the ongoing Mahakumbh, as pandals in Sector 19, near the Shastri Bridge, were consumed by flames. Approximately 200 tents were impacted, with approximately 20 of them completely reduced to ashes. Although no casualties were reported, the fire resulted in substantial damage to valuables, and several LPG cylinders exploded, worsening the situation. Initial reports indicate that the fire started from the tent belonging to Gita Press. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to inquire about the fire incident. **Continued on page 2**

## Police claims Saif attacker nabbed



Police personnel take the accused, arrested in connection with the alleged attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan, to a hospital for medical examination before producing him at a court, in Mumbai. PTI

**T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**

The 72-hour-long drama involving the elusive accused in the murderous attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan finally ended on Sunday, as the Mumbai police finally arrested the real culprit - a Bangladeshi national - behind the sensational crime from the neighbouring Thane city. A day after the Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel detained a 31-year-old suspect in connection with Thursday's attack on Saif, the Mumbai police zeroed in on the real accused - identified as Shariful Islam Shahzad (30) - from Hiranandani Estate at Thane (west). Shariful, who hails from Rajabariya village in Nalchity sub-region of Jhalokati district in southern Bangladesh, had illegally crossed over to India some six months and been living in Mumbai under the false name of Bijoy Das. **Continued on page 2**

The police said that during the questioning after his arrest, Shariful admitted to having committed the crime. After his arrest, Shariful was produced before a holiday court in Mumbai, which remanded him in police custody for five days. The police had sought Shariful's custody for 14 days to establish the motive behind his breaking into Saif's house, to ascertain where he had hidden the cloths that he wore at the time of crime, what was the motive behind his entry to Saif's house, where did he procure the weapon, how did he enter India and how did he break into Saif's house and why did he assume a false name after coming to India. During the knife attack carried out on him allegedly by Shariful in the small hours of January 16, Saif had sustained six stab wounds, including the one in his spine while he was grappling an intruder in the actor's 12th floor apartment in posh 'Satguru Sharan' building at Bandra (W) in north-west Mumbai. The knife attack on the actor had taken place between 2 am and 2.30 am on Thursday, after a failed attempt of a burglary. After his admission to the Lilavati Hospital, the actor had undergone a surgery for removal of a knife stuck in his spine and also plugging the leakage of spinal fluid. During a surgery carried out on him immediately afterwards, the doctors attending on Saif removed a 2.5-inch piece of knife from Saif's spine. During the preliminary interrogation, Shariful admitted to have sneaked into the actor's building on the night of January 15. Earlier, while seeking the custody of the accused for 14 days, the police cited several grounds for his custody. "The robbery was the motive behind the crime was robbery," a senior police officer said. The theft attempt failed after a house maid saw and raised an alarm, prompting Saif to come out of his bedroom. The actor resisted Shariful's attempt, resulting in a scuffle between the two-in which the latter stabbed him six times before fleeing the building empty handed. **Continued on page 2**

## Exiled Kashmiri Pandits seeks homeland in Valley as UT

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**

Members of the exiled Kashmiri Pandit community Sunday took a pledge to intensify their struggle to reclaim their separate 'homeland' with a Union Territory status in Kashmir valley on the occasion of the completion of 35 years in exile. On 19th January 1990, the Kashmiri Pandit community was driven out of their homes under the shadow of guns. To mark this day, each year 'Holocaust Remembrance Day' is observed to mark their ongoing struggle for a permanent resettlement. Over 500,000 Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee,



leaving behind their homes, businesses, and ancestral heritage. Paying solemn tributes in the memory of countless martyrs, killed at the hands of Pakistan-sponsored terrorists, the members of the Kashmiri Pandit community, sporting bandanas, took out a solidarity march and also organized a signature campaign in the Jagti

township on the outskirts of Jammu. To highlight their struggle and the living conditions in exile, Panun Kashmir along with Youth for Panun Kashmir also organized an exhibition of posters depicting their plight. Images of vandalized temples, broken homes, and martyred Kashmiri pandits were put on display to depict the sufferings and pain they went through during the 35-year-long period of exile. Sushma Pandita, seated inside a temporary tent in a park inside Jagti township, explained that 35 years ago when we first reached Jammu we were accommodated inside a makeshift tent city. "We were living in our multi-floor houses in the valley. Since then we have been living in these camps where we were accommodated in one-room and later two-room apartments. We have spent 35 years of life in these miserable conditions. We will not live in these matchbox houses now. We want to return to our homes and hearths". **Continued on page 2**

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# Lot of interest in PM Modi's policies at WEF meeting in Davos, says Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Sunday said there was a lot of interest globally in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic policies, which would be the focus of discussions at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Vaishnaw, who is leading the Indian delegation at the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting beginning Monday, said there was a lot of interest in India's growth story among the international community, particularly about the digital transformation and the new digital architecture. "In the World Economic Forum in Davos, there is lot of interest in understanding our thought process, the prime minister's economic policy, about the digital transformation, about the way India has created new digital architecture



under the Digital India programme and also the way technology has been democratised. There is a lot of interest on this," he said. There will be detailed discussions about inclusive growth, the investment in social, physical, digital infrastructure and on democratising technology, he added.

"The prime minister has put huge focus on inclusive development and a growth that brings a big transformative change in the lives of the people at the bottom of the pyramid, people who have been left out of development over many decades in the past," said Vaishnaw, the minister for information and broad-

casting, railways, and electronics and information technology. "Whether it is bank accounts, providing toilets, gas connections, tap water connections, getting the basic infrastructure in villages done, infrastructure in urban areas done, this is something which the world wants to understand," he added. Besides Vaishnaw, Union ministers CR Patil, K Ram Mohan Naidu, Chirag Paswan, and Jayant Chaudhary are expected to attend the WEF from January 20 to 24. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and their Andhra Pradesh counterpart Chandrababu Naidu will also attend the WEF meeting. US President-elect Donald Trump is expected to join the meeting via video link after he assumes office on Monday.

# Retired Government official held under 'digital arrest' for 18 days, duped of ₹40 lakh by fraudsters

STAFF REPORTER ■ FARIDABAD

A retired government official from Faridabad was duped of Rs 40 lakh by fraudsters posing as TRAI and Mumbai Police officials, who placed her under 'digital arrest' for 18 days. According to the police on Sunday, the victim, Monika, who retired from her post as Labour Welfare Commissioner with the Central Ministry, lives with her 90-year-old mother in Faridabad, while her daughter resides in Delhi, police added. "On November 11 last year, she received a call on her mobile from an unknown number and was held hostage for the next 18 days," police said. According to the victim's complaint, the caller introduced himself as a representative of the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRAI) and informed her that an account had been opened in Canara Bank, Mumbai, using her Aadhar card and phone number. The caller also mentioned a large transaction made from



that account involving the CEO of a private aviation company. The victim denied opening any account in Mumbai, to which the caller replied that a huge transaction had been made from the account. The caller then transferred the call to another individual, who introduced himself as a Mumbai Police officer. During a video call, the alleged officer showed documents related to a loan from the bank account

and sent her an arrest warrant via WhatsApp. The fraudster, claiming to cooperate with the investigation, insisted on house arrest and kept WhatsApp voice calls active day and night, instructing the victim not to tell anyone about the situation or she would be arrested, police said. During this period, the accused transferred Rs 40 lakh from her account, promising to return the money after the

investigation was complete, police said. On the 18th day, when the accused stopped responding during a video call, Monika realised she had been duped. Due to fear I did not complain to anyone for about 15 days but finally now moved to police," she said in her complaint. A senior police officer said that an FIR has been registered and an investigation is underway.

# Kejriwal silent when he found that Saif attacker was Bangladeshi national: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday attacked AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on his silence, stating that when actor Saif Ali Khan was attacked, he sought sympathy from the media by claiming that Saif is a national treasure but has been silent when found out that the accused was a Bangladeshi national. "However, after it came to

light that the attacker is a Bangladeshi citizen, Kejriwal has chosen to remain silent, raising questions about why this has happened?" the BJP leader questioned. The Delhi BJP President emphasized that Arvind Kejriwal, who showed deep concern after Saif Ali Khan was attacked, now has a responsibility to condemn the Bangladeshi individual involved in the attack. "From the very beginning, the BJP has maintained that Rohingyas and Bangladeshis



Ranjan Dimri

are a security threat across the country, including Delhi. Despite this, Arvind Kejriwal continues to provide them shelter and sustenance in the capital," he claimed. Sachdeva further alleged that AAP leaders, including the MLA from Okhla, provide financial aid of Rs 10,000 to illegal Bangladeshis and facilitate free electricity and water for them. "Additionally, they are involved in creating illegal Aadhaar cards and fake voter IDs for these individuals," he

said, demanding that Kejriwal disclose the connections of the attacker with other individuals or groups. Meanwhile, AAP spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar, in a post on X, said, "Modi Ji and Amit Shah Ji should apologize to Saif Ali Khan and his family. Due to their failures, Bangladeshi infiltrators have come to different parts of the country in the last 10 years. Modi Ji has been a total failure in protecting the country."

# Delhi Police Crime Branch dismantles international dark web drug cartel

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch on Sunday claimed to dismantle an international dark web drug cartel, seizing 6 kilograms of hydroponic weed worth over Rs 2 crore. The seizure was made under Operation Kawach, carried out ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, targeting illicit liquor, drugs, and illegal arms. "Using blockchain-based privacy-centric communication apps and the sophisticated dead delivery

method, the syndicate operated through the dark web, with payments made via cryptocurrencies," a senior police officer said. He said the bust led to the arrest of 46 year old Abdul Malik alias Parvez, and 35 year old Mayank Nayyar, both from Delhi and key figures in the racket. "An investigation into the matter began when police intercepted several drug parcels at the Foreign Post Office, containing over 5kg of hydroponic weed imported from the USA," the officer said.

# TRUMP IS BACK

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Sunday will be Trump's first full day back in the capital since the election. It gives him a chance to enjoy the moment and fire up his core supporters before Inauguration Day's heavy dose of official pomp, including the swearing-in at noon. Trump planned to place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery before addressing a rally downtown at Capital One Arena, home of Washington pro basketball and hockey teams.

With frigid temperatures expected Monday, Trump directed his oath of office - now set for the Capitol Rotunda - and most of Monday's outdoor events be moved indoors. The traditional parade will be held, in some form, at Capital One Arena. Trump also was to attend a candlelight dinner Sunday where he was expected to speak. Biden, in his final full day in office, scheduled a trip to South Carolina, a state that holds special meaning after his commanding win in the 2020 Democratic primary there set

him up to achieve his life's goal of being elected president. Biden, accompanied by his wife, first lady Jill Biden, was set to visit a church in North Charleston to worship and speak on the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the White House said. Monday is also the federal holiday honouring the slain civil rights leader. The president used his farewell address earlier in the week to warn of a growing "oligarchy" of ultra-rich interests gaining power and threatening the nation's very democracy.

# No casualty in Mahakumbh fire...

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Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who was attending the Mahakumbh, quickly visited the site to monitor the relief and rescue operations. The fire broke out at around 4:15 PM and was brought under control within 30 minutes. More than 50 fire tenders, equipped with advanced firefighting tools, were dispatched to extinguish the flames. ADG Prayagraj Zone Bhanu Bhaskar stated in a press briefing that preliminary investigations suggest an LPG cylinder explosion as the likely cause of the fire. "No injuries to any pilgrims have been reported," he confirmed, attributing the minimised

damage to the prompt response of fire officials and local volunteers. Prayagraj District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar Mander further said: "At 4:30 PM today, we received information about a fire in the Gita Press tent within the Kumbh area, Sector 19. Fire brigade and police teams quickly responded to the scene. In addition to the Gita Press tent, 10 Prayagwal tents were also destroyed. The fire has been extinguished, and the situation is now under control. Fortunately, no casualties have been reported." Authorities are currently conducting a thorough investigation into the incident to ensure the safety of pilgrims and to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

# Police claims Saif attacker nabbed

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Preliminary investigations have revealed that after stepping out of Saif's building post crime, Shariful headed straight to Bandra railway station where he boarded a Churchgate-bound train in the early hours of Thursday and got down at Dadar, from where he walked to some location in Worli. Later in the morning, he headed to Thane. En route, he changed clothes and his appearance. After seeing his photographs and video clips go viral on social media, Shariful reportedly hid himself at Thane creek near Thane's Kasarvadavali area. "Using the technical intel, we traced the accused to Thane," Deputy Commissioner of Police (IX) Dikshit Gedam said. "After his illegal entry to Mumbai, he was working for a house-keeping agency after coming to Mumbai. He does not have any prior criminal record, and further investigations are on," Gedam said. The preliminary investigations have revealed that when he entered Saif's home, he did not

know that he had barged into a celebrity's home. Incidentally Shariful is the third person that the Mumbai police have taken into custody in connection with the murderous attack on Saif. Earlier, the Mumbai police had revealed that they had detained one Waris Ali but was let off later, while another suspect named Akash Kailash Kanojia who they arrested from the Mumbai-Kolkata Jnaneswari Express at Durg in Chhattisgarh on Thursday. Both Ali and Kanojia were apparently 'clones' of the real accused who is now in custody, after remaining absconding for three days. The Bandra police have registered a case against Shariful under sections 311 (robbery or dacoity with the intent to cause grievous hurt or death, 331(4) (house-breaking) and other relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita and Passport Act, 1967. Meanwhile, Saif is stated to be convalescing well at the Lilavati Hospital where he underwent multiple surgeries after the brazen attack and is likely to be discharged in a couple of days, medicos indicated.

# Valmiki Basti key to elite New Delhi seat

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He also voiced his concern about the potential demolition of slums if the BJP comes to power. "On one hand, they might provide flats to a few slum dwellers, but on the other hand, they will leave many homeless by demolishing jhuggis if they win the elections," said the 35-year-old. Rameshwaram, who works with the New Delhi Municipal Council, expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of regularisation for contractual workers, despite AAP supremo Kejriwal's promise to do so. "Contractual workers can be removed from their positions at any time. Kejriwal had promised to regularise them, but that promise remains unfulfilled," he stated. Despite his concerns, he intends to support the AAP in the upcoming elections, citing his belief that "Kejriwal is with the poor people." He noted, "Kejriwal's initiative for free bus rides for women has been a

tremendous help. Many women from the Basti, especially those working as house help, have benefited greatly. Previously, they had to spend money on transportation, but now they can take the bus for free and go wherever they need to. The money saved from this goes towards the welfare of their entire families." Echoing similar sentiments, 59-year-old Mukesh, a worker in the NDMC, recounted an instance where he overheard a woman getting off the bus saying that the free bus rides allowed her to treat her grandson to a plate of chole bhature for just Rs 10. "The impact of the scheme is visible in many households. While some might see the free bus rides as insignificant, there are countless individuals who experience its profound effects in their daily lives," he remarked. He further noted that free electricity and Mohalla Clinics are beneficial schemes, although they have not been able to take advantage of them since they reside in the NDMC area. A

retired NDMC worker also expressed skepticism about the BJP's claims that if their candidate wins in this constituency, all pending tasks and development projects will be completed. "They have the Lieutenant Governor, a central government, and all seven MPs in Delhi are from the BJP, yet they still can't get things done here. What guarantee do we have that they will deliver when they have an MLA? At least we know there's another party we can turn to if they fail to deliver," remarked 70-year-old Jai Kishan. Residents expressed concern that the Centre appointed Lieutenant Governor, Vinai Kumar Saxena, has been granted excessive powers, seemingly overriding those of the Chief Minister. "They are suppressing him with so many constraints. The LG is not allowing him to work effectively. How can he have more power than the Chief Minister?" questioned 50-year-old Raju. On the other hand, some locals are

frustrated with Kejriwal's lack of presence in the area. "We haven't seen him much in the Basti, despite supporting him with our votes. He only visited briefly before filing his nominations, and even then, we weren't informed," remarked a 35-year-old resident. He further commented on the adverse effects of the liquor policy on families. "Even if a liquor policy was necessary, he shouldn't have introduced promotions like 'one plus one.' In many households, this has had a detrimental effect, with men drinking excessively and causing disturbances. Additionally, many black marketers exploited the scheme to stockpile such liquor. This shouldn't have happened," he stated. The NDMC worker mentioned that he plans to vote for the BJP. "We are facing soaring electricity bills. We have asked the BJP to help us by addressing these exorbitant charges. We are hopeful that they will resolve our issues as soon as they are elected to power," he added.

governments marginalized us and false narratives were peddled to mislead the people outside Jammu and Kashmir. Dr Agnishekhar said when Articles 370 and 35-A were Abrogated in August 2019 we welcomed the same as we expected the move may also open up the gates of our 'Ghar Wapsi' at the earliest. Expressing dismay Dr Agnishekhar said we continue to remain on the margins. Our genocide has not been recognized. The properties of Kashmiri pandits were put to distress sale and all those Kashmiri pandits, who were given jobs under the PM's package, have been targeted in the Kashmir valley and have no social life. He added, on its

# Exiled Kashmiri Pandits seeks homeland in Valley as UT

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Addressing the gathering, Dr Agnishekhar of Panun Kashmir reiterated their commitment to continue their struggle to reclaim their separate Homeland in the valley. Referring to the distribution of 65 lakh Property cards by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Dr Agnishekhar claimed none of the members of the exiled Kashmiri pandit community received it. He said we have been living in exile in Jammu and other cities across India yet we have been forced to fill in the address of Kashmir valley from where we were driven out forcibly. The successive

part the government claims they have restored normalcy in the valley, the tourist footfall has increased and film shootings are happening. He said for us it's a cruel joke. "We are ready to return to Kashmir valley in our separate homeland where we will get all the constitutional guarantees and foolproof security arrangements. From where no terrorist organization can uproot us, where we enjoy the support of fellow Indians," Dr Agnishekhar said. "We have given this roadmap 35 years ago and till the time the government is ready to create a conducive atmosphere we will continue to suffer in exile."

the war killed over 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants abducted around 250 others. More than 100 hostages were freed during the weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. Some 90 per cent of Gaza's population has been displaced. The United Nations says homes, the health system, road networks and other vital infrastructure have been badly damaged. Rebuilding - if the ceasefire reaches its final phase - will take several years at least. Major questions about Gaza's future, political and otherwise, remain unresolved.

# Gaza ceasefire begins, handover of hostages started

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Israel's hard-line national security minister, meanwhile, said his Jewish Power faction was quitting the government in protest over the ceasefire agreement. Itamar Ben-Gvir's departure weakens Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition but will not affect the truce. In a separate development, Israel announced it had recovered the body of Oron Shaul, a soldier killed in the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, in a special operation in Gaza. The bodies of Shaul and another soldier, Hadar

Goldin, remained there after the 2014 war and had not been returned. The ceasefire deal was announced last week after a year of mediation by the United States, Qatar and Egypt. The outgoing Biden administration and President-elect Donald Trump's team had both pressed for an agreement to be reached before the inauguration on Monday. Netanyahu on Saturday warned that he had Trump's backing to continue fighting if necessary. The 42-day first phase of the ceasefire should see 33 hostages returned from Gaza

and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees released. Many displaced Palestinians should be able to return home. There is also supposed to be a surge of humanitarian aid, with hundreds of trucks entering Gaza daily, far more than Israel allowed before. The United Nations' World Food Program said trucks started entering through two crossings after the ceasefire took hold. This is just the second ceasefire in the war, longer and more consequential than a weeklong pause in November 2023, with the potential to end the fighting

for good. Negotiations on the far more difficult second phase of this ceasefire should begin in just over two weeks. Major questions remain, including whether the war will resume after the first phase and how the rest of the hostages in Gaza will be freed. Across the Gaza Strip, celebrations erupted as people hoped for respite after the fighting killed tens of thousands, destroyed large areas of the territory and displaced most of its population. Masked militants appeared at some celebrations, where crowds chanted slogans in

support of them, according to Associated Press reporters in Gaza. The Hamas-run police began deploying in public after mostly lying low due to Israeli airstrikes. Some families set off for home on foot, their belongings loaded on donkey carts. In the southern city of Rafah, residents returned to find massive destruction. Some found human remains including skulls in the rubble. "It's like you see a Hollywood horror movie," resident Mohamed Abu Taha told the AP as he inspected the ruins of his family's home. Reactions in Israel were varied, as people hoped for

the hostages' safe return but remained divided over the agreement. "It's a new day," Nissan Kalderon, the brother of hostage Ofer Kalderon, 54, told Israeli Channel 12. "Don't stop. Bring all the hostages home." Asher Pizem, 35, from the city of Sderot near Gaza, said he eagerly awaited the hostages' return but said the deal had merely postponed the next confrontation with Hamas. He also criticized Israel for allowing aid into Gaza, saying it would contribute to the militant group's revival. "They will take the time and attack again," he said while

overlooking Gaza's smoldering ruins from a small hill in southern Israel with other Israelis who gathered there. Israel's Cabinet approved the ceasefire early Saturday in a rare session during the Jewish Sabbath, more than two days after mediators announced the deal. Over 46,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which says women and children make up more than half the fatalities but does not distinguish between civilians and fighters. The Hamas-led attack on southern Israel that sparked

the war killed over 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants abducted around 250 others. More than 100 hostages were freed during the weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. Some 90 per cent of Gaza's population has been displaced. The United Nations says homes, the health system, road networks and other vital infrastructure have been badly damaged. Rebuilding - if the ceasefire reaches its final phase - will take several years at least. Major questions about Gaza's future, political and otherwise, remain unresolved.



# Kejriwal writes to PM Modi proposing joint housing scheme for Government employees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP Convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposing a joint housing scheme for government employees, particularly sanitation workers, in Delhi ahead of the assembly elections, slated to be held on February 5. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal has proposed a joint Housing Scheme with the Centre, aimed at ensuring they live with dignity and security in their post-service years. The scheme will be piloted with employees of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) before being extended to all government employees across Delhi. The AAP chief urged the cen-

tral government to allocate land in Delhi at concessional rates for the scheme. "The AAP Government will construct affordable housing units on this land, enabling Safai Karamcharis to pay for their homes in easy installments deducted during their service. By the time they retire, they would have a home to call their own, eliminating the risk of homelessness and financial strain," he said. "Particularly for the poor, owning a house or renting one is almost impossible. During a recent visit to my New Delhi constituency, many Safai Karamcharis approached me. As long as they are employed, they have access to government accommodation," he said. However, he added that after retirement, they are almost left



Ranjan Dimri

homeless. "Since land in Delhi falls under the jurisdiction of the central government, if the central government provides land at highly subsidized rates, the Delhi government will construct houses on it. The government employees can become the owners of these houses by paying easy installments," he said. Arvind Kejriwal said that he has requested the Prime Minister to initiate this scheme specifically for Safai Karamcharis. "It can begin with the Safai Karamcharis of NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Council) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Under this scheme, the central government will provide land, and the Delhi government will construct houses. The Safai Karamcharis can deduct

installments for the house from their salaries in the final years of their employment. By the time they retire, they will have a house to live a dignified life," he added. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva accused Kejriwal of targeting economically weaker sections (EWS) and sanitation workers, claiming that if the central government provides land, he will build flats for them after their retirement. "The central government built flats for the EWS in Delhi at a cost of Rs 2,415 crore rupees, but in 10 years, the Arvind Kejriwal government has failed to ensure that the benefits of these flats reach the poor," he claimed. He alleged that Kejriwal seized the entire file despite the flat

being ready and insisted that the flats will not be handed over unless they are named under the Chief Minister Housing Scheme, even though more than half of the funds came from the central government. "These flats have now become ruins due to Kejriwal's obstinacy, as he insisted that his photo be placed on the flats," he said. The Delhi BJP chief added, "When it came to repairing the flats, both departments of the Delhi government, DUSIB and DSIDC, requested nearly Rs 220 crore rupees from Kejriwal. However, in 2023, Kejriwal only allocated Rs 1 lakh rupees and then claimed there were no funds. This highlights the gap between his words and actions when it comes to the poor."

## BJP accuses AAP of creating fake narrative of attack on Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A war of words has erupted between the AAP and BJP on Sunday over the attack on former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal with the BJP accusing the ruling party of creating a 'fake' narrative of it while the AAP is alleging stone-pelting at Kejriwal's car by BJP's New Delhi assembly candidate Parvesh Verma's goons' ahead of the upcoming Delhi elections. Addressing a press conference, Verma asserted the AAP chief will lose the seat to him by 20,000 votes and gave it in writing. He claimed, "Kejriwal is baffled and restless as he has not fulfilled any of the 10 promises he made to the people of Delhi before the 2020 Assembly polls, and now the women and youth are asking him questions. A vehicle in which Kejriwal himself was sitting hit three local youths but the AAP is creating a fake narrative of an attack on him." He said he has submitted a complaint with the Election Commission and given videos.



He rejected AAP's charges that those who allegedly attacked Kejriwal were his 'goons' and said, "The entire one lakh voters of the New Delhi constituency were his family. Kejriwal is saying that the people of the constituency are goons. The three local youth hit by Kejriwal's vehicle at his instance were also local voters who wanted to ask him about jobs." Verma also claimed that Kejriwal's convoy during campaigns includes 50 vehicles in

replace Bhagwant Mann to become the Chief Minister himself. For this reason, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is doing everything in his power to help Kejriwal win. A sum of Rs 50 crore has allegedly been sent from Punjab solely for the New Delhi constituency," he claimed, adding that he has demanded an investigation by the Election Commission. Meanwhile, Kejriwal slammed the BJP and said, "They are losing elections badly and resorting to deadly attacks. My life is dedicated to the country and society, and we are campaigning for the welfare of the people, unlike this unprecedented violence." He also remarked that the kind of campaign being witnessed this time is unprecedented in Delhi. "The level of violence, including attempts to assassinate a former Chief Minister, has never been seen before in Delhi. However, I have always stated that my life is dedicated to the country and society," the AAP chief said. "They are losing badly, and this

is their way of contesting elections. While they indulge in such acts, I continue to focus on development and welfare schemes for the people," Kejriwal affirmed. Hitting out at the BJP, Chief Minister Atishi said, "They have come to the realization that even after distributing Rs 1100, shoes, bedsheets, and glasses, and resorting to fraudulent elections and additions to voter lists, they cannot win the election. Now, they have resorted to life-threatening attacks on Arvind Kejriwal, and it is evidently clear from this incident." She added that the incident raises questions not just about Delhi Police but also about the Election Commission and all the officials conducting the elections. "When it is crystal clear that BJP workers attacked AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal, what is the Election Commission doing? Can they not see this?" she questioned.

## City police scuttled yet another attempt to screen documentary: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP alleged on Sunday the Delhi Police has scuttled their yet another attempt to screen a documentary based on the arrest of party leaders including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia. There was no immediate reaction from the police on the ruling party's claim on Sunday. However, they had said on Saturday that the party did not seek permission for screening the documentary. Unbreakable and in any case, it could not be allowed due to the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct in the city. The party said that under pressure from BJP, Delhi Police on Sunday stopped AAP from holding a press conference and did not allow journalists to show the documentary made on Arvind Kejriwal. The party had

booked the Godavari Auditorium at Andhra Association for the press conference. In protest against stopping the press conference, Rajya Sabha AAP MP Sanjay Singh staged a sit-in outside the auditorium and asked to show the order to stop it, but they could not. Singh said, "BJP can do whatever it wants, but AAP will continue to show the documentary. Why is BJP afraid of this documentary? In this we want to show how Arvind Kejriwal was arrested in a fake case. A hall was booked to show the documentary. Election Commission should explain under which rule it cancelled its permission?" He said that the documentary film is about how Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Satyendra Jain were kept in jail by making fake cases. "There is no election campaign in it and neither has there been any appeal for votes. We had not come to hold any meeting. On

Saturday, that documentary was stopped from being shown. On Sunday, I wanted to show it to the media by holding a press conference," he said. "I want to ask the Election Commission under which rule the permission was denied. There was not going to be any public meeting, election campaigning or appeal for vote was to be made. I came alone for the press conference and screening the documentary," Singh said outside an auditorium of the Andhra Association in Central Delhi. He said he was verbally conveyed that the permission for the press conference and screening was denied. A screening of the documentary, based on the arrest of A leaders over the last two years in corruption cases, at the Pyarelal Bhawan near ITO was prevented by the police on the ground that no permission was taken for the event which is mandatory as the MCC is in place for the February 5 Assembly polls.

## Congress leader dubs Kejriwal as anti-Dalit

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Dubbing AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal as 'anti-Dalit', Congress leader and former MP Udit Raj on Sunday claimed that while the ruling party announced a scheme to provide a monthly honorarium to temple priests and gurdwara granthis, it left out priests of Valmiki and Ravidas temples. He said that on Monday, 'bhikshus' and priests of Valmiki and Ravidas temples will protest against the AAP to demand that they be covered under the party's proposed scheme. Raj posed eight questions to the AAP chief including not covering priests of Valmiki and Ravidas temples. On December 30, Kejriwal announced that the AAP would give Rs 18,000 a month to temple priests and gurdwara granthis under the 'Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana' if it returns to power in Delhi after the upcoming assembly polls. "He was silent on giving similar honorariums to Buddhist monks, priests at the Guru Ravi



Das Mandir and Valmiki Mandir, who are all from the Dalit community, and priests from poor churches. There are 314 Budh Vihars, 150 Valmi Temples and an equal number of Ravi Das temples, and they were all related to the Dalits. Church officials should also be made such honorariums," the Congress leader said. He also asked why of the party's 11 Rajya Sabha MPs, not one is from the SC or OBC community. He added that Kejriwal misled the Dalits with his

## Minister urges AAP to fulfill promises in Punjab before announcing schemes in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu on Sunday slammed the AAP, urging them to fulfill their promises in Punjab before announcing new schemes for Delhi and claimed that the education in the national Capital is so poor that senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia has to send his children to Canada for studying. Addressing a press conference, Bittu criticised AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal for what he called "unfulfilled commitments" in Punjab, including the unimplemented promise of providing Rs 1,000 per month to women. "Kejriwal talks about free schemes every day in Delhi, but what about Punjab? He promised to eradicate drugs in Punjab, but no substantial action has been taken. In fact, Punjab reported 144 deaths due to drug overdoses in 2023, the highest in



Ranjan Dimri

the country," Bittu alleged. He also raised concerns about the law and order situation in Punjab under AAP's governance, citing a 10 per cent rise in rape cases last year and the assassination of singer Sidhu Moose Wala after the state government downgraded his security. Bittu further targeted the AAP over the Delhi liquor

excise policy, claiming it has contributed to a rise in alcoholism. Additionally, Bittu said that special upgradation of Delhi's Purvanchal Dwar Anand Vihar Railway Station and Sarai Rohilla Railway Station will be done by the Railway Ministry and their premises will shine with facilities similar to an air-

port. Calling Delhi government's education scheme a 'super flop scheme', Bittu claimed, "The two universities of Delhi government, which are running along with private colleges, are of such poor standard that even Manish Sisodia, the founder of Delhi Education Scheme, does not consider them worthy of his

children studying and is getting his children educated in Canada." "While on one hand Kejriwal-Sisodia misled the people of Delhi and the country by calling their schools and universities world class in election after election, on the other hand Ashok Mittal and Arvind Ojha etc. do not tire of encouraging their own education mafia," he said. He also alleged that the corruption of Kejriwal-Sisodia has increased to such an extent that first they openly send the wealthy private education moguls of Punjab to Rajya Sabha and then take money from them in the form of fake loans, be it Covid period or immediately after the liquor scam, they send Sisodia's son to Canada to study. "Ramesh Mittal, who gave loan to Sisodia for his son's education, is the brother of AAP MP and owner of a private university Ashok Mittal, while Gunest Arora is a relative of AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Arora," he asserted.

## Congress natural choice of Delhi: Devendra Yadav

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Reiterating his party's stand on no post poll alliance with the AAP, Delhi Congress President and party's Badli candidate Devendra Yadav claimed that the AAP is making accusations against his party because they are disgruntled over Congress going full throttle in the upcoming assembly elections while calling BJP 'not the natural choice of people in Delhi'. Yadav was among the few candidates who won in 2013 assembly elections from Badli when the party managed to secure only 8 seats and AAP rose to power. Claiming that people in Delhi want to vote for someone other than BJP, he said that AAP came in power after the Congress ruled Delhi for 15 years, when there was huge anti-incumbency against the party and people trusted AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal. "There is a huge anti-incumbency since AAP had been in power for the last 10 years and promised big things that they have not been able to deliver be it electricity or water. Whatever schemes they are

promising are not going well with the people whereas, in contrast, our schemes we have launched with credible faces who have delivered promises in Congress ruled states," Yadav stated. The Congress leader also emphasized that the BJP is not seen as the "natural choice" by the people of Delhi. The Delhi Congress chief took over the leadership after the sudden exit of his predecessor and former Delhi Minister Arvinder Singh Lovely, who left Congress to join BJP just before the crucial Lok Sabha elections. Since then, Yadav has taken many initiatives including organising the month long Delhi Nyay Yatra to rejig the ground level cadre. "We went full offensive since the Lok Sabha. No one could have ever thought of organising a Yatra in every assembly constituency the kind we did. We started thinking more about people-oriented issues. Moreover, this led to the anti-incumbency of Delhi government coming to the fore," the two-time MLA from Badli said. He added that this led to



them convincing party's senior leadership that the Congress has to contest this election with full force independently, affirming that there will be no post poll alliance and the party will not repeat the same mistake they did in 2013, reiterating AICC Treasurer Ajay Maken's stand. Although, while many eagerly anticipated senior leaders like Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi to join the yatra, they were a no show. However, the 52-year-old leader said that they would have been in it if there weren't crucial elections happening in Jharkhand and Maharashtra. Moreover, with Congress

being wiped out from the political landscape of Delhi for about a decade now, the elections are proving to be a do or die situation for the party. "This election is very important to Congress especially in the pretext that we have been losing the last two elections consecutively and not been able to secure even one seat. So yes, this is important and we are putting our best front whether it's in campaign, whether it's in the organization, whether it is in the form of a candidates," he asserted. However, this has disgruntled their 'friends-turned-foe' with the AAP making serious allegations against Congress of repeating BJP's narrative. "I believe that AAP is on the brink of ending. People do not realise it especially since the data is now supporting them but it supported us in 2013 also. People are so angry with them that the AAP chief has stopped going to the field. They are getting disgruntled and retaliating against us because they know we are putting our best front forward and they realise that this is going to damage their

prospects. Even retaining their vote share would be a big thing," the senior Congress leader added. On INDIA bloc leaders including Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav and Trinamool Congress supreme Mamata Banerjee supporting AAP in the elections, Yadav claimed, "INDIA bloc is on the national level and has nothing to do with state politics. And there is no official statement by the parties. If anyone wants to support anyone on an individual level, it is their choice." With the elections approaching closer, the AAP and BJP have attacked each other over voters with the former alleging large scam by addition and deletion of voters in New Delhi assembly constituency while the BJP charging the ruling party with sheltering Bangladeshi and Rohingya for their vote bank. Yadav, however, remarked that the BJP is insulting our border forces by saying that there is an infiltration by Bangladesh. On his opponents from the seat, he cheekily replied, "They are good candidates from their party and even better for me."

## Kejriwal hosts representatives from Aggarwal community at his residence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal hosted representatives from the Aggarwal community at his residence, on Sunday. During this meeting, the Aggarwal community extended their support to the Aam Aadmi Party for the Delhi elections. Kejriwal assured them that under the Aam Aadmi Party government, there would be no political exploitation of the trader community or the Aggarwal community in any manner. It is estimated that the vaishya/bania community has nearly 14 per cent vote shares spreading in over dozen constituencies in Delhi. The Baniya community is a significant vote bank in Delhi, in no small part because its members are regarded as influential political donors. Their influence on election results can be seen on 8 out of 10 assembly seats of Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency. Baniya voters come mainly from Chandani Chowk, Adarsh Nagar, Shalimar Bagh, Shakur Basti, Tri Nagar, Wazir Pur, Model Town, Sadar Bazar, Gandhi Nagar, Krishna

Nagar, Laxmi Nagar, Jangpura, Viswas Nagar, Rohtash Nagar, Karol Bagh, Rajender Nagar, etc. Traditionally, they support BJP in Lok Sabha elections while AAP in Vidhan Sabha elections. In 2020 Vidhan Sabha elections, BJP got success to win just 6 seats where Baniya voters are in influential position with combination of Sikh and Punjabi voters and rest all seats were swept by the AAP. However, the same voters supported BJP in 2024 General Elections. AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal hosted representatives from the Aggarwal community at his residence, on Sunday. Kejriwal assured them that under the AAP, there would be no political exploitation of the trader community or the Aggarwal community in any manner. Taking to social media platform X, Arvind Kejriwal expressed his gratitude, stating, "Met with representatives of the Aggarwal community at my residence today and thanked them for their continued support to the Aam Aadmi Party. With the blessings of Maharaja Agrasen, we have served the people of

Delhi with sincerity and will continue to do so in the future." Senior AAP leader and former Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Gupta highlighted that people from all 70 constituencies of Delhi came together to showcase the unity of the Aggarwal community by meeting Arvind Kejriwal. He remarked, "Arvind Kejriwal himself belongs to the Aggarwal community. The BJP has subjected him to numerous injustices, including imprisonment and false cases." The AAP had taken Delhi by storm in 2013 in its first electoral outing, winning 28 of the 70 seats, with a vote share of 29.49%. It went on to pulverize its opponents two years later in 2015, when it won 67 seats (leaving only three for the BJP and none for the Congress) with a vote share of 54.34%, a feat it almost repeated in 2020. Although its tally marginally dipped to 62, the AAP maintained a vote share of 53.57% in the 2020 Assembly elections. In 2020, the BJP registered its best vote share (38.51%) in two decades, but it was still 15 percentage points behind the AAP.



# PM Modi praises ECI for its commitment to fair polling

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the Election Commission on Sunday, saying it has used the power of technology to strengthen people's power and also shown commitment to a fair polling process. Modi's praise for the poll body in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast came ahead of its foundation day on January 25, observed as the National Voters' Day, and amid frequent criticism from the opposition for its alleged pro-BJP bias. Noting that January 25 is important because on this day the Election Commission of India was established, Modi said Constitution makers have accorded a very important place to the EC and equally to

people's participation in democracy. "When the first elections were held in the country in 1951-52, some people were doubtful whether the country's democracy would survive. But our democracy proved all the apprehensions wrong - after all, India is the mother of democracy," he said. In the past decades as well, the country's democracy has strengthened and prospered, the prime minister asserted. "I would also like to thank the EC, which has modernised and strengthened our voting process from time to time. The Commission has used the power of technology to give more strength to the power of the people. I congratulate the EC for its commitment to fair elections," he said. "I would like to urge the people of the country to use



their right to vote, always, in maximum numbers and also become a part of the country's democratic process and strengthen this process," he said in his first Mann Ki Baat of 2025 which was held on the third Sunday this month as against the last, which is

usually the case, as next Sunday is Republic Day. His remarks come amid Opposition parties' criticism and questioning of the integrity of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Modi's remarks can be seen as an endorsement of the EVMs.

Pointing out that this year's Republic Day is very special as it is the 75th anniversary of the Indian Republic, Modi said, "I salute all those great personalities of the Constituent Assembly, who gave us our sacred Constitution. During the Constituent Assembly, long deliberations were held on many subjects. Those discussions, the thoughts of the members of the Constituent Assembly, their words, are our great heritage." The prime minister played short audio clips of three members of constituent assembly. Chairman Rajendra Prasad, B R Ambedkar and Syama Prasad Mookerjee - to highlight the values they promoted. Speaking of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, he said people of various castes and regions

have come together. There is no discrimination of any kind, he added. He also pointed out that this month the first anniversary of the 'Pran Pratishtha Parv' of Ram Lalla was celebrated on the day of 'Paush Shukla Dwadashi'. Modi further said that in the beginning of 2025 itself, India has attained many historic achievements in the field of space. During the broadcast, he also highlighted that a few days ago, Indian scientists have undertaken space docking of satellites. Modi also highlighted how IIT Madras's ExTeM Centre is working on new technologies for manufacturing in space. Ahead of Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary on January 23, Modi hailed his valour.

# LoP Rahul Gandhi launches 'White T-shirt Movement'



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Sunday announced the launch of a 'White T-shirt Movement', championing the rights of the masses, even as he accused the Narendra Modi government of turning its back on the poor. Gandhi announced the launch in a social media post and urged people to be a part of it. "If you believe in economic justice, oppose rising wealth inequalities, fight for social equality, reject all forms of discrimination, and strive for peace and stability in our country, wear your white T-shirts and join the movement," said a video voiceover posted by Rahul Gandhi. "Today the Modi government has turned its back on the poor and the working class and has left them to their own devices. The government's entire focus is on enriching a select few capitalists," he said. He said that because of this, inequality is constantly increasing and the condition of the workers "who nourish the country with their blood and sweat" is getting worse and they are forced to endure various kinds of injustice and atrocities. "In such a situation, it is the responsibility of all of us to raise our voice strongly to get them justice and rights. With this thought, we are starting the #WhiteTshirtMovement," he said on X. "I appeal to my youth and working class colleagues to participate in this movement

in large numbers. To join this campaign and get detailed information about it, visit this link - <https://whitetshirt.in/home/> or give a missed call on this number -- 9999812024," the post further read. The website of the 'White T-shirt Movement' states that a 'white T-shirt' is not just a piece of cloth but is a symbol of the party's five guiding principles -- compassion, unity, non-violence, equality, and progress for all. "These values resonate the spirit of India's 8000-year-old civilisation, which is based on harmony and diversity. Today, growing inequalities that are rooted in income, caste and religion demand action beyond ideology," it says. The message further reads, "Our commitment must be derived from the philosophy of Dharma and Karma, Dharma being the duty to selflessly serve society, while Karma is the resolve to uphold rights and fight for justice." The website says that the five principles can create a society where every individual is valued and freedom is not held hostage by the ambitions of a few. "Let us all be agents of change and embrace this way of life with pride. The white T-shirt is our symbol - a call for a just and unified India. By wearing it, we honour the spirit of Bharat Jodo, which echoes the goals of the Bharat Jodo Yatra: bridging divides and building a cohesive, equitable nation," it says.

# SKM welcomes Government decision to hold talks with agitating farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Samyukt Kisan Morcha on Sunday hailed the Central Government's proposal of talks with farmers as a great victory and welcomed fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's decision to receive medical support. "SKM considers union government's decision to hold discussions with farmers organisations a great victory," they said in a statement. Union Agriculture Ministry officials and farmers are meeting on February 14. The group, which led the 2020-21 farmers' protests against the three now-repealed farm laws, said the government was forced to hold discussions due to the farmers' growing unity. "SKM welcomes the decision of fasting farmer leader Sardar Jagjit Singh Dallewal to receive medical support and wishes him a quick recovery and good health. The continuous efforts made by SKM leaders for farmers' unity and pan-India agitation against the anti-farmer union



government has forced the Govt. To retract from its divisive strategy," the collective said. The SKM also called upon all farmers to "respond and rise in protest" against the Union government and force it to "roll back its anti-farmer policies." They termed the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing (NPFAM) an attempt to bring back the repealed farm laws. The farmers' body also called upon all its units to send out memorandums to Members of Parliament through email instead of holding Kisan Dharna at MP offices on

Monday and asked them to focus on SKM's tractor rallies on January 24. A meeting of the general body of SKM will be held in New Delhi on January 24. "SKM once again calls upon and warns the union government to desist from acting against the interests of farmers, the Annadatas of the country. SKM resoundingly informs and announces to the government that farmers of this country are united in their demands which have to be met by the Union Govt and till then, democratic agitations in all forms shall continue against the Union Government," the SKM said.

# India, Italy decide to expand counter-terror cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Italy have vowed to enhance their cooperation in combating terrorism including by effectively countering the "misuse" of technology for terrorist activities. Extensive deliberations were held on ways to expand bilateral cooperation in dealing with terrorism at a meeting of the India-Italy Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime held in Rome on January 16 and 17, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a readout on Sunday. The two sides discussed emerging domestic, regional and international terrorist threats and exchanged views on a wide range of areas of cooperation in counter-terrorism and transnational organised crime, it said. Recognising the need for enhancing cooperation for effectively countering the misuse of technology for



terrorist purposes, the two sides shared experiences in preventing and mitigating the menace, the readout said. India and Italy also stressed the importance of an effective prosecution of those responsible for terrorist acts. In the talks, the two strategic partners reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation in the multilateral fora, including in the UN, GCTF (Global Counterterrorism Forum) and FATF (Financial Action Task Force), the MEA said. "The two sides also discussed ways and means to advance the ongoing negotiations on

various bilateral agreements," it said. The meeting was co-chaired by K D Dewal, Joint Secretary for Counter-Terrorism in the MEA, and Alessandro Azzoni, Senior Deputy Director for Political Affairs and Director for Security at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Indian delegation also met officials of Italy's Inter-Agency Law Enforcement Academy in Caserta and discussed strengthening of capacity building measures between the academy and its counterpart organisation in India.

# Government suspends officers of Kadipur Tehsil after irregularities in property registrations found

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

To crack down on corruption prevalent in the revenue department. Irregularities in over 1,500 property registrations were found in Kadipur Tehsil here in Gurugram. Following a complaint related to illegal registries and General Power of Attorney (GPA), the government suspended Amit Yadav, Naib Tehsildar of Kadipur Tehsil, and initiated a departmental enquiry against him. It is being said that an inquiry against Yadav has also been completed in which massive irregularities in property registration were revealed. Following an enquiry conducted by the administration, preparations are now being made for a charge sheet against the suspended Naib Tehsildar. The source claimed that based on this enquiry, an FIR would be registered against the suspended officer and the people responsible for this illegal practice soon. The



information about the irregularities found in these registries has been sent to the headquarters by the administration. Apart from this enquiry, a parallel investigation of the entire matter was also given to SDM Gurugram Ravinder Kumar. That investigation has also been completed. According to sources, during the investigation, it was disclosed that there were over 260 such registries were done without proper documentation, and even stamp duties were not up to mark, which has also caused a loss of revenue. "The investigation of alleged registries and GPA done in Kadipur tehsil has been completed. In connection with

this information has also been sent to the government. The case will be registered after the investigation report which will be submitted by the SDM Gurugram," an officer privy to the matter said. Meanwhile, the sources claimed that the charges of illegal registries and GPA were fixed at the Kadipur Tehsil. The suspects used to take Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh per GPA and Rs 1.5 lakh to 3 lakh was fixed per registry. Apart from this, a private individual was also appointed at the Tehsil office to collect money from middlemen and parties for executing illegal property registration. Recently, A "secret" letter compiled by the Haryana Revenue and Disaster Management Department had also revealed that 370 patwaris (revenue officials) as corrupt. The list also includes 170 private individuals who double up as middlemen-cum-assistants for these officials. A

report has been sought from respective Deputy Commissioners from across the state within 15 days. The officials are accused of taking money from people directly or through middlemen in lieu of getting their work such as takseem (partition of land records), land measurement, mutation of property and corrections in land records done in the Revenue Department. Gurugram district has the maximum number of middlemen (26), who allegedly take money on patwaris' behalf. "These private individuals appointed by these officials exploit common people by demanding bribes in exchange for completing official procedures. Sometimes, the visitors approaching the patwari offices are deliberately turned away, forcing them to meet these unauthorised agents to get their work done," Ramesh Yadav, the complainant said.

# Haryana's Industry and Commerce Minister visits proposed route of metro expansion

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

As part of the process of Metro expansion between Millennium City Center to Cyber City in Gurugram, Haryana's Industry and Commerce Minister Rao Narbir Singh visited the proposed route of expansion with the officials of Gurugram Metro Rail Limited (GMRL) GMDA and gave them necessary guidelines on Sunday. The process of making the DPR of the Metro project is ongoing. Special attention will be given to the facilities of the general public under the guidelines of the Cabinet Minister. Singh inspected the entire proposed route and instructed the officials to take the work of Metro forward at a fast pace keeping in mind the convenience of the people. Apart from this, while instructing the officials, he said that people should not



face any kind of inconvenience during the construction of Metro and the traffic should run smoothly, a good plan should also be made in that regard. "Whenever a big construction infrastructure is built, the officials should make such a plan that it lasts for a long time and people get benefits. In this entire project, special care should be taken that the existing services like drainage system, electricity, drinking water, sewerage and other important facilities in the proposed route should be disturbed as little as possible,"

he said. The cabinet minister also instructed the GMDA officials that whatever construction work the authority has to do with this project regarding the flyover or underpass should also run parallel to the metro construction work. While giving instructions to freeze the alignment work on the proposed route in a month, he said that the officials should take special care in this entire work and that the drainage system of Gurugram should not be affected in any way in this entire process. It is worth noting that in relation to the project, Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini has already held a meeting with the concerned officials in Gurugram in December. In which it was told by officials that the detailed project report (DPR) of the metro rail running between Millennium City to Cyber City, Gurugram has been

approved by the Haryana Government and the Central Government and the foundation stone of this project was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rewari on February 16, 2024. In the meeting, the officials said that the construction work of the metro expansion in Gurugram will start on May 1, 2025. There will be a total of 27 stations on this 28.50 km long metro rail line and a depot will also be built, out of which 8 stations will be model stations. Rs 896.19 crore will be spent on this project by the Central Government and Rs 4556.53 crore by the Haryana Government. Apart from this, this metro will be based on CBT, i.e. Communication-Based Train Control Signal, and the maximum speed will be 80 km per hour. Initially, 3 coaches will be installed in this metro connectivity, and after that, it will be increased to 6 coaches.

# Modi, Shah hails NDRF on foundation day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AMARAVATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed the National Disaster Response Force, describing the courage, dedication and selfless service of the brave personnel as a shield in times of adversity. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is a premier central agency tasked with responding to disasters. It is celebrating its 19th raising day. In a special event at Amaravati, Home Minister Amit Shah said backed by resilient infrastructure in the area of disaster management, India has emerged as a global leader in the sector by adopting a 'zero casualty' goal during calamities. "On this special occasion of the raising day of the National Disaster Response Force



(NDRF), we salute the courage, dedication and selfless service of the brave personnel who are a shield in times of adversity," Modi said in a social media post. Their unwavering commitment to saving lives, responding to disasters and ensuring safety during emergencies is truly commendable, the prime minister said. "The NDRF has also set global standards in disaster response and management," he said.

# Focus at 24th party Congress will be on increasing mass base: CPI (M) leader Prakash Karat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Strengthening the CPI (Marxist) and increasing its mass base will be the focus of the 24th party Congress scheduled to be held in Madurai in April, interim co-ordinator of the party Prakash Karat said. The Congress will also deliberate on the election of the new general secretary, the party's top post. Karat said increasing the party's mass base is key as the Left has not grown in the country in the past few years. "The CPI(M)'s 24th party congress is going to be held in the first week of April in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. In this congress, we are going to discuss how we can strengthen the CPI(M) as a national party, increase its political influence and, mass base," Karat told PTI. "We think this should be

given priority because the left in recent years has not grown in the country," he said. The CPI(M), which fielded 52 candidates in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, won four seats in all, two in Tamil Nadu and one each in Kerala and Rajasthan - up from three in 2019. In 2004, at its peak, the CPI(M) had sent 43 MPs to the Lok Sabha, getting around 5.4 per cent of the total votes. Karat added that the unity of Left parties is also an important issue that will be taken up. "We are already working out how to unite all the Left parties and forces together so that we can project the Left platform and alternative policies," he said. The party's former general secretary said that a stronger Left would contribute to the creation of a stronger, united opposition to the ruling



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "And the third thing, which is that this is not contradictory to each other, we think a stronger Left will also contribute to stronger united opposition to the BJP, that is the secular opposition parties. The left will be an important component of this wider unity," he said. The CPI(M) and other Left parties are a part of the opposition's INDIA bloc.

The party, founded in 1964 and the largest of the Left bloc, faced a setback last year with the sudden demise of sitting general secretary Sitaram Yechury. Karat said while his absence is felt, the party has a strong, collective leadership. "For our party, it was a very crucial juncture, we had just begun the preparations for our party congress, which normally starts six months

ahead of the meeting. His absence is definitely, keenly felt... But the party has a strong collective, leadership," Karat said. In the party congress, the CPI(M) will elect a new central committee, a politburo, and a general secretary. As a part of the preparations, the party is holding several state-level meetings. A three-day central committee meeting to discuss a draft political resolution for the upcoming party congress, held in Kolkata, concluded on Sunday. The central committee is second after the politburo in the CPI(M) leadership chain. The resolution will be debated and adopted at the party congress and will set the party line on various issues. According to the CPI(M) constitution, the All-India Party Congress is the supreme

organ of the party and is convened by the central committee ordinarily once every three years. At the meeting, the outgoing central committee will recommend a panel of names for the election of a successor committee. A delegate can raise objections about any name in the panel proposed as well as propose any new name or names, with prior approval of the member. The central committee then elects from among its members a politburo, including the general secretary. The number of members in the politburo is decided by the central committee. There are 16 members in the CPI(M) Politburo at present, and 83 members are there in the central committee. The 24th Congress of the CPI(M) will be held from April 2 to 6.



# Prayagraj Mahakumbh becomes a milestone for women empowerment

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Prayagraj Mahakumbh 2025 is poised to etch its name in history, not only as a spiritual spectacle but also as a beacon of women's empowerment. The 13 Akhadas, custodians of Sanatan Dharma's traditions, are preparing for the grand Amrit Snan on Mauni Amavasya, which will also witness an unprecedented number of women being initiated into asceticism.

This year's Mahakumbh is marking a transformative shift, with the 'diksha' ceremonies seeing significant participation from women ascetics. According to Sanyasini Divya Giri of the Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhada, over 200 women are set to receive sannyas diksha (initiation) under their Akhada alone. Across all Akhadas, the total is expected to exceed 1,000, a landmark achievement for inclusivity in Sanatan Dharma. The registration process is already underway, with the diksha ceremonies scheduled for January 27.

## Women Embracing the Path of Renunciation

In Sanatan Dharma, the decision to renounce worldly ties stems from spiritual awakening or transformative



personal events. Divya Giri noted that many of this year's initiates are highly educated women, choosing the ascetic path for deeper self-realization. One such aspirant is Radhenand Bharti, a Ph.D. scholar in Sanskrit from Gujarat's Kalidas Ramtek University. Hailing from a prosperous Rajkot business family, her quest for spiritual fulfillment led her to renounce material ties. After 12 years of serving her guru, she is now

ready to embrace the ascetic life. **Akhadas Acknowledging Women's Power** The Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhada has been instrumental in promoting women's contributions within the Akhada system. It recently renamed its women's wing to Sanyasini Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhara, granting it a separate identity. This recognition, approved by Mahant Hari Giri, underscores

the growing acknowledgment of Matrushakti (women's power) within traditionally male-dominated frameworks. For the first time, the women's wing will have its own dedicated camp at the Mahakumbh, symbolizing progress and inclusivity. Divya Giri expressed pride in this development, calling it a step towards greater recognition of women's spiritual roles. **Female Naga Sadhus: A Life of Rigorous Dedication**

Female Naga Sadhus, who dedicate their lives entirely to God, embody the ultimate form of renunciation. Their initiation process is arduous, requiring strict celibacy for 10-15 years, unwavering devotion to their guru, and the ability to endure rigorous ascetic practices. A key initiation ritual involves performing Pind Daan (symbolic funeral rites) and shaving their heads as gestures of renunciation. Unlike male Naga Sadhus, who often remain Digambara (naked), female Naga Sadhus wear a single piece of unstitched saffron cloth known as "Ganti." They are revered within their Akhadas and addressed as "Mai," "Avdhutani," or "Naagin." Despite their devotion and sacrifices, female Naga Sadhus are yet to be considered for leadership roles within the Akhadas, reflecting enduring traditional gender norms.

## A Historic Shift in Spiritual Legacy

The Prayagraj Mahakumbh 2025 is not just a congregation of faith but also a testament to evolving traditions. With the increasing participation of women in ascetic practices, the event underscores a pivotal moment in Sanatan Dharma's journey toward inclusivity and empowerment.

# Garland seller 'Monalisa' becomes viral sensation at Mahakumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Amid the spiritual fervor of the Mahakumbh, an unexpected star has emerged - Monalisa, a garland seller from Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh. Her striking beauty and calm demeanor have captivated social media, turning her into a viral sensation. However, the overwhelming attention has forced her to leave the event. Monalisa, who arrived at the Mahakumbh with her family to sell garlands to pilgrims, quickly became the talk of the grand congregation. Videos highlighting her dusky complexion, amber eyes, sharp nose, and serene smile went viral, with social media users comparing her elegance to the iconic Mona Lisa.

Admiring her "kajrali eyes" and graceful presence, countless people flocked to Sector-7 of Mahakumbh to click selfies and shoot videos, disrupting her daily activities. "It became impossible for her to sell garlands because she was constantly surrounded by people asking for selfies and videos," her father shared. The intense attention left Monalisa distressed, leading her family to send her back



to their hometown of Maheshwar. Her two sisters continue selling garlands at the Mahakumbh, while Monalisa's sudden departure has sparked discussions about the challenges of unintended internet fame. In one widely shared video, Monalisa was asked about her marital status. She gracefully replied, "Why would I like any of them? All of them are my brothers."

Her respectful demeanor and adherence to cultural values resonated with viewers, earning her further

admiration. She also mentioned her willingness to marry only someone chosen by her parents, further fueling online debates. Monalisa's story recalls past Mahakumbh sensations, such as Harsha Richariya and the "IIT Baba," whose unique presence also garnered widespread attention. While Monalisa's rise to fame adds a human-interest element to the Mahakumbh, it underscores the challenges of viral fame, especially for individuals unprepared for its overwhelming impact.



# 'Matka Crossing' of Mahakumbh: Visitors flock to click selfies with massive earthen pot

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The spiritual and devotional hub of the Mahakumbh area has gained a unique identity in Sector-7, now popularly referred to as the "Matka Crossing." This unofficial title has been bestowed by pilgrims visiting the Swachh Sujal Village, an initiative by the Jal Jeevan Mission, featuring a massive earthen pot sculpture at its entrance.

This grand installation, showcasing a cascade of clean water, has become a key attraction, drawing hordes of visitors. On Sunday, over one lakh pilgrims visited the

Swachh Sujal Village, marveling at its artistic beauty and innovative message on water conservation. Ajay, a pilgrim from Delhi visiting the Mahakumbh with his family, was exploring the various stalls in Sector-7. At one point, separated from his family, he called them and said, "I am at the Matka Crossing, come here." Many other pilgrims have similarly adopted this name for the area due to the striking sculpture. Adjacent to the Swachh Sujal Village's main entrance, the towering earthen pot has also become a favorite selfie point. Dipali, a visitor from Mumbai,

expressed her admiration, saying, "This pot is incredibly captivating. It shows how this Mahakumbh is not just about spirituality but also a confluence of art and culture." Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the Swachh Sujal Village offers visitors a chance to witness Uttar Pradesh's development story. Through artistic displays, the exhibition showcases the transformation of rural areas under the Jal Jeevan Mission. It highlights how regions like Bundelkhand, once plagued by acute water scarcity, now have access to clean drinking water in every household.

# Pipa bridges: Vital links between Sangam and Akhada areas at Mahakumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The temporary pipa bridges are playing key role in the grand arrangements of the Mahakumbh. These bridges are serving as vital links between the Sangam area and the Akhada area during the massive event.

The administration has divided the sprawling 40-square-kilometer Mela area into 25 sectors. These pipa bridges are an integral part of the Mahakumbh, offering a low-maintenance solution for the vast crowds. However, their operation requires constant monitoring, ensuring the safety and smooth movement of devotees 24/7. Engineer Alok Kumar from the Public Works Department explained that the pipa bridges are temporary structures built with large hollow iron containers (pontoon) floating on the water's surface. These are commonly known as 'pipe ka pul' in Prayagraj. These bridges have been built to facilitate movement not only for the public but also for the grand entry of 13



Akhadas, chariots, elephants, horses, and over 1,000 vehicles during the Amrit Snan at Mahakumbh. According to Kumar, he was entrusted with this significant task to build Pipa bridges in August 2023. To construct 30 pipa bridges for the Mahakumbh, 2,213 pontoons were used, the largest number ever. Over 1,000 workers, engineers, and officials worked tirelessly, often for 14 hours a day. The construction of these bridges was completed by October 2024 and subsequently

handed over to the Mela administration. The construction of 30 pipa bridges over the Ganga River for the Mahakumbh is the largest such project to date. After the conclusion of the fair, these bridges will be dismantled and stored for future use at other locations. The hollow pontoons, made of strong iron sheets, are lowered into the river with the help of cranes. Girder beams are then placed on these pontoons and secured with nuts and bolts. Hydraulic machines are used

to position the pontoons accurately. After that, thick wooden planks, sandy soil, and iron angles are added to further stabilize the bridges. Finally, checker plates are laid on the bridge surface to ensure it remains strong for the movement of pilgrims and vehicles. Each pontoon weighs about 5 tons, yet it floats on water. The secret lies in Archimedes' principle. PWD engineer Alok Kumar explained, "When an object is submerged in water, it experiences an upward force equal to the weight of the water displaced by it. This principle helps the heavy pontoons float." The design of the bridges is such that they can withstand up to 5 tons of weight. If the weight exceeds this limit, there is a risk of the bridge being damaged or sinking. Therefore, crowd management on the bridges is crucial. The construction of the 30 pipa bridges has cost Rs 17.31 crore. The bridge from Nagwasuki Temple to Jhoosi is the most expensive, costing Rs 1.13 crore, while the cost

of the Gangeshwar and Bharadwaj bridges ranged between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 89 lakh. The technology of pipa bridges is over 2,500 years old. They were first used in 480 BC by Persian King Xerxes I during his invasion of Greece. These types of bridges were also used during the Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC) in China. In India, the first pipa bridge was built in October 1874 over the Hooghly River between Howrah and Kolkata. It was designed by British engineer Sir Bradford Leslie. The bridge was supported by wooden pontoons but was damaged due to a cyclone. Eventually, it was dismantled in 1943, and the famous Howrah Bridge was constructed in its place. After the Mahakumbh 2025, these bridges will be disassembled and stored in safe locations. According to officials, some of the bridges will be stored in Sarainayat (Kenihar), Trivenipuram, and Parade Ground in Prayagraj. Others may be repurposed as temporary bridges in various districts of Uttar Pradesh.

# Ruling NDA slams Rahul Gandhi for dismissing state's caste survey as 'fake'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
PATNA

The ruling NDA in Bihar on Sunday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for terming as "fake" the caste survey conducted by Nitish Kumar government in the state. On his first tour of the state since Lok Sabha polls, Gandhi on Saturday vowed to push for a nationwide caste census and declared that he would see to it that the exercise was "not fake... Intended to befool people" like the one conducted in Bihar in 2022-23.

Reacting to the statement, state minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary of the JD(U) said "we cannot expect anything better from a politician who is unable to differentiate between Indian government and Indian state". The allusion was to a recent remark by Gandhi in Delhi, which has led to an FIR against the Congress in BJP-ruled Assam. Chaudhary reminded Gandhi that "his party had been supporting the caste survey all through. The government has also been willing to set right anomalies if these were pointed out with tangible evidence. In such a backdrop, the comment by Gandhi is just



another example of his propensity to speak things that sound ridiculous". Senior BJP leader and former minister Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain expressed similar sentiments and pointed out "till recently, Rahul Gandhi used to claim credit for Bihar's caste survey. It is bewildering on his part to call the survey fake". State minister Dilip Jaiswal, who is also the Bihar BJP chief, mockingly said, "Before holding forth on caste census, Rahul Gandhi should tell us to which caste does he belong". Incidentally, the Congress was a partner in the government headed by Nitish Kumar when the findings of the survey were

made public in October 2023. The survey highlighted a rise in the population percentage of Dalits and backward classes. Reacting to the attack on the party's top leader, state Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh claimed Gandhi had meant to underscore that the survey has since been "put in cold storage". "Nitish Kumar left us and joined hands with the BJP shortly after the survey's report was published. He has since been dragging his feet which makes one question his intentions," the former Union minister alleged. The Rajya Sabha MP pointed

out that "quotas for Dalits and backwards were raised in light of the findings of the survey. The legislation was set aside by the Patna High Court and the government has challenged the order in Supreme Court. Nitish Kumar is now hiding behind the excuse that the matter is before the court". "If the CM is serious about ensuring that deprived sections receive benefits, he should withdraw the petition, bring in a fresh legislation and then use his party's clout in the Centre to protect the new law from any judicial intervention by getting it placed in the ninth schedule of the Constitution," he said.

# Himachal CM directs forest department to protect migratory birds at Pong Dam

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Sunday directed the officers of the forest department to ensure the safety of migratory birds from Siberia and Mongolia that flock to Pong Dam.

Sukhu, who visited the Pong Dam in Kangra district for bird watching, also toured the ancient temples at the famous tourist site, Bathu-Ki-Lari. He highlighted the area's immense potential for tourism and emphasised the state's efforts to promote tourism in the region. He noted that migratory birds from Siberia and Mongolia attract visitors from across the country to Pong Dam and directed the forest department to take necessary steps to protect these birds, according to a statement issued here. To improve tourist experience, two boats have already been deployed and two additional speedboats would soon be added. Basic facilities for tourists will also be developed in the area, he informed. The number of migratory birds visiting Pong Dam has risen significantly this year, with 92,885 birds recorded by December 2024. The count



is expected to exceed one lakh by the end of the season. A total of 85,000 birds visited the dam during the entire season from October 2023 to January 2024. On average, around 100 species of migratory birds visit Pong Dam annually and 85 species have already been observed this season. The government's initiatives have led to an increase in tourist footfall, with nearly 30,000 tourists visiting the area last year. Efforts are underway to introduce water sports activities at the Regional Water Center near the Pong Dam Barrage, further boosting tourism in the region. In Basa, located in the Jawali assembly constituency, a Wildlife Interpretation Centre has been established

at a cost of Rs. 3.20 crore. The centre aims to enhance the tourist experience and provide educational resources about the region's biodiversity and the migratory patterns of birds. The center also offers accommodations, including dormitories for students from colleges and schools, allowing them to stay and learn about Pong's rich wildlife. "This unique opportunity will enable young minds to connect with nature, learn about the importance of conservation, and develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world," Sukhu said. "We invite bird enthusiasts, nature lovers and students to visit the area to experience the beauty and wonder of Pong's avian life," he added.

# 121 farmers end fast-unto-death at Khanauri Protest Site

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH



A group of 121 farmers, who sat on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri protest site in solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, ended their indefinite strike on Sunday after he took medical aid. Dallewal (70), who has refused any aid since he sat on a fast-unto-death on November 26, agreed on Saturday to take medical aid following the Centre's invitation for talks on February 14 to discuss farmers' demands. With his health deteriorating and the government not agreeing to their demands, a group of 111 farmers joined Dallewal's fast-unto-death on January 15, and sat on the Haryana side of the border near Khanauri. On January 17, 10 more farmers, who were from Haryana, joined them. The 121 farmers ended their fast by sipping juice in the presence of Deputy Inspector General of Police Mandeep Singh Sidhu and Patiala Senior Superintendent of Police Nanak Singh.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Trump in the Oval Office

As Trump begins his second term, he is likely to reshape domestic policies and redefining America's role in the world

Donald Trump will begin his second term as President of the United States today, marking a significant moment in US political history. The swearing-in ceremony has dignitaries from around the world in attendance. Notably, Chinese Vice President Han Zheng will represent China, highlighting the importance of US-China relations in the coming years. President Trump's second term is anticipated to commence with a series of decisive actions. Reports suggest that he plans to issue approximately 100 executive orders on his first day in office, targeting areas such as immigration, trade and energy. These orders aim to deport illegal immigrants, end birthright citizenship and reinstate the 'Muslim ban.'



Economically, he plans to raise tariffs, cut taxes and eliminate regulations. Trump seeks to boost fossil fuel production by reducing green energy initiatives. His cultural policies include banning transgender women from female sports and restricting hormone treatments for minors.

In the international arena, President Trump's approach to China is poised to be assertive. He has proposed imposing tariffs ranging from 10 per cent to 20 per cent on imports, with the possibility of escalating to 100 per cent for BRICS countries like China and Russia if they move away from using the US dollar. Additionally, Trump has indicated a focus on addressing issues such as fentanyl trafficking and the operations of Chinese companies like TikTok in the US. A recent phone call between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping covered topics including trade, fentanyl and TikTok, suggesting a complex and potentially contentious relationship moving forward. Another area which is more relevant to us here is his attitude towards Indian companies and tech professionals working in the US with H1-B visas. The relationship between the United States and India is expected to experience both opportunities and challenges during President Trump's second term. The personal rapport between President Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi may facilitate continued cooperation. However, Trump's "America First" policies could lead to heightened trade barriers, especially in sectors like information technology and pharmaceuticals, where India has significant interests. Despite these potential hurdles, India's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific region and its role in diversifying global supply chains away from China may provide avenues for strengthened collaboration between the two nations. As President Trump embarks on his second term, the global community will be closely monitoring how his administration's policies unfold, particularly in relation to major economies like China and India. The decisions made in the coming months will have profound implications for international trade, security and diplomatic relations.

### PICTALK



A farmer prepares an agricultural land for paddy cultivation, in Nadia

## Need for a unified global strategy against terrorism



SUDHIR HINDWAN

Nations must come together to share a common vision and adopt a multilayered approach that prioritises security, innovation and collaboration



In the face of escalating transnational terrorism, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive global anti-terror strategy. Such a plan should involve a shared strategic vision and a unified, multilayered approach to ensure safety and security across borders. To counter the evolving threats, nations must develop a fresh perspective that emphasises mature international cooperation and robust retaliation strategies to deter destabilising activities.

### Strengthening International Cooperation

Collaboration among nations is essential to design and implement an integrated strategic framework. This includes pooling development funds, fostering mutual trust and crafting plans to address shared security challenges. India, with its growing prominence on the global stage, is well-positioned to lead such efforts.

Its successful handling of key responsibilities—such as the G20 Presidency, leadership in the Quad Group, and chairing organizations like Interpol and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—demonstrates its capability to drive global strategic initiatives.

India's role in enhancing multi-layered security cooperation can serve as a model for addressing issues like the financing of terrorism, enhancing policing collaboration, countering cyber threats, and leveraging technological advancements. Tightened border and maritime security measures, coupled with efficient intelligence-sharing, are critical components of this strategy.

### Adapting to Evolving Challenges

The nature of global threats has become more severe, with adversaries employing increasingly sophisticated tactics. This calls for an adaptable and proactive approach to strategic policy-making. Nations, particularly in Asia, must diversify their strategies and implement forward-looking recommendations to effectively counter emerging challenges. A modernised approach to safety and security is imperative to outpace organised threats and propaganda-driven terror networks.

### Bridging Policy Gaps

A significant gap exists between theoretical strategies

and their practical application in countering terrorism. Regional political actors must engage in rigorous policy analysis and embrace innovative approaches to address these shortcomings. More integrated programs that support both military and law enforcement agencies are necessary to strengthen their efficiency in combating propaganda and terror. Community development within regional alliances like the Quad can also foster resilience against destabilising forces.

### Addressing Underlying Socio-economic Factors

In a globalised world, the imbalance of power and inequality in the international economy often fuel terrorism. Socio-economic disparities create fertile ground for non-state actors to exploit psychological vulnerabilities and propagate extremist ideologies. To counter this, nations must dismantle the mechanisms that enable the spread of false narratives and ill-intentioned ideologies.

### Specialised Counter-Terrorism Frameworks

A robust counter-terrorism strategy must include spe-

cialised think tanks and talent development programmes. These institutions can provide tactical expertise, real-time feedback, and innovative solutions to address evolving threats.

Interactive communication between intelligence, law enforcement and military branches can further enhance operational efficiency. A modern, vigilant, and assertive network of military, police, and paramilitary forces must replace outdated systems to address the complexities of modern terrorism.

### The Path Forward

To combat terrorism effectively, nations must overcome entrenched mindsets and outdated practices. Strategic planning should evolve to address the realities of state-sponsored terrorism and propaganda. Establishing a new consensus on international security and fostering a collaborative global environment are vital for achieving long-term stability.

(The author is a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor and expert in international relations; views are personal)



IN A GLOBALISED WORLD, THE IMBALANCE OF POWER AND INEQUALITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY OFTEN FUEL TERRORISM

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SELECTORS RETAIN ROHIT SHARMA

Madam — The news that the selectors have retained the Indian skipper Rohit Sharma for the upcoming series against England for ODIs and for the Championship Trophy. While Rohit was averaging 6 runs in his last six innings, on the other side, the Karun Nair is waiting for his chance by having proved his immense worth with 752 runs in 7 innings with an average of 752 with 5 recent unbeaten centuries to his credit at the much-acclaimed Vijay Hazare Trophy, still waiting for his place patiently. It is also disprising the Board's statement that the players must play the local games to prove themselves to claim their place at the international level was not considered in Karun Nair's case.

One can expect that during the crisis in the upcoming series, when the team struggles, in the name of injury, Nair may get a call back from Rohit to join the team, as we have seen such inclusions in the past. One thing is evident that the selection criteria lack complete transparency and without the godfather, finding a place is becoming increasingly difficult in the team. Ironically, Sanju Samson was dropped for the series by assigning reasons that the board was not happy because he didn't play the local games. Stranger than fiction of selection won't do good for the sport and currently for the Indian cricket.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

### JOBS OVER FREEBIES

Madam—The Delhi assembly elections have transformed into a marathon race for freebies without realising the negative impact on the state's economy and the diversion of massive funds for turning the potential workforce passive. Delhi loses its charm if the development, infrastructure, education, health, job creation and entrepreneurship are sacrificed. Delhi people should not ask for jobs as the parties are promising enough for their sustenance. Alas! After all, votes appear to decide their lives. The taxpayers pay taxes for the development, security and growth of the nation but virtually provide funds for freebies.

### Centre announces 8th Pay Commission



In a major decision, the Union government has announced the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries and pensions of over 1 crore central government employees and pensioners. With more money in the hands of the employees and pensioners after the implementation of recommendations of the next pay commission, the gov-

ernment is expecting a boost for overall consumption and demand in the economy. Though every employee deserves more, the appointment of a pay commission is an exercise against fiscal prudence.

At a time when 60 per cent of revenue expenditure is spent only on salary, pension, interest and subsidies, leaving only 40 per cent for development activities, the implementation of the 8th pay commission will further shrink the share of development activities in revenue expenditure. Every pay commission brings inflation to the economy, which affects the poor most. In addition, the financial condition of the states is not ready to bear the burden of another pay commission.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

Delhi is one of the biggest sources of revenue collection in income tax and GST. At least the taxpayers should have the option in their ITRs to invest or spend their taxes towards national security, education, industrial and civil infrastructure, health and welfare schemes.

All the welfare schemes and freebies are funded at the cost of higher electricity, water and municipal taxes paid by the non-eligible class besides taxes paid by them. In the long run, the taxpayers may be demotivated to pay taxes honestly as the political parties are squandering their hard-earned money on freebies, which are the antithesis of growth and development. At least the BJP was expected to promise jobs to the youth and empower them instead of turning them into dead wood like other parties. We should not lose the demographic dividend by parasitising the youth.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

### EXPECTATIONS BURDEN WOMEN

Madam — Refer to The Silent Struggles of a Daughter-in-Law. A call to change

(January 18). The natural shift in family roles—where elders move from decision-makers to mentors (less responsibility, less freedom) and younger generations take on more responsibilities and more freedom in decision-making—can become complicated when societal pressures interfere. High expectations with society's rigid rules on newer generations often result in rigid roles, particularly for daughters-in-law, who are expected to navigate complex expectations. This situation may hinder the balance within the family.

To achieve the ultimate goal of love, care, and empathy, families must embrace internal management and communication rather than following society's rigid rules that allow shared responsibilities and individuality. This fosters understanding and reduces the generational gap, creating harmony and mutual respect among family members. The ultimate goal is a stable and loving society.

Riti Dwivedi | Indore

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## When elephants roamed beyond: A remarkable journey through China



C K NAYAK

A historic event captivated the world as a herd of 15 wild elephants embarked on a 500-km journey from Xishuangbanna to the bustling city of Kunming

Some time back an extraordinary event unfolded in China: for the first time in recorded history, a herd of 15 wild elephants embarked on an unprecedented journey. Leaving their natural habitat in Xishuangbanna (commonly referred to as Banna), the elephants traveled over 500 kilometers to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Xishuangbanna, an autonomous prefecture for the ethnic Dai people, lies in the southernmost part of Yunnan, bordering Myanmar and Laos.



This remarkable migration captured the attention of the world, with live 24/7 broadcasts and drones following their every move. The Chinese authorities, committed to the conservation of these majestic creatures, responded with care rather than confrontation. However, their journey caused panic among local residents, who abandoned their homes in fear. Despite trampling crops and cornfields along the way, the elephants did not harm any humans. In some instances, curious jumbos ventured

human activity. Large-scale commercial rubber cultivation, introduced to Banna, has significantly disrupted the region's rainforest ecosystem.

These plantations, consisting of monocultures of Brazilian rubber trees, replace diverse habitats, further encroaching on the elephants' range. Asian elephants, an endangered species, number only about 300 in the wild in China, primarily in Banna. Protecting these animals is a national priority. Emergency workers and volunteers were mobilised during the migration, providing tonnes of corn, pineapples and other food to ensure both the safety of the elephants and the local population. Trucks and drones were deployed to guide the animals along safe paths, offering them a feast akin to a celebratory banquet. Xishuangbanna is a biodiversity hotspot, home to a wide variety of flora and fauna.

The region's tropical climate and historical isolation have preserved its rich ecosystems. In addition to Asian elephants, the area supports other endangered species

such as green peacocks, wild oxen, and monkeys. The Wild Elephant Valley Forest Park, located 47 kilometers north of Jinghong city, serves as a key conservation site. Spanning 369 hectares, this park provides a haven for wildlife and a unique opportunity for visitors to observe elephants.

The reserve features observation towers, allowing visitors to watch wild elephants bathing, playing, and strolling. A cableway provides breathtaking views of the valley, while the park's elephant-domestication school entertains visitors with performances by trained elephants, including dancing, headstands, and football tricks. Looking ahead, the Chinese government plans to establish an Asian Elephant Breeding Centre in Banna to further conservation efforts. These initiatives aim to protect not only the elephants but also the rich biodiversity of this unique region, ensuring a harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)





## FIRST COLUMN

## A REUNION OF HEARTS, MINDS AND THE DIVINE

Today, we are connected not just by the bonds of friendship but by the threads of technology



RAVI VALLURI

Three decades ago, we were perhaps merely a group of motley friends and acquaintances. We were a bunch of strapping youngsters and petite women who had flowered from their teens, all tutees in an estimable institution. Three decades back we professed and cherished a heterogeneity of political ideologies spanning the left, right and center spectrums, in an era of a controlled economy and what also was the pre-globalisation era. This was a generation ago. Meanwhile, the Soviet economy crumbled and disintegrated, the Berlin Wall collapsed and diverse countries swiftly embraced consumerism and capitalism. A talismanic Zuckerberg bought a contrivance called WhatsApp from Jan Koum. All the technology and gadgets have provided seamless connectivity and people across the globe have been moored, and so it was with us. In a trice, we were all trussed up through WhatsApp.

A few months of endless chatting on WhatsApp resulted in a clarion call for a reunion. This was followed by frenetic preparations and a homecoming took place at the opulent Rajputana Sheraton, Jaipur. The assembly and the bonding were indeed amazing. For three days and four nights we were to shed our past baggage and live another life. The friends of yesteryears conducted themselves as a group of children rediscovering their roots. This is purely a physical pining. The geometry and architecture of the human mind are unmindful, unsuspecting and unaware of the exalted, elevated and lofty state it is capable of. This is the pining and longing for the Divine. The same longing that Radha Arjuna or Sudama possessed for Lord Krishna. This is true of all religions, faiths and spiritual masters. Like Yusuf, Dawud, Sulayman, and Ibrahim beckoned Allah. Akin to what the apostles, and more recently, Saint Teresa felt for Jesus or Ananda for Buddha. This is divine love without any attach-



ments and entanglements. This is not an emotion of craving but that of five Es. What are these five Es? The devotee, seeker and devout are subsumed with exhilaration, ecstasy, euphoria, elation, exultation and ebullience. This is the authentic and genuine pining for the Divine. It is a meditative state in which the seeker or the disciple basks in the glory of the Master and utters his name with the doctrine of the three Cs: credence, confidence, and conviction.

Yes, the enlightened Buddha does say nothing is permanent in life, and impermanence is the only constant factor. However, the heart and mind aching for the Divine is voracious. It transcends all boundaries and frontiers. Feelings and emotions encompass the human mind with constructive and efficacious thoughts, where it becomes intrepid to scale and surmount any misadventure. To elaborate further, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar poses a teaser, "Do we give quality time to the Divine?" He goes on to add, that we do that only after partying hard, watching some tantalizing movies and entertaining guests. The remainder or balance of our time is set aside by the mind to pine for the Divine.

The universe thus showers upon us only that quantum of benediction and bounty, depending upon our tapas or the tractive effort of the mind. However, through methodical and punctilious practice of techniques like yoga, pranayama, meditation and the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya, the mind can achieve the state of continuous communion with the Divine by remaining in the present moment. So, what happened to the group that met after thirty years? They are in abiding and sustained touch. Perhaps a dash of spiritual sparkle is required to cement the bonding from within and without.

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

## LPG subsidies: Give it to the poor and needy



UTTAM GUPTA

As state-owned oil companies grapple with massive losses from selling LPG below cost, the Govt is set to allocate Rs 35,000 crore in subsidies to mitigate the financial burden



During the current financial year (FY) 2024-25, the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) are expected to incur an under-recovery of Rs 19,550 crore, Rs 10,400 crore and Rs 10,570 crore respectively on sales of LPG to household consumers. To make up for this loss totalling Rs 40,500 crore, the Union Government is likely to provide a subsidy of Rs 35,000 crore. In the Budget for 2025-26, to be presented on February 1, 2025, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will make a provision of Rs 10,000 crore in the revised estimate (RE) for the current FY and the remaining Rs 25,000 crore in the budget estimate (BE) for 2025-26.

The under-recovery arose because these corporations sold LPG for Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder against the cost of supplying at the retail point being higher. The cost is calculated as the refinery-gate price or RGP (taken as import parity price or IPP and export parity price or EPP in the ratio of 80:20) plus freight, marketing costs, marketing margin, dealers' commission, and taxes and duties. During the current FY, the cost is Rs 1043 per cylinder, and the loss is Rs 240 per cylinder which on total sales of 169 crore cylinders would be Rs 40,500 crore. Modi - government had stopped giving subsidies on LPG during FY 2021-22. Then, how come, it continues to make huge payments from the budget? LPG is an environment and human-friendly fuel that meets the needs of millions of households (HHS).

Subsidy on LPG ought to be given only to those HHS who are poor. The government also needs to track the income status of the beneficiaries and withdraw support from those who become better off and can pay cost-based prices. Ignoring these cardinal principles, the subsidy was given to anyone who had an LPG connection. It went to all and sundry including the rich. The poor who alone should have got it sat at the bottom. According to the Economic Survey (2015-16), only 0.07 per cent of LPG subsidies in rural areas went to a fifth of the



LPG IS AN ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN-FRIENDLY FUEL THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF MILLIONS OF HOUSEHOLDS (HHS). SUBSIDY ON LPG OUGHT TO BE GIVEN ONLY TO THOSE HHS WHO ARE POOR. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO NEEDS TO TRACK THE INCOME STATUS OF THE BENEFICIARIES AND WITHDRAW SUPPORT FROM THOSE WHO BECOME BETTER OFF AND CAN PAY

poorest households. In urban areas, the poorest fifth got only 8.2 per cent.

A lot of subsidies went to fake beneficiaries or the diversion of stocks (albeit subsidised) of LPG cylinders to hotels, restaurants, and other commercial users. Despite lacking sound justification, sheer populism drove politicians to give subsidies to all and sundry. They found ways to give it without taking the burden on the Centre's balance sheet. Initially, the subsidy on LPG (besides petrol and diesel) was cross-funded/subsidised by charging more on the sale of other products such as fuel oil, naphtha, ATF, etc. hence, no burden on the budget. In 2002-03, the Vajpayee-led NDA government ended the above system and decided to give subsidies on these products directly from the budget with the intent to eventually disband them. But, that was not to be.

The UPA government which took charge in 2004, even while continuing with subsidised sales, used disingenuous methods such as the issue of oil bonds to IOCL/BPCL/HPCL (instead of losses incurred by them due to selling these products at below-cost prices), and sale of domestic crude oil by stated owned upstream oil and gas companies viz. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Limited (OIL), etc. at a discounted price to these fuel refiners-cum-retailers. In June 2010, petrol was decontrolled followed by diesel in November 2014. As for LPG, the Kelkar Committee recommended the removal of 25 per cent of the subsidy in 2012-13 and 75 per cent in the following two years. Modi Government which took charge in May 2014, started acting on it but in a calibrated manner. On January 1, 2015, it launched a direct benefit transfer (DBT) of subsidy.

Under DBT, oil PSUs deliver the cylinder to the beneficiaries at a full cost-based price and follow it up by depositing a subsidy in the beneficiary's account.

In turn, they claim reimbursement of the subsidy amount from the Centre. This helped in eliminating fake beneficiaries and curbing misuse that was inherent in the erstwhile system wherein subsidy was embedded in the price. But, the government couldn't muster the courage to trim the number of beneficiary HHS sans Modi requesting the rich to give up on their own.

The FY 2020-21 was a boon, viewed from a subsidy angle. In that year, there was a steep decline in international prices (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) leading to a fall in the cost of supplying an LPG cylinder to a low of Rs 600; hence, it could be given to all HHS at Rs 600 requiring no subsidy support. The BE of Rs 36,000 crore for that year was used largely to clear past dues of oil PSUs and provide free gas connections under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). During 2021-22 when the international price rose due to waning COVID and demand revival, the cost of LPG zoomed to over Rs 900 per cylinder.

This prompted the government to give subsidies but only to the PMUY beneficiaries. They were 9.6 crore out of a total of 33 crore HHS. It spent Rs 14,000 crore during that year. During 2022-23, it spent Rs 9,170 crore. But, this doesn't tell the full story. From June 2020 to June 2022, the government had asked the three fuel retailers namely IOCL/BPCL/HPCL to sell LPG at a price below cost and gave them a one-time grant of Rs 22,000 crore to compensate for the losses incurred in 2021-22 and 2022-23 (against under-recovery of Rs 28,250 crore).

This was nothing but subsidy (albeit 'hidden') given to all and sundry, and not just PMUY beneficiaries. In the Budget for 2023-24, it kept the BE for LPG subsidy at Rs 2,257 crore. As in the previous two years, that allocation was meant to cover subsidy to PMUY beneficiary HHS @ Rs 200 per cylinder for up to 12 refills per year. However, to benefit all the 33 crore HHS, on August 29, 2023, the Union Cabinet approved a reduction in the price by Rs 200 per cylinder effective from August 30, 2023, thereby enabling the PSU retailers to sell it at Rs 903 per cylinder (Delhi). Taking 4 fills per HH, @Rs 200 per cylinder, the annual burden comes to Rs 26,400 crore (200x4x33).

Since the decision was effective from August 30, 2023, for the remaining seven months of FY 2023-24, the outgo would be around Rs 15,300 crore. On March 9, 2024, the fuel retailers namely IOCL/BPCL/HPCL were asked to cut the price by another Rs 100 per cylinder (courtesy, of general elections) to Rs 803.

During the current FY 2024-25, the price has remained unchanged despite the cost remaining at an elevated level. The under-recovery for 2023-24 and 2024-25 thus comes to over Rs 40,000 crore of which the Centre now wants to reimburse Rs 35,000 crore. This and the earlier payment of Rs 22,000 crore for loss incurred by IOCL/BPCL/HPCL during 2021-22 and 2022-23 could have been avoided if only it had stuck to its earlier stance of restricting LPG subsidy only to the poor HHS and keeping it transparent. But, this is unthinkable in the current political climate wherein all decisions based on sound economic logic are hamstrung by populism.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

## The silent epidemic: The untold story of gender inequality against men in India

Indian society, long entrenched in patriarchy and gender inequality against women, is now grappling with an overlooked dimension of the issue—gender inequality against men

Indian society has always been dominated by patriarchy and gender inequality against women. However, the two recent suicides of a techie and a head constable, both alleging extortion and harassment by their estranged wives and families, point to a highly skewed, female-oriented and obsolete legal framework. Gender inequality largely remains a half-told story, deprived of the male counterpart.

The legal system in India favours women with the dowry laws in India being specifically highly discriminatory. As per section 113B of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (now Bhartiya Saksham Adhiyam, 2023) if a married woman commits



KAJLEEN KAUR

suicide within 7 years of marriage, it is assumed that the husband or his family abetted suicide, while the same does not apply to women. Marriage litigation experts claim that when women file complaints against their husbands and families, the dynamics of abuse and unclear documentation frequently make

these cases highly complex and a woman's statement is usually considered at face value, creating a significant imbalance in the legal process.

Additionally, females also get a preference in the custody of children especially in younger ages below 5 years, in most divorce cases, as per the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022 data, men accounted for 1,22,724 suicides out of a total of 1,70,896.

This is 71.81 per cent of all suicides. The data also highlights that a man commits suicide every 4.45 minutes while a woman every 9 minutes. Moreover, the rate of

suicide among married men is three times that of married women. In 2021 as many as 81,063 married men committed suicide while the women's figure stood at 28,660.

Family problems and marriage-related issues were the leading causes of suicide in metropolitan cities, accounting for 32.5 per cent of the cases. Gender inequality towards men finds limited discussions both culturally and in academic research, not just in India but globally. However, a closer look at the facts reveals a biased feminist societal structure predominantly. According to the founder of a Delhi-based organisation, Purush Ayog, society stereotypes assume that 'males



cannot be victims', which leads to ignorance and neglect of the issues facing them. A study by Stoet and Geary, 2019 for 134 countries claimed that men were more disadvantaged in 91

(68 per cent) countries than women. They argued that the Global Gender Gap was flawed, due to lopsided measuring techniques, which did not include situations where men are disadvan-

tagged, due to the absence of literature.

Another study in France found that discrimination against men in female-dominated workplaces is more prevalent than discrimination against women in male-dominated workplaces. Similar examples of reverse sexism, with anti-male prejudice are vastly prevalent, but ironically barely quoted. The mental health research is also focussed on women, and scholars warn of the problems faced by men as a 'silent epidemic'. In the legal framework, the female culprits are less likely to have longer and more stringent imprisonment for similar crimes. Women's liberalisation and empowerment are necessary

for a progressive social structure and developed economy. Still, a gender-equal status should not be thrived at the cost of male exploitation.

In modern-day society, with evolving gender roles and relationships; better education and awareness; and a feminism gaining force, balanced matrimonial laws are more pertinent than ever. The government must consider amending marriage laws to include prenuptial agreements to address financial complexities, disputes, and legal rights.

(The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



# 'Trump wants to visit China, talked about possible trip to India'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump wants to travel to China after he takes office as part of his effort to deepen relations with Beijing, and also has talked to advisors about visit to India, a media report said Saturday. Trump, who arrived at the Dulles International Airport aboard a special plane along with First Lady Melania and son Barron, had during his election campaign threatened to impose additional tariffs on China. "President-elect Donald Trump has told advisors he wants to travel to China after he takes office, according to people familiar with the discussions, seeking to deepen a relationship with Xi Jinping strained by the president-elect's threat to impose steeper tariffs on Chinese imports," The Wall Street Journal reported. "Trump has also talked to advisors about a possible trip to India, according to people close to him," the financial daily said. According to familiar sources, a preliminary level of talks were initiated when External Affairs Minister S

Jaishankar visited Washington DC around Christmas last month. India is all set to host the QUAD Summit composed of leaders from Australia, Japan and the United States. The visit could happen as early as April or in the fall later this year. It is also being considered as a possibility that Prime Minister Narendra Modi might be invited by Trump for a White House meeting this spring. A day earlier, Trump had spoken with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi has deputized Vice-President Han Zheng to attend Trump's swearing-in ceremony, the first time a senior Chinese official will be present at a US presidential inauguration. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar would represent India at the inaugural. Trump invited Xi to his inauguration, however, the Chinese leader never attends the swearing-in of foreign leaders. After the talks, Trump said he held a "very good" phone call with Xi. "I just spoke to Chairman Xi Jinping of China," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "It is my

expectation that we will solve many problems together, and starting immediately." Trump said the pair discussed trade, fentanyl, TikTok and other subjects, and asserted that the call was "very good" for both countries. "President Xi and I will do everything possible to make the World more peaceful and safe!" Trump said. According to The Wall Street Journal, a Beijing meeting would come at a fraught moment in the relationship between the world's leading superpowers. Along with potential new tariffs on Chinese imports, Trump has also pushed Beijing to crack down on Chinese chemical producers that supply the ingredients for fentanyl to Mexican cartels, it said. **TRUMP LIKELY TO SIGN 100 EXECUTIVE ORDERS** When Donald Trump walks into the White House Monday afternoon soon after his swearing-in, 100 plus executive orders would be waiting for him on his Oval Office Desk, which his team has prepared for him to kickoff his second term without wasting any



minute. These executive orders are mainly aimed at fulfilling his poll promises. In an interview to NBC news, Trump said he is planning to sign a "record-setting" number of executive actions on day one. "Well, at least in that category," Trump said when asked if these executive orders would be more than 100. An executive order is an order issued unilaterally by the president who carries the force of law. Unlike legislation, executive orders do not require Congressional approval. Though Congress cannot overturn them, they can be challenged in the court of law.

"We have a record-setting number of documents that I'll be signing right after this (inauguration) speech," Trump said. He would be sworn-in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20. One of his close associates Stephen Miller told a news channel that these would mainly be around five topics: sealing the Southern border, mass deportation, preventing transgender people from women's sports, removing restrictions on energy exploration and improving government efficiency. Among his executive orders is expected to be pardoning his

supporters who were arrested by law enforcement agencies for their role in the attack on the US Capitol on January 6 four years ago. Trump, 78, is also expected to roll back some of the executive orders and actions of the outgoing President Joe Biden. Prominent among them include the Paris Climate agreement, lifting restrictions on fossil fuel production and expanding domestic oil drilling. "This flex of power will quickly implement much of his agenda as Congress takes up his legislative priorities," Sara Carter said. "I've been told it's going to be shock and awe as far as executive orders and all the lists of things that are going to happen on January 20th. And that they're going to throw a lot into the first day," Fox News anchor Bret Baier said. Many call it an ambitious agenda. "I don't think it's hyperbole. Is it ambitious? Yes. But it's absolutely doable," said EJ Antoni, public finance economist at The Heritage Foundation, who has analyzed past executive orders told The Washington Times. "When you think about the amount of

time his team has had to prepare those executive orders, it's perfectly reasonable to think those orders will be on the Resolute Desk on the day of the inauguration," he said. Republican Senator Ted Cruz Congressman Jodey Arrington have introduced legislation to repeal an Executive Order issued by President Biden on January 6, that banned American energy exploration on over 625 million acres of offshore territory. Trump is expected to reverse this through his own executive order. In an interview to NBC News in December, Trump said he would fulfill a campaign promise to levy tariffs on imports from America's biggest trading partners. He is likely to sign executive orders previously announced tariffs on countries like China, Mexico and Canada. Biden on his first day had issued nine executive order. Six of these were overturning the decisions of his predecessor Trump. In the first week, he had signed 22 executive orders. During his campaign trail, Trump had given an indication of his first day executive orders.

"On day one, I will launch the largest deportation program of criminals in the history of America," Trump repeatedly said on the campaign trail. "I want to close the border, and I want to drill, drill, drill," he said at another rally. Politico said Trump's emphasis as he enters the Oval Office on Monday is sending a loud signal that the border is closed to illegal crossings and that anyone who is living in the US unauthorised, especially those who have committed crimes, is not safe from deportation. "He'll do so through a slew of executive orders and actions, launching the process of resurrounding policies from his first term, shredding Biden administration immigration policy and taking what Trump officials have labeled the "hand-cuffs" off of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials," the media outlet reported. Axios reported that Trump is setting the stage for an explosive first day in office: pardons for Jan. 6 rioters, a vacuum sealing of the southern border and a massive regulatory roll-back affecting vast swathes of the American economy.

## Who is Itamar, Isarel minister who resigned from Netanyahu cabinet?

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Israel's far-right national security minister resigned from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet on Sunday to express his disapproval of the Gaza ceasefire deal. The resignation of Itamar Ben-Gvir does not threaten the ceasefire, but it does weaken Netanyahu's governing coalition. If other far-right lawmakers leave the government — as Ben-Gvir has encouraged them to do — the prime minister could lose his parliamentary majority, potentially forcing early elections. It was the latest act of defiance by the 48-year-old ultranationalist settler leader who transformed himself over the decades from an outlaw and provocateur into one of Israel's most influential politicians.

The ceasefire will pause the war and free dozens of hostages held by militants in Gaza. Ben-Gvir opposed the deal because it requires Israel to free hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and to withdraw troops from Gaza's southern border with Egypt — and because it leaves open the possibility of Hamas staying in power in Gaza. Ahead of the resignation, he said the ceasefire was "reckless" and would "destroy all of Israel's achievements." In his Cabinet post, Ben-Gvir oversaw the country's police force. He used his influence to encourage Netanyahu to press ahead with the war in Gaza and recently boasted that he had blocked past efforts to reach a ceasefire. He also has paid multiple visits to Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site — the contested hill-

top compound that houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque — including last month. In one such visit in July, he said he came to pray for the return of the hostages "but without a reckless deal, without surrendering." The move, while legal, was seen as a provocation, violated a longstanding ban on Jewish prayer there, and threatened to disrupt months of sensitive negotiations. The site is revered by Jews as the Temple Mount. Ben-Gvir has been convicted eight times for offences that include racism and supporting a terrorist organisation. As a teen, his views were so extreme that the army banned him from compulsory military service. Ben-Gvir gained notoriety in his youth as a follower of the late racist rabbi Meir Kahane. He first became a

national figure when he broke a hood ornament off then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's car in 1995. "We got to his car, and we'll get to him too," he said, just weeks before Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist opposed to his peace efforts with the Palestinians. Two years later, Ben-Gvir took responsibility for orchestrating a campaign of protests, including death threats, that forced Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor to cancel a concert for peace in Jerusalem. The political rise of Ben-Gvir was the culmination of years of efforts by the media-savvy lawmaker to gain legitimacy. But it also reflected a rightward shift in the Israeli electorate that brought his religious, ultranationalist ideology into the mainstream and diminished hopes for Palestinian independence.

## TikTok shuts down as US ban takes effect

PTI ■ HOUSTON

TikTok's app effectively shut down in the US, just hours before a law banning the popular video-sharing platform was set to go into effect. "A law banning TikTok has been enacted in the US Unfortunately, that means you can't use TikTok for now," a message reads when American users open the app. "We are fortunate that President Trump has indicated that he will work with us on a solution to reinstate TikTok once he takes office. Please stay tuned!" While the Biden administration dismissed TikTok's shutdown threat as a "stunt" and handed enforcement to the Trump administration, TikTok maintained that without clear assurances, it had no choice but to suspend its services in the US. An internal email to employees stated that President Trump has expressed his intention to work



on a solution to restore TikTok once he assumes office on January 20th. TikTok assured teams are working to resume services as soon as possible. On Saturday evening, a warning appeared in both TikTok and CapCut apps at 9 PM Eastern time: "We regret that a US law banning TikTok will take effect on January 19th, forcing us to temporarily suspend our services. We're working to restore our service in the US as soon as possible. Thank you for your support. Stay tuned." By 10:30 PM ET, users were blocked from accessing both

apps, with TikTok displaying a message that the app "isn't available right now," but expects resolution under President-elect Trump. It comes after days of speculation and confusion over the platform's future. The Supreme Court on Friday unanimously upheld the divest-or-ban law, which gave TikTok's China-based parent company ByteDance until Sunday to divest from the app. The law directed Apple and Google to remove the service from app stores. It also required web-hosting firms, including TikTok's back-end cloud provider, Oracle, to stop supporting the app or face penalties that could reach into the billions of dollars, NPR reported. Trump said Saturday that he would most likely give TikTok a 90-day extension. "The 90-day extension is something that will be most likely done, because it's appropriate. You know, it's appropri-

ate. We have to look at it carefully," Trump said in a call with "Meet the Press" moderator Kristen Welker. "It's a very big situation." The law, which passed Congress with wide bipartisan majorities and was signed by President Biden in April, allows the president to provide a 90-day extension, as long as progress is being made toward a divestiture. Following Friday's Supreme Court decision, TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew thanked the president-elect for his commitment to finding a solution to keep the app accessible in the US. Chew, who met with Trump at Mar-a-Lago last month, is set to attend Monday's inauguration, the Hill reported. While the app's message and Trump's remarks suggest the app could be revived in the US soon, it remains unclear exactly what that would look like and how long a divestiture deal could take to hammer out.

## British Indians welcome launch of Bradford City of Culture 2025

Bradford/London (PTI): Bradford in the northern England county of West Yorkshire recently launched its City of Culture 2025 festivities, with British Indians enthusiastically joining in to showcase the region's diversity, vibrant bazaars and curry restaurants. Bradford was designated the UK City of Culture for 2025 after winning government backing from a record-breaking 20 bids. The initiative, covering the entire Bradford district across West Yorkshire, opened last weekend with a glittering performance that paid homage to the region as a melting pot of cultures — with one in three residents identifying as being of South Asian heritage. "Our communities can and should be empowered to come

together, tell their story and create change in their local area. That is what the UK City of Culture competition is all about," said Lisa Nandy, the British Indian Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. "So much enthusiasm and hard work has gone into organising Bradford's year. There is a real buzz in the city as people get ready to showcase their talents. I would encourage everyone to go and see some of the fantastic events in the new year," she said. A year-long roster of performances, exhibitions, events and activities inspired by the extraordinary variety of the landscape, from the city's historic centre to the bucolic countryside that surrounds it, will pay homage to

Bradford's potent heritage as everything from a former industrial powerhouse to the world's first UNESCO City of Film. Deepak Sharma, Trustee of Bradford Hindu Council — one of the many community groups who were hard at work since 2018 to put together the winning bid, is ecstatic about the Diwali, rangoli and Yoga events in the pipeline for the year. "What our community is looking to do with Bradford being the City of Culture is looking to showcase our roots and diversity here," said Sharma, born in Bradford to parents who migrated from Punjab. "We're going to do some rangoli with children, Yoga for International Yoga Day and a series of events planned for the summer such as mehndi festivals.

## Biden spending final full day in office in South Carolina which helped him become president

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Joe Biden is spending his final full day in office Sunday in South Carolina, a state that holds special meaning after a commanding win in the 2020 Democratic primary there set him up to achieve his life's goal of being elected president of the United States. On the eve of Monday's inauguration of Republican President-elect Donald Trump, Biden planned to deliver a final farewell from the state that brought him to the dance, as he likes to say. Biden, accompanied by his wife, first lady Jill Biden, was scheduled to visit Royal Missionary Baptist Church in North Charleston to worship and speak on the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.,

the White House said. Monday is the federal holiday honouring the slain civil rights leader. Afterward, the Bidens will tour the International African American Museum. It was built on a waterfront site where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans were brought to the US from the late 1760s through 1808, according to the museum's website. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-SC, a key Biden ally, said the trip was Biden's way of saying "thank you" to the state. "Joe Biden is showing once again who he is by coming back to the state that really launched him to the presidency," Clyburn told The Associated Press in an interview. The president delivered a televised farewell address to the nation on Wednesday. Back in

2020, Biden saw his campaign flounder after he lost the opening contests in New Hampshire, Iowa and Nevada. But at the fourth stop, South Carolina — where Black voters make up a majority of the Democratic electorate — he was lifted to victory after Clyburn's endorsement. "I know Joe. But most importantly, Joe knows us," the congressman said at the time. After winning election and taking office, Biden pushed for South Carolina to move to the head of the line and be the state that opened the Democratic Party's nominating process for 2024, instead of New Hampshire. He easily won the state's primary that year. "In 2020, it was the voters of South Carolina who

proved the pundits wrong, breathed new life into our campaign, and set us on the path to winning the presidency," Biden said in a statement after winning the primary for the second time. "Now in 2024, the people of South Carolina have spoken again and I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the Presidency again — and making Donald Trump a loser — again." It didn't turn out that way. After faltering in a debate against Trump, Biden dropped out of the race under pressure from many Democrats, though Clyburn notably was not among them. Biden endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris, who replaced him as the Democrats' nominee. She lost to Trump.

## Nearly 60 people killed in Colombia

San Juan (PTI): Officials in Colombia say about 60 people have been killed in the country's northeast region following failed attempts to hold peace talks with the National Liberation Army. Among those killed are seven people who sought to sign a peace deal, as well as community leader Carmelo Guerrero, according to a report that a government ombudsman agency released last Saturday. Officials said the attacks occurred in several towns located in the Catatumbo region, with at least three people who were part of the peace talks being kidnapped. Hundreds of people are fleeing the area, with some hiding in the nearby lush mountains. Colombia's government has demanded that the National Liberation Army, known as ELN, cease all attacks and allow authorities to enter the region and provide humanitarian aid.



Christian Orthodox believers walk after a swim in the icy water of the Danube river in Belgrade, Serbia, on Sunday

## Families of wildfire victims mired in grief

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES

The house was burning with her brother-in-law and nephew inside when Jackie McDaniels flagged down a firetruck and begged for help. "Whoever is in there is no longer alive," she recalled one of the firemen telling her before urging her to flee her Altadena neighbourhood. "I pray to God that they were. But it was horrible to have to leave them there." Now McDaniels, like so many, is facing the gripping realities of grief and questions about what more could have been done. Experts say these survivors are victims themselves; the fires that swept through the Los Angeles area this month were fast-moving and fierce. "It's really just a different beast of a fire when it's this propagating entity of just total mayhem," said Benjamin Hatchett, a fire meteorologist with the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere

at Colorado State University. But that doesn't ease the pain or the questions for the families of the more than two dozen killed, some unable to escape, others unaware of what was coming, having survived other blazes unscathed. Among the dead is Dalcy Curry, who rubbed shoulders with some of the elites of old Hollywood in her youth. To family, she went by a different name. "Momma Dee, that's the fire," her granddaughter and namesake, Dalcy Kelley, recalls saying as she drove the 95-year-old to her Altadena home on January 7 after a day of medical tests. But the flames they saw seemed so far away and power was still on. Now Kelley wishes she would have asked more questions, wishes she would have returned earlier. "I will live with that regret for the rest of my life," she said. That saddens Jennifer Marlon, a wildfire and climate research scientist at Yale's School of the

Environment. She said larger factors were at play, the summer the warmest on record in California, drying out the vegetation that fuelled the flames. "These are, by and large, not situations that people could have really anticipated," she said. "It's incredibly tragic that people are blaming themselves and wracked with guilt." Yet it is a common response, said Tory Fiedler, a Red Cross disaster mental health manager who is helping to coordinate the response to the wildfires. "Most of us get our sense of self and value from what we do in service to others," she said. "When I'm not able to do that, I feel bad about that," she added. "I feel guilty that I didn't get to help. I didn't do enough. I survived and other people didn't, and I can't help them. And it's not just I survived and other people didn't, but I don't know what to do about that." Compounding the pain is the

fact that many families are still awaiting formal notification from the medical examiner, a process that could take weeks. During that painful wait, Carol Smith has been praying. Her son, Randy Miod, a 55-year-old surfer, known to friends as Craw Daddy, had lived in his Malibu home for three decades, first as a renter and then the owner. Known as the "Crab Shack," it was a popular hang-out spot for surfers, with loaner boards always available. She said he never evacuated for wildfires, including during the Franklin Fire in December that knocked out power to his home for three days. "I'm scared," she recalled him telling her the last time they spoke. She begged of him, "Please, go somewhere safe, so I don't worry." But he wasn't budging, telling her: "I've got the hose. And he said, 'Pray for the Palisades and pray for Malibu. And I love you.'"



# Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government launches op in Kurram district

**PTI ■ PESHAWAR**

Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provincial government on Sunday launched an operation in troubled areas of Kurram district after armed men attacked an aid convoy transporting goods to Parachinar and killed several people, officials said.

The operation started in four village councils of Lower Kurram district, including Bagan, Mandori, Chapri and Chapripao, to secure the roads and establish lasting peace in the region, where sectarian clashes have left dozens dead since November, they said. The KPK government spokesperson has officially announced the initiation of the operation in troubled areas of the restive Kurram district. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting attended by Chief Secretary KPK, IG Police, and other civil and police officials.

The meeting decided to take strict action against terrorists without any discrimination. The state supports peaceful elements, and oppressors would be brought to justice, officials said.

Deputy Commissioner Ashfaq Ahmed issued a notification on Saturday to establish camps in Thal and Hangru for the displaced people. The Express Tribune newspaper reported. Security forces will assist police and civil administration in action against miscreants. The government sus-

## Security forces kill 5 terrorists

**Karachi (PTI):** Pakistani security forces on Sunday killed five suspected terrorists attempting to cross into the Balochistan province of Pakistan from Afghanistan, the ISPR said. According to the military's media wing, the terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group were killed while trying to infiltrate the Zhob district of the restive province early Sunday. Pakistan has regularly asked the Afghanistan Taliban government to take action against the TTP militant group which the Pakistan government blames for terror attacks in Pakistan. The Pakistan government emphasises the TTP militants operate from their hide-

outs in the neighbouring country which shares its borders with two provinces of Pakistan. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been strained due to frequent border skirmishes. Kabul, however, denies the TTP was behind the attacks in Pakistan. The ISPR statement reiterated that Pakistan has "consistently been asking [the] interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border". "[The] interim Afghan government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by TTP terrorists for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan," the statement read.

Pakistani security forces are also facing challenges from outlawed separatist groups in Balochistan who have stepped up their terror attacks in the province. On Saturday night, armed militants who attacked a Levies checkpoint in the Turbat area snatched arms, ammunition, and communication devices from the personnel, a police official said. The official said no loss of lives has been reported in the incident. Since last year, Pakistan fighter jets have twice carried out bomb attacks on suspected TTP locations/camps in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province, killing and wounding several terrorists, security officials claimed.

and helicopter shelling, although some persons were reported still missing, Geo News reported. According to the business community, 33 out of the 35 trucks were taken to Bagan and surrounding areas, and 12 vehicles were set on fire. Parachinar, upper Kurram, has been under siege for the past 110 days, with people dying due to a lack of essential supplies. The community has urged the government to take immediate action to address the situation, it added.

ent phases within 15 days, while the dismantling of local bunkers is to be completed by February 2025. However, aid convoys have repeatedly been attacked in Kurram district in January, resulting in casualties. On Thursday, an aid convoy of 35 vehicles en route to Parachinar was attacked in Bagan, which resulted in the deaths of five drivers, one passenger, and two security personnel. The district administration had said that six attackers were killed in retaliatory action

# US rejects Maduro's re-election, but keeps financial lifeline for his govt

**PTI ■ CARACAS**

Things seemed to be looking up for Venezuela in 2022. Following years of authoritarian rule and withering economic sanctions, President Nicolás Maduro had agreed to work toward a democratic presidential election. The White House, in return, granted him a financial lifeline: a permit for US energy giant Chevron to pump and export Venezuelan oil. Oil wells roared back to life and massive tanker ships returned to Venezuela's coast to be filled with heavy, hard-to-refine crude destined for the US. Maduro's promised election was neither fair nor free, and the longtime president was sworn in this month for a third six-year term despite credible evidence that his opponent got more votes. Yet, the sanctions relieve the US offered "to support the restoration of democracy" is still helping fill state coffers. Venezuela's opposition says Maduro's government has earned billions of dollars from exports allowed by the permit. The White House has ignored calls from the main opposition coalition, as well as Republicans and Democrats in the US Congress, to cancel a permit that now accounts for around a quarter of the South American country's oil production. Senior administration officials have struggled to explain why the permit has been left in place under questioning by reporters, saying only that sanctions policy toward Venezuela is frequently reviewed. President Joe Biden told reporters last week he "didn't have enough data" to adjust oil-related sanctions before he leaves office Monday. Venezuela sits atop the world's largest proven oil reserves and once used them to power Latin America's strongest economy. But corruption, mismanagement and eventual U.S. economic sanctions saw production steadily decline from the 3.5 million barrels per day pumped in 1999, when the fiery Hugo Chávez took power and began his self-described socialist revolution, to less than 400,000 barrels per day in 2020. California-based Chevron Corp., which first invested in Venezuela in the 1920s, does business in the country through joint ventures with the state-owned company Petroleos de Venezuela S.A., commonly known as PDVSA. The joint ventures produced about 200,000 barrels a day in 2019, but the following year, US sanctions imposed by then-President Donald Trump forced Chevron to wind down production. In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a 30% decline in the country's economic activity, Venezuela's Central Bank reported year-over-year inflation of over 1,800%. For many, rummaging through garbage in search of food scraps or valuable items became a common activity. Locked out of world oil markets by US sanctions, Venezuela sold its remaining oil output at a discount — about 40% below market prices — to buyers like China and other Asian markets. It even started accepting payments in Russian rubles, bartered goods or cryptocurrency. Once Chevron got a license to export oil to the US, its joint ventures quickly began producing 80,000 barrels a day, and by 2024, they topped their daily output from 2019. That oil is sold at world market prices. The terms of the license bar Chevron from directly paying taxes or royalties to Venezuela's government. But the company sends money to the joint ventures, which are majority-owned by PDVSA. "What Chevron is doing is buying oil from joint ventures," Venezuelan economist Francisco Rodriguez said. "This purchase of oil is what generates the revenue of the joint ventures," and that revenue pays taxes and royalties to Venezuela's government. It is not clear exactly how Venezuela's government, which stopped publishing almost all financial data several years ago, uses this revenue. Neither the government nor Chevron have made public the terms of the agreement allowing the company's return to Venezuela. Chevron did not answer questions from The Associated Press regarding the joint ventures, including payments made to Venezuela's treasury. "Chevron conducts its business in Venezuela in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations," Chevron spokesman Bill Turenne said in a statement. Economist José Guerra, a former economic research manager at Venezuela's Central Bank, said the license's impact is partly reflected in the nation's foreign cash reserves, which increased by roughly \$1 billion between February 2022 and November 2024, according to the institution's data. The government uses its dollar reserves in part to maintain an artificially low exchange rate between the US dollar and the Venezuelan bolivar. "The only explanation is that Chevron exports without discounts, it exports everything — the 200,000 barrels go abroad — and that is what is feeding the reserves," Guerra said. "I call it Saint Chevron." The outcome of Venezuela's presidential election, and a subsequent campaign of repression, have prompted new calls to rescind the licenses. "In the end, one wonders, and quite rightly so, why the Biden administration continues to maintain a license whose objective was not achieved," said Rafael de la Cruz, who is an adviser to the opposition campaign of Edmundo González and María Corina Machado. He said the opposition has estimated that Maduro's government has received about \$4 billion through the operation of the joint ventures.

# S Korea's impeached president arrested

**PTI ■ SEOUL**

Hours after South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol was formally arrested, triggering rioting by his supporters, his lawyers said Sunday that he remains defiant in his refusal to answer questions over the probe into his declaration of martial law last month.

Yoon was formally arrested early on Sunday, days after being apprehended at his presidential compound in Seoul. He faces possible imprisonment over his short-lived authoritarian push, which set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratization in the late 1980s. Yoon's arrest could mark the beginning of an extended period in custody, lasting months or more.

The decision to arrest Yoon ignited unrest at the Seoul Western District Court, where dozens of his supporters broke in and rioted, destroying the main door and windows. They used plastic chairs, metal beams and police shields that they managed to wrestle away from officers. Some were seen throwing objects and using



fire extinguishers, destroying furniture and office machines, smashing glass doors and spraying water on computer servers. They shouted demands to see the judge who had issued the warrant, but she had already left. Hundreds of police officers were deployed and nearly 90 protesters were arrested. Some injured police officers were seen being treated at ambulance vans. The court said it was trying to confirm whether any staff members were injured and assess the damage to its facilities. In granting law enforcement's request for an arrest warrant for Yoon, the court said he was a threat to destroy evidence. Yoon and his lawyers on Saturday appeared before the court and argued for his release. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and the military, can now extend Yoon's detention to 20 days, during which they will transfer the case to public prosecutors for indictment. Investigators are examining whether Yoon's Dec. 3 martial law decree amounted to an

attempted rebellion. While South Korean presidents have wide-ranging immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. Yoon's lawyers could also file a petition to challenge the court's arrest warrant. Yoon Kab-keun, one of the president's lawyers, said he will not attend a questioning by the anti-corruption agency set for Sunday afternoon and will remain at the detention center. Yoon Suk Yeol's appearance in court caused chaotic scenes in nearby streets, where thousands of his fervent supporters rallied for hours calling for his release. Even before the court issued the warrant for Yoon's arrest, protesters repeatedly clashed with police. At least two vehicles carrying anti-corruption investigators were damaged as they left the court after arguing for Yoon's arrest. Yoon's defense minister, police chief and several top military commanders have already been arrested and indicted for their roles in the enforcement of martial law. The crisis began when Yoon, in an attempt to break through legislative gridlock, imposed military rule and sent troops to the National Assembly and election offices. The standoff lasted only hours after lawmakers who managed to get through a blockade voted to lift the measure. The opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14. His political fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which is deliberating whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him. Seok Dong-hyeon, another lawyer representing Yoon, called the court order for his

arrest "the epitome of anti-constitutionalism and anti-rule of law." He pointed to the riot and said Yoon's arrest would inspire more anger from his supporters. Yoon's People Power Party regretted his arrest but also pleaded for his supporters to refrain from further violence. The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative effort to impeach Yoon, said his arrest would be a "cornerstone for restoring the collapsed constitutional order." It also called for stern punishment of the rioters. The country's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, expressed "strong regret" about the riot, saying it "directly undermines democracy and the rule of law." He asked for heightened security at the sites related to Yoon's case, also including the Constitutional Court, and measures to ensure order during protests. After its investigators were attacked by protesters later on Saturday, the anti-corruption agency asked media companies to obscure the faces of its members attending the hearing.

# Will follow timeline set by govt for holding polls: B'desh EC

**PTI ■ DHAKA**

Bangladesh Election Commission said on Sunday that it will hold general elections on the timeline set by the interim government, asserting its commitment to free and fair polls. Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin made the remarks during an event where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) handed over technical equipment needed to update the voter lists, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. The Election Commission received 175 laptops, 200 scanners and 4,300 bags for data collection from the UNDP. "We're focusing on the timeframe announced by the honourable chief advisor and working towards it," the CEC was quoted as saying by the bdnews24 news portal. Last month, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said the next general election in the



country could take place by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026. He had, however, said the timing of the election would largely depend upon the political consensus and the extent of the reforms that must be carried out before it. Nasir Uddin's comments came days after former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) demanded that the general election be held by July or August of this year. When asked about it, the CEC underscored that the polls body does not wish to get involved in politics, and added that the voter list

update would need six months. "We don't want to comment on political statements. We'll follow the law, rules and the system," the report quoted him as saying. Asserting that the country's people expect free, fair and impartial elections, Nasir Uddin said the commission is committed to fulfilling the expectation. He said that the voter list update process would be carried out with transparency, according to the report. Speaking at the event, UNDP Resident Representative Steffen Liller said that discussions would take place with political parties and other stakeholders to determine how cooperation could be best organised.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 [This is to inform regarding property number E-287, Naraina Vihar. The owner, Mrs. Sushma Kaushal, has stated that all original documents of the property have been misplaced. If anyone has any objections or concerns, they are requested to inform me, Satish Kumar (Purchaser), via email at ayariserelady@gmail.com within 15 days from today failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.]

# 'No excuse for education bans on Af women, girls'

**Kabul (PTI):** A senior Taliban figure has urged the group's leader to scrap education bans on Afghan women and girls, saying there is no excuse for them, in a rare public rebuke of government policy.

Sher Abbas Stanikzai, political deputy at the Foreign Ministry, made the remarks in a speech on Saturday in southeastern Khost province. He told an audience at a religious school ceremony there was no reason to deny education to women and girls, "just as there was no justification for it in the past and there shouldn't be one at all." The government has barred females from education after sixth grade. Last September, there were reports authorities had also stopped medical training and courses for women. In Afghanistan, women and girls can only be treated by female doctors and health professionals. Authorities have yet to confirm the medical training ban.

"We call on the leadership again to open the doors of education," said Stanikzai in a video shared by his official account on the social platform X. "We are committing an injustice against 20 million people out of a population of 40 million, depriving them of all their rights."

# Disneyland Paris unveils nighttime show using Paris Games laser technology

**PTI ■ CHESSY (FRANCE)**

A cutting-edge nighttime show at Disneyland Paris is heralding a bold new chapter for Europe's most-visited theme park, as a raft of ambitious developments comes to fruition under a 2 billion euro (USD 2.05 billion) expansion plan.

The overhaul includes the completed revamp of the luxury Disneyland Hotel, the upcoming renaming and doubling in size of Walt Disney Studios Park, doubling in size and reimagined as Disney Adventure World. Opening in spring 2025, a new park entrance, World Premiere, will greet visitors with the glamour of a Hollywood film premiere, leading them into immersive themed areas. "These projects reflect our commitment to innovation and storytelling," said Natacha Rafalski, head of Disneyland Paris, adding that they will further strengthen it as Europe's top tourist destination. Already Europe's most-visited theme park and France's top tourist attraction outdrawing the Louvre, Disneyland Paris welcomed over 10 million visitors in 2023. The expansion includes two eagerly awaited themed

ceremony that featured a performance with Celine Dion. The lasers, which travel 23 miles (37 kilometres), deliver extraordinary power while remaining safe near crowds. "The Paris Olympics used it first. But we saw it first," said Dana Harrel, executive entertainment director at Disneyland Paris. Featuring Disney and Pixar tales brought to life by drone-made 3D figures, synchronised fountains and a 100-piece orchestra, the show is elevated further by the original anthem "Live in Magic." At the heart of Disneyland Paris' expansion is the transformation of Walt Disney Studios Park, doubling in size and reimagined as Disney Adventure World. Opening in spring 2025, a new park entrance, World Premiere, will greet visitors with the glamour of a Hollywood film premiere, leading them into immersive themed areas. "These projects reflect our commitment to innovation and storytelling," said Natacha Rafalski, head of Disneyland Paris, adding that they will further strengthen it as Europe's top tourist destination. Already Europe's most-visited theme park and France's top tourist attraction outdrawing the Louvre, Disneyland Paris welcomed over 10 million visitors in 2023. The expansion includes two eagerly awaited themed

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 Known to all that my client Sh. Sandeep Gupta owner of the PROPERTY NO. 13, AREA 50 SQ. YDS., KHASRA NO. 133 VILLAGE BINDAPUR, ANANI VIHAR IN BLOCK B-1, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110059 and, Sh. Sandeep Gupta purchase property from Smt. Gian Wati vide Notarized GPA, ATS and will dated 17.12.2022. Now Sh. Sandeep Gupta wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and sign his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
 Ch. No. 769, Sector-10, Dwaraka, New Delhi-75  
 Mobile :- 9899013918

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mrs. RICHIA with respect to the Property bearing Plot No. 148 and 149, area measuring 100 Sq.Yds., comprised in Kharsa No. 371, situated in the area of Village Mansarovar known as Mohan Garden, in Block L-Extra, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, which is presently owned by Mr. Parveen Kumar and Mr. Praveen Kumar had purchased the subject property from Prabhjot Kaur Sachdeva vide Notarized Deed of Attorney, Agreement to Buy and Will dated 20.02.2024, now Mrs. RICHIA intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from ADITYA BIRLA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED. To comply the requirements of BANKINGFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /nightly/ interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP Plot No. 136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact # 011-46046316

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 This is to inform the general public that Mr. Vijay Singh is the GPA Holder of Plot area measuring 50 Sq. Yds. out of Kharsa No. 910, situated in Vishwanath Colony, Manakpuri, Tehsil- Dadr, District G-B Nagar, Uttar Pradesh-201309. He is in possession through Regd. GPA, dated 17.05.1997, doc. No. 2992, executed by Mr. Vijender Singh in favour of Mr. Vijay Singh in respect of the said Plot. Mr. Vijay Singh intends to transfer the ownership of aforesaid plot by way of Sale Deed to Mr. Ramnath Maurya. Subsequently, Mr. Ramnath Maurya is in the process of mortgaging the said property with SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Home Finance Co. Ltd.) for the purpose of securing a loan. In this regard, notice is hereby given that if any Person having any type of claim /nightly/ interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP Plot No. 136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact # 011-46046316

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

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PD(1283)C

**गेट नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण**  
 प्लाट संख्या-01, सेक्टर-नौआ पार्क-4, गेट नोएडा सिटी, जिला-गौतमबुद्ध नगर (3050)

**सार्वजनिक सूचना**

गेट नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण के अन्तर्गत M/s Elegant Infracon Pvt. Ltd. भूखण्ड संख्या-CP-GH-05C, Sector-Technzone-04, Greater Noida को दिनांक 02-03-2016 को मानचित्र स्वीकृति प्रदान की गयी है। तदुपरोक्त विकासकर्ता द्वारा (Group Housing Project) का आंशिक अधिभोग प्रमाण-पत्र स्वीकृति हेतु आवेदन संख्या - CC-8110 दिनांक 20-03-2024 ऑनलाइन के माध्यम से आवेदन किया गया है। तदनुसार में UP-Apartemnt Act-2010, Amendment 2016 in Section-4 Sub Section-B के अन्तर्गत परियोजना के आवेदियों से आपत्ति/सुझाव आमंत्रित किये जाने का प्राधान्य है। इस सम्बन्ध में विकासकर्ता द्वारा प्रस्तुत स्वीकृति मागचित्र एवं Declarations as per UP Apartment Act-2010 परीक्षण किसी भी कार्यदिवस में सुबह 9:30 से सायं 6:00 बजे के मध्य नियोजन विभाग में तथा प्राधिकरण की वेबसाइट पर किया जा सकता है। अतः उपरोक्त परियोजना के आवेदियों द्वारा Sanction Map एवं Declarations as per UP Apartment Act-2010 के सम्बन्ध में सूचना प्रकाशित करने के 30 दिनों के अन्दर आपत्ति / सुझाव आमंत्रित की जाती है। उपरोक्त के निहितार्थ अपनी आपत्तियां लिखित रूप में अपने आवेदन पत्र, नाम, पता एवं दूरभाष नम्बर के साथ आपत्तिय समय व कार्यदिवस में गेट नोएडा प्राधिकरण के मुख्य प्रशासनिक कार्यालय, भूखण्ड संख्या-1, नौआ पार्क-4, गेट नोएडा में रिजल्ट महाप्राबन्धक (नियोजन/वास्तु) को सम्बोधित करते हुए सूचना प्रकाशित होने के 30 दिनों के अन्दर जमा कराया जा सकता है। महाप्राबन्धक (नियोजन/वास्तु) गेट नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण

**JM FINANCIAL**  
 JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited  
 Corporate Identity Number : U67190MH2007PLC74287  
 Registered Office Address : 7th Floor, Energy, Appasahib Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025  
 T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +91 22 6630 3223 www.jmfinancial.com

**DEMAND NOTICE**

Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned Loans) together with underlying security interest created therefor along with all the rights, title and interest thereon under Section 5 (1) (b) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("SARFAESI ACT") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 ("the Assignment Agreement") in favour of JMFCAR (JM) (herein referred as Assignee). The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of JM assigned. Under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act), in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Loan Code	Demand Notice Date and Amount With NPA Date	PROPERTY ADDRESS
(LC No. 0960002091 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Rohit Kumar (Borrower) Kusum Lata (Co Borrower 1)	23-12-2024 /R 3337791 /-R Thirty Seven lakh Thirty Seven Thousand Three Hundred Ninety (33,37,791) NPA (10-04-2020)	Ugf Rhs Ptn Without Roof R/F Prop No 1199/-/10 Kh No 93 Govindpuri Kalkaji New Delhi NCT of Delhi - 110019
(LC No. 196DE37129 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Vidur Khanna (Borrower) Usha Khanna (Co Borrower 1)	23-12-2024 /R 9855817 /-R Ninety Eight lakh Fifty Three Thousand Six Hundred Seventeen (98,55,817) NPA (01-05-2019)	Hehli No 402 Fourth Floor, Supertech Capetown Gautambudh Plot No Gh 01 A Sector, 74 Village, Noida, Uttar Pradesh - 201301

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to JM as aforesaid, JM shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of JM. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date : 20-01-2025 Place: Delhi

Authorised Officer  
 JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited,  
 acting in its capacity as trustee of Aranya - Trust



# Budget FY26: Government could cut customs duty on raw materials to boost manufacturing

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The government could reduce customs duty on inputs used in manufacturing medical equipment, electronic goods and footwear industries in the forthcoming Budget to boost local manufacturing, according to tax experts. Deloitte India Partner, Indirect Tax, Harpreet Singh said key demands from the Customs side from the 2025-26 Budget, to be tabled in Parliament on February 1, would be rationalisation, simplification of the regime, and litigation and dispute management. "In the lines of the phased manufacturing plan, we expect some duty cuts in raw materials in electronics, home appliances, healthcare products, and pharmaceuticals. These are the industries where the government wants to give impetus in terms of manufacturing, and hence, we will see the raw materials declining in these sectors," Singh told PTI. On the proposed Customs duty rationalisation



announced in the Budget in July 2024, Singh said the sectors which could see rationalisation are healthcare, manufacturing of medical equipment, white goods, electronics, footwear and toys. The 2024-25 Budget announced that a comprehensive review of the Customs Duty rate structure will be undertaken over the next six months to rationalise and simplify it for ease of trade, removal of duty inversion and reduction of

recyclable and reused materials to support sustainable manufacturing practices. "What is expected is a more streamlined rate structure is expected to support domestic manufacturing and align with the 'Make in India' initiative," Ramjee said. Ramjee further said that the industry anticipates the introduction of an amnesty scheme aimed at resolving long-standing customs disputes. With over 40,000 cases pending in courts and tribunals, such a scheme could reduce litigation and enhance the ease of doing business. Huge money is stuck in litigation, and the government should prudently bring a one-time dispute settlement scheme in the Customs law to settle the outstanding Customs disputes, which is increasing year-on-year, he added. Grant Thornton Bharat Partner Manoj Mishra said about Rs 50,000 crore is locked up in Customs disputes, and an amnesty scheme will help in dispute settlement.

raw material/Intermediary, and accordingly, slab rates may be fixed," said Anurag Sehgal, Managing Director at Price Waterhouse & Co. LLP. Nangia Andersen LLP Executive Director, Indirect Tax, Sivakumar Ramjee said there is a call for simplifying the customs duty structure to minimise rate multiplicity, correct duty inversions, if any, and reduce classification disputes by way of clarification and rationalisation of duties on

# FPIs take out ₹44,396 Crore from equities in January amid weak earnings outlook, rising dollar

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 44,396 crore from Indian equities this month, driven by strength of the dollar, rising bond yields in the US, and expectations of a weak earnings season. This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the month of December, data with the depositories showed. The shift in sentiment comes amid global and domestic headwinds. "The continued depreciation of Indian rupee is exerting significant pressure on foreign investors leading them to pull the money out of the Indian equity markets," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Research, Morningstar Investment Advisers India, said. In addition to that, higher valuation of Indian equities, despite recent corrections, expectation of a rather weak earnings season and uncertainty over the pace of economic growth are making investors wary, he added. According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 44,396 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till



January 17). FPIs have been sellers on all days this month except January 2. "The principal reasons for the sustained FPIs selling are the strength of the dollar and the rising bond yields in the US. With the dollar index above 109 and the 10-year US bond yield above 4.6 per cent, it is logical for FPIs to sell in emerging markets, particularly in the most expensive emerging market India," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Since US bond yields are attractive, FPIs have been sellers in the debt market, too. They withdrew Rs 4,848 crore from debt general limit and Rs 6,176 crore debt voluntary retention route. Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors, said that a cyclical improvement in corporate earnings, along with stronger GDP growth driven by resilient domestic consumption and increased government spending on infrastructure projects, could lead to a potential turnaround in FPI flows into India. The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just Rs 427 crore. This contrasts sharply with the extraordinary Rs 1.71 lakh crore net inflows in 2023, driven by optimism over India's strong economic fundamentals. In comparison, 2022 saw a net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore amid aggressive rate hikes by global central banks.



# Want to be a leader in every segment we operate in says ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
ITC is sharpening its competitiveness and strengthening innovative capacity under its "Next Strategy" as the multi-conglomerate aims to be a leader in the segments in which it operates, said its Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri. The cigarettes-to-consumer goods conglomerate has articulated a strategy of the organisation, the ITC Next Strategy' aiming to shape a future-ready enterprise and define the next phase of growth and profitability, Puri told PTI. As part of the ITC Next Strategy, it identified levers of competitiveness, which include digitalisation, sustainability, innovation and supply chain efficiency, among others for its future growth. "These have been identified as areas where specific interventions have been made to become competitive and contemporary. The objective is to keep innovating while leveraging enterprise strengths," said Puri. The idea is to be a leader and to be a very large-scale business, in which ITC has made "appreciable progress" in its ongoing journey over a period of time. "For us, ITC's Next strategy is a journey in action. While we have made appreciable progress in many areas, I would not say that this journey is anywhere near completion. Our vision is to be a very large player in every

# India not seeking duty concessions on liquor, cigarette in FTA with Oman: Sources

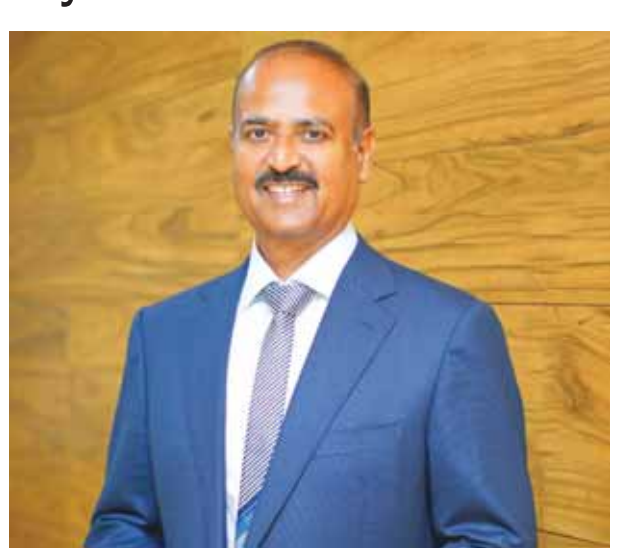
**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India is not seeking customs duty concessions on over 100 product categories such as liquor, and cigarette in the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), which is under negotiations between the two countries, sources said. They also said that though the FTA negotiations were concluded, Oman has sought revision of its market access offers on some products. The two sides have discussed three to four issues flagged by Oman, and any potential changes would be minimal, they said. India is expected to gain greater market access for about 98 per cent of its goods in Oman, along with significant access to the services sector. "There could be about 125-130 tariff lines (or product



categories), where we have not asked for duty concessions and that included goods like liquor, and cigarettes," they added. On January 14, India and Oman held the fifth round of talks for the agreement, which is aimed at boosting bilateral economic ties. The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in November 2023. Oman's import duty ranges from 0 to 100 per cent along with the existence of specific

duties. On specific meats, wines and tobacco products 100 per cent duty is applicable. According to industry sources, India should not extend duty concessions on petrochemical products, a key demand of Oman. Indian petrochemical industry which comprises both large public sector units and private players have raised their serious concerns and requested the government not to accede to this demand of Oman, they said. "In petrochemical sector, feedstock constitutes a significant portion (about 65-70 per cent) of the total product cost such as Polyethylene (PE), Polypropylene (PP), Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) etc. Therefore, feedstock pricing makes a critical determinant of overall competitiveness in the petrochemical industry," the industry sources said. They added that Oman has a distinct feedstock cost advantage due to its abundant natural resources and has a significant exportable surplus of petrochemical products with minimal domestic demand. "Any tariff concessions to Oman would lead to an influx of low cost petrochemical imports, adversely affecting the Indian petrochemical industry," they said. Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. According to the think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Institute), Indian goods worth USD 3.7 billion like gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery will get a significant boost in Oman, once both sides reach a comprehensive free trade agreement.

# Insurance industry pivotal, says GIC Chairman



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The insurance industry, which safeguards millions of lives and businesses, often faces unwarranted criticism fueled by isolated grievances and sensationalism. Despite these perceptions, its contributions are pivotal. In FY 23-24 alone, the industry settled claims worth Rs 1.72 lakh crore, including Rs 80,000 crore for health insurance, with a claim settlement ratio exceeding 80 per cent. In this regard, Tapan Singhel, Chairman, General Insurance Council and MD & CEO, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, said that, as per the IRDAI annual report, last year, the General Insurance industry settled crores of claims worth Rs 1.72 lakh crore, out of which it paid more than Rs 80,000 crore towards health insurance. "Yet those who benefit rarely make the news. On the flip side, isolated grievances and odd bad experiences become the face of the industry. Social safety nets like Ayushman Bharat, covering 55 crore beneficiaries, and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, which disbursed Rs 1.64 lakh crore in claims over eight years, prevent poverty and support vulnerable populations. Without the insurance industry's support, the scheme would not be in place or effective in states adopting an insurance or hybrid model. Insurance also underpins critical sectors, mitigating financial risks in agriculture, motor, and disaster recovery, and ensuring economic resilience," said Singhel. Notably, Singhel mentioned the industry boasts an impressively low grievance ratio of 0.003 percent against 2.96 billion policies and actively combats fraud, detecting Rs 1.73 lakh crore in fraudulent claims over five years. "Contrary to the belief that insurers generate massive profits, the industry operates at a loss, with a combined ratio of 115 percent, paying Rs 115 for every Rs 100 earned in premiums. Employing over 6 million people, insurance is a cornerstone of economic growth. While improvements are possible, insurance remains essential for societal progress, demanding constructive engagement rather than destructive criticism. Without it, the social and economic consequences would be dire," added Singhel.

# Domestic composite materials industry to touch USD 2.8 Billion by 2030: Report

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Domestic composite materials industry is expected to grow at a 7.8 per cent annual growth rate to reach USD 2.8 billion by 2030, a report said. Composite materials or fibre-reinforced plastics (FRP) help in the circular economy as these are manufactured by combining multiple materials with different properties. The Indian composite materials market is estimated at USD 1.8 billion in 2024, FRP Institute said in its report. "The Indian composite materials market is likely to grow at a healthy CAGR of 7.8 per cent over the next six years to reach USD 2.8 billion in 2030," the Chennai-based body said. The major growth



drivers for the industry will be increasing demand from sectors like electrical vehicles (EVs), renewable energy, transportation and construction industries, consumer and white goods, construction and defence. Government projects like

smart cities, hydrocarbon, freshwater transportation, sewage treatment system, and rehabilitation of water and sewage pipelines will also aid the growth of composite materials consumption. According to the report, India has an extremely low per capita consumption of composites at 0.55 kg as compared to matured markets such as the US with 11.5 kg followed by Germany at 7.7 kg. FRP Institute along with industry stakeholders will discuss the ways and opportunities to increase the consumption of the materials in India at the upcoming 'International Conference and Exhibition on Reinforced Plastics (ICERP 2025)' scheduled for January 21-23, 2025 in Mumbai. FRP Institute Chairman Shekhar Sardessai said ICERP 2025 will offer an opportunity for professionals to explore new technologies, latest industry trends, and emerging applications of composites across important industries of India's growth story.

# Budget 2025-26 needs to focus on capex, infrastructure spending: RBI MPC member Nagesh Kumar

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget for financial year 2025-26, needs to focus on capital expenditure and infrastructure spending to boost economic growth and make it more sustainable, RBI Monetary Policy Committee member Nagesh Kumar said on Sunday. The eminent economist noted that sustaining infrastructure expenditure and building it further would be very helpful for creating a much more robust trajectory of economic growth in India. "In the context of the slight economic slowdown that we observed in the second quarter,



and overall, there is a need to boost growth and make it more robust, more sustainable. "The finance minister would

do well to continue this momentum (in Budget 2025-26), which she herself started two years ago, of putting great emphasis on capex, infrastructure spending and increasing it to very healthy levels," he said in an interview to PTI Videos. The Union Budget for 2025-26, set to be presented by Sitharaman on February 1, arrives amidst global economic uncertainties and moderating domestic growth. "Because after suffering from the COVID pandemic, the Indian economy suffered a lot, after that it showed a robust recovery, but this pent up demand which drove the Indian economic growth for

the past few years, is now coming to an end. "And so then the Indian economy is back to the trajectory which was there in pre-COVID times, and it now needs to be given a little bit of a boost to public spending," he said. Sitharaman in her last year's budget had said that the government will provide Rs 11.11 lakh crore for capital expenditure for 2024-25 and introduce viability gap funding to spur private investment in infrastructure. India's second quarter (July-September) GDP growth has slumped to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent. Responding to a question on

weakening of rupee, Kumar said it is more than rupee depreciation, it is the strengthening of the dollar. According to him, all different currencies are weakening vis-a-vis dollar, because the dollar is becoming very strong, and that is largely due to the strong performance of the American economy and the expectation that the new administration led by Donald Trump will do something to strengthen the US economy. "So this weakness of the rupee is largely the strengthening of the dollar and which is also leading to the outflows of FII positions from India. So when there is too much demand for dollars, the rupee tends to

depreciate," Kumar observed. He said the fact that other currencies are also depreciating, one has to take a relative look. "My feeling is that rupee is still in real terms a bit appreciated and overvalued," Kumar said, adding that managing rupee at a more competitive exchange rate, which is not overvalued, is healthy for exports, for India's manufacturing efforts. The rupee is currently hovering around 86.60 against the greenback. It had also touched an all-time closing low of 86.70 on January 13. Replying to a question on resurgence of giveaways, also called freebies, Kumar said it is a concern for long-term

development. "Because the resources which could have been used for development purposes, for building infrastructure, for closing the gaps in the infrastructure that exist in the lagging regions or different states are promised to be given as handouts. "It is not a very healthy trend, and should be curbed, because people should be aware of where the money will come from," he said. Emphasising that there is a need to make voters aware that resources which are promised to them are not really freebies, Kumar said freebies cost the public in other forms in terms of development.





## DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT MEN'S SKINCARE

By Dr MEGHNA MOUR

The men's skincare industry is witnessing a noteworthy transformation, driven by changing perceptions, rising awareness, and evolving consumer behaviours. Globally, the men's skincare products market size was valued at USD 16.94 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to USD 29.61 billion by 2033. Closer to home, the Indian men's grooming market is estimated to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.1% from 2024 to 2030. The growing prominence of social media, influence of celebrities, and exposure to global beauty standards have also inspired a considerable number of Indian men to pay closer attention to their appearance, actively seeking ways to enhance it. Against this backdrop, let's explore the myths and facts surrounding men's skincare and the key trends shaping this segment in 2025.

**MYTH 1:** Skincare is not masculine  
**FACT:** Skincare is health care  
 Historically, skincare has been misperceived as a feminine activity, creating a stigma that dissuaded many



men from prioritising it. However, in today's world, skincare is increasingly seen as an essential aspect of self-care and overall wellness. Experts stress that skin health is as crucial as other aspects of physical well-being, such as diet and exercise. Brands are addressing this shift by introducing gender-neutral products and campaigns that promote inclusivity. The aim is to dismantle outdated

stereotypes and encourage men to embrace skincare as a vital component of their daily lives.

**MYTH 2:** Men's skin is the same as women's  
**FACT:** Men's skin has unique needs  
 A common misconception is that skincare products are universally effective. However, men's skin differs



from women's. It is thicker, has higher collagen density, and tends to produce more oil due to testosterone levels. Recognising these differences, brands are now developing targeted formulations to address specific concerns like excess sebum, larger pores, and post-shave irritation, ensuring that men receive tailored solutions for their skin.

**MYTH 3:** Sunscreen is optional  
**FACT:** Daily SPF is non-negotiable  
 Despite the proven benefits of sunscreen, many men have traditionally neglected sun protection. This oversight contributes to premature aging, hyperpigmentation, and increased skin cancer risk. In 2025, lightweight and non-greasy sunscreens designed specifically for men are driving a shift in habits. These

products are often integrated into daily-use items like moisturizers and serums, making sun protection more accessible and convenient.

**MYTH 4:** Aging signs cannot be reversed  
**FACT:** Prevention and repair are possible  
 While aging is inevitable, modern skincare science offers tools to slow down and even repair its visible effects. Products with retinol, peptides, hyaluronic acid, and collagen-boosting ingredients are increasingly popular among men looking to address wrinkles, fine lines, and sagging skin.

**MYTH 5:** Natural ingredients are always better  
**FACT:** Science-based solutions matter  
 While natural ingredients are popular, they aren't always suitable for every skin type. Men are learning to embrace scientifically backed formulations with proven efficacy over trendy, all-natural claims. Ingredients like niacinamide, salicylic acid, and ceramides remain staples for addressing common concerns such as acne, uneven tone, and hydration.  
 — The author is an MBBS, DDV, DVD and Aesthetic Physician



By ANURAAG BHARDWAJ

Our surroundings profoundly influence our mental and emotional well-being, shaping how we think, feel, and interact with the world. Thoughtfully designed spaces have the power to reduce stress, boost creativity, and inculcate a sense of belonging. By blending nature, aesthetics, privacy, and community, architecture becomes a tool for healing and connection. Go through how innovative design can enhance mental wellness and enrich our lives.

**BIOPHILIC DESIGN:** Incorporating natural elements like plants, water features, and natural light into our environments can have a profound impact on reducing stress and improving cognitive function. Studies have shown that exposure to natural environments can lower cortisol levels, blood pressure, and heart rate, while also improving mood and cognitive functioning. This is because natural environments have the power to calm our minds and promote relaxation

**SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY:** Architecture plays a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging and connection to our surroundings. When buildings are

## SPACES THAT HEAL



designed with the community in mind, they can create a sense of place and identity. This, in turn, can lead to increased social connections, a sense of belonging, and improved mental health. For instance, public spaces that incorporate natural elements, like parks or gardens, can become community hubs, promoting social interaction.

**PRIVACY AND PERSONAL SPACE:** Having access to quiet, private spaces is essential for mental rejuvenation. These spaces allow us to retreat from the world, recharge, and reflect. In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to get overwhelmed, and having a private sanctuary can be a lifesaver. Architects and designers can incorporate private spaces into buildings, such as meditation rooms, quiet lounges, or even private offices.

**AESTHETICS AND BEAUTY:** Visually appealing and inspiring spaces can uplift our mood and reduce stress. When we're surrounded by beauty, it can stimulate our minds, promote creativity, and even reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Architects and designers can incorporate aesthetic elements, such as natural materials, artwork, or stunning views, to create spaces that inspire and uplift us.

In conclusion, our surroundings play a significant role in shaping our mental health. By incorporating biophilic design, providing private spaces, and creating aesthetically pleasing environments, we can promote mental well-being and improve our overall quality of life.

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



## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES

By Dr APOORVA SHRIVASTAVA

In today's world, sedentary lifestyles have become increasingly prevalent, driven by technological advancements, desk-based jobs, and reduced physical activity. While these changes have brought convenience, they have also contributed to a surge in health problems such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and musculoskeletal disorders. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, and one highly effective solution lies in accessible, high-quality active physiotherapy.

**THE SEDENTARY EPIDEMIC:** Prolonged sitting and limited movement are now recognised as significant health risks. Studies show that sitting for more than eight hours a day without regular physical activity increases the risk of premature death by up to 20%. Additionally, sedentary behavior often leads to muscle weakness, joint stiffness, and poor posture, which can result in chronic pain and reduced mobility. These issues are not limited to adults. Children and teenagers, too, are increasingly falling victim to inactivity, with screen time often replacing outdoor play. This highlights the urgent need for interventions that promote movement and physical well-being across all age groups.

**THE ROLE OF ACTIVE PHYSIOTHERAPY:** Active physiotherapy stands out as a powerful tool in combating the ill effects of sedentary lifestyles. Unlike passive treatments that involve modalities like heat, ice, or electrical stimulation, active physiotherapy emphasises patient involvement through therapeutic exercises, stretching, and strengthening routines. This approach not only alleviates pain and restores function but also empowers individuals to take charge of their health. High-quality active physiotherapy programs focus on personalised care. A thorough assessment identifies specific issues, such as tight hamstrings, weak



core muscles, or joint misalignment, and targets them with tailored exercises. This individualised approach ensures faster recovery and long-term benefits. Moreover, active physiotherapy can improve cardiovascular health, enhance muscle tone, and boost mental well-being. Regular movement releases endorphins, reducing stress and anxiety—common side effects of sedentary lifestyles.

**ACCESSIBILITY: BRIDGING THE GAP:** Active physiotherapy, despite its effectiveness, often remains inaccessible due to factors like cost, geographic constraints, and a lack of awareness. Bridging these gaps requires targeted strategies to make this essential service more widely available. Expanding tele-physiotherapy platforms can allow

individuals to access guided active rehabilitation programs from their homes, breaking location barriers. Establishing affordable physiotherapy clinics in underserved areas can further ensure inclusivity.

**A PATH TO HEALTHIER LIVES:** The challenges posed by sedentary lifestyles are undeniable, but they are not insurmountable. Active physiotherapy provides an evidence-based, patient-centered approach to restoring health and preventing future issues. By making high-quality physiotherapy accessible to all, society can take a significant step toward combating the epidemic of inactivity and fostering a culture of movement and vitality.

— The author is CEO & Founder, Resolve360



# SKY will be missed in CT, he could have been the 'X-factor': Raina

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Former India all-rounder Suresh Raina feels middle-order batter Suryakumar Yadav will be sorely missed in the upcoming Champions Trophy as he could have provided the 'X-factor' in Dubai, where Rohit Sharma's side will play all its games. Suryakumar and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj were the two big names missing from the Champions Trophy squad announced on Saturday. They are among a total of six players who featured in the 2023 ODI World Cup squad. The others to miss out are Prasidh Krishna, Shardul Thakur and Ishan Kishan, while Ravichandran Ashwin has recently retired from the game. "Surya was an integral part of the World Cup squad, he is a 360 player who can score at 9 runs per over at any stage of the game. He can dominate the opposition and bats in a

different way," Raina said on Star Sports Press Room. "If Surya was there there would have been an X-factor, he will be missed. The responsibility will be now on top 3 who are not in form. Surya is someone who can bat in any position." Raina also said with uncertainty looming large over Jasprit Bumrah's fitness and Mohammed Shami returning from an injury, Siraj would have been a better option although he still feels, the Hyderabad pacer can still make it to the squad. "Siraj was in a different form in Australia but you can change the squad till 12 February. So I feel Siraj can be back in the side if Bumrah is not fully fit," he said. "Harshit Rana has done well. He has good pace, good bumper, variation, yorker and pace. He and both Arshdeep Singh can bowl at the death but I still feel, Siraj is a better option if Bumrah is not there." While Bumrah is racing



against time to be fit from back spasms that he suffered during the recent Sydney Test against Australia, Shami is returning to the ODI set up for the first time since the 2023 World Cup after recovering from a heel injury. While Rohit will lead the side, young talented batter Shubman Gill has been named as the vice-captain for the Champions Trophy, and Raina termed the decision as a forward-thinking move. "Gill got the vice-captaincy at the right time. He is the next superstar of India cricket, and has done remarkably well in ODIs. Rohit knows how to mentor a youngster and what value Shubman will bring in," said Raina, a member of India's 2013 Champions Trophy-winning side. With Dubai pitches tend to play slow and offer turn, Raina said left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav and all-rounder Hardik Pandya will play vital role in the bowling department. "Shami lacks of match practice, Bumrah is still uncertain and Kuldeep is returning back from an operation. What will be important is to see who will partner Kuldeep in the spin department." India had won the Champions Trophy twice - in 2002 jointly with Sri Lanka and in 2013 in England, and Raina has no doubts that Rohit and his men can go all the way. "Rohit has the capacity, he has team but what will be important is out 11 player combination out of 15. The wickets will be a bit slow, but we have the capacity." Raina too backed Rishabh Pant to be first choice wicket-keeper in the Indian team, which also has KL Rahul. "Definitely Pant, his wicket-keeping has improved. But he has to play with more responsibility in a 50-over game. If he stays there for 40-50 balls he can take the game away from the opposition but he needs to spend more time at the crease."



## ITF W50 singles event: Tatiana Prozorova saves six match points to emerge champion

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Tatiana Prozorova saved six match points to bag the singles title at the ITF W50 tournament, edging past second seed Panna Udvardy in a marathon final here on Sunday. Seventh seed Prozorova saved three match points in the 12th game of the second set and then three more in the tiebreaker to force a decider and finally prevailed 4-6 7-6(6) 6-4 in the three-hour-long final that was littered with breaks and unforced errors from the two players. "I am really happy that I could win this match and save so much points and also didn't miss my chance. I am really happy to win my first title in this year, in January and I will look forward to playing next tournament here in New Delhi," said Prozorova. It was Prozorova's first singles title in four months, her last trophy coming in September 2024 when she triumphed at the ITF W100 event in Incheon. Udvardy, who hails from Hungary and featured in top-100 in 2022, was playing her first final since June 2024 when she ended a runner-up in the WTA 125 event on clay in Italy and yet again missed out on a title. The two players traded early breaks to be at 3-3. From there, Prozorova had the chance to keep it a close affair but unforced errors let her down. She was down 0-40 in game

seven but managed to save all three break chances. She netted a backhand at deuce and then hit a forehand marginally long to drop her serve again. Udvardy too struggled to keep the ball within the lines and also her first serve troubled her. She saved four break points in the game eighth but eventually lost her serve, making it 4-4. Prozorova, by dropping her serve again, allowed Udvardy to be in a position from where she could have served out the opening set and the Hungarian did not miss the opportunity this time. Udvardy bagged the set when Prozorova hit a forehand long. Prozorova did not help her cause by not holding her serve at the start of the second set, handing that one-break cushion to her rival. Udvardy, though, could not consolidate the advantage, hitting a forehand error on a breakpoint in game six to allow her rival make it even-Stevens again. At 5-5, 30-all, Prozorova hit a backhand wide but Udvardy could not convert the chance. However, the Hungarian got the break when her rival again made a backhand error. Udvardy came to serve out the match, and had three match-points but lost all and was facing a breakpoint when she netted a forehand at deuce point. Prozorova grabbed the opportunity with a crushing backhand down-the-line winner, stretching the set to tie-break

## India begin women's U-19 WC title defence with nine-wicket win over West Indies

**PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR**  
Indian bowlers shot a clueless West Indies batters out for a measly 44 to set up a commanding nine-wicket win to begin their title defence on a resounding note in the women's U-19 World Cup here on Sunday. Left-arm spinners Parunika Sisodia (3/7) and Aayushi Shukla (2/6) as well as pacer VJ Joshiha (2/6) toyed with the West Indies batters to bowl the Caribbeans out in just 13.2 overs in the Group A match at Bayuemas Oval. Kenika Cassar top-scored for the West Indies with a 29-ball 15 while opener Asabi Callender contributed 12. All the other West Indies batters could score in single digit figures with five of them getting out without opening account.



India chased down the target of 45 in just 4.2 overs, reaching 47 for 1 with opener Trisha G getting out for 4 on the second ball off Jahzara Claxton. Wicketkeeper-batter G Kamalini (16 not out off 13 balls) and Sanika Chalke (18 not out off 11 balls) took India home for an easy win. India play hosts Malaysia in their next group match here on Tuesday. Sri Lanka is the other team in Group A. The top three teams from each of the four groups will progress to the Super Six stage, with the three teams from Group A and Group D combining to form one Super Six group and similarly with the top three teams of Group B and Group C in the other

group. The teams will also carry forward their points and net run rates and will play the two sides who were not in their group in the first stage and who finished at a different position from them. As an example, if India finish second in Group A, then they will play the winner and the third-place team of Group D. The top two teams from each Super Six group will progress to the semi-finals. The final will be played here on February 2. Brief Scores: West Indies U-19 Women: 44 in 13.2 overs (Kenika Cassar 15; Parunika Sisodia 3/7, Aayushi Shukla 2/6, VJ Joshiha 2/6). India U-19 Women: 47 for 1 in 4.2 overs (Sanika Chalke 18 not out, G Kamalini 16 not out; Jahzara Claxton 1/18).

## India defender Pritam Kotal joins Chennaiyin FC

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
India defender Pritam Kotal on Sunday joined Indian Super League (ISL) side Chennaiyin FC, leaving Kerala Blasters FC on a two-and-a-half-year deal. The 31-year-old Kotal, who has more than 50 caps for India has been a regular feature in the ISL for the last decade. Kotal began his youth career with Chirag United before moving to the I-League and eventually to ISL. The West Bengal player has captained Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the past, leading them to eight consecutive wins in Kolkata derby. He has also been a member of the ISL winning sides in 2016 and 2019-20. The move will strengthen the defence line of the Marina Machans. With the Indian



team, Kotal won the 2016 South Asian Football Championship and was also a member of the sides that won the 2018 Intercontinental Cup and the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. He received the AIFF Player of the Year award in 2015. "The coach explained he really wanted me in his team, so when I got the offer, I had no doubts about joining. This is a very good team that plays well. My goal from hereon would be to try and win every match and go to the playoffs," Kotal said.

## Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka moves into Australian Open quarterfinals

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Aryna Sabalenka has advanced to the quarterfinals at the Australian Open, where she's three wins from achieving something no woman has done since the 1990s. The two-time defending champion extended her winning streak at Melbourne Park to 18 matches with a 6-1 6-2 win over 14th-seeded Mirra Andreeva to open play Sunday on Rod Laver Arena. Martina Hingis, from 1997 to 1999, was the last woman to win three straight Australian Open singles titles. Sabalenka hugged Andreeva after the match, waved to the crowd, took a photo with her Polaroid camera and gave a thumbs up to mark the occasion. She's won 24 consecutive sets in Melbourne. "I'm super happy to get through this difficult match in straight sets," she said. It



was over in just over an hour. Apart from the fifth game of the second set, when Sabalenka has triple breakpoint but Andreeva rallied by winning five straight points to hold, just about everything went the way of the No. 1-ranked player. Sabalenka didn't face a break point until midway through the second set, when she saved three in one game. It seemed like she was testing

## Viktor Axelsen, An Se-Young claim India Open titles

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Olympic champions Viktor Axelsen and An Se-Young secured the men's and women's singles crowns respectively with dominating wins in lop-sided finals at the India Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Sunday. Axelsen, a 2017 and 2019 winner, prevailed 21-16 21-8 over last year's finalist Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong in the men's singles summit clash at the KD Jadhav indoor hall which was almost full despite the fact that no Indian was competing in the two finals. Axelsen, a two time world champion, thus erased the disappointment of falling in the opening round of Malaysian Open super 1000 last week to the same opponent. In the women's singles, it was another graceful performance from An Se-



Young as she effortlessly packed off P Chochuwong 21-12 21-9. Malaysian combination of Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin, who had ended India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's run at the semifinals, produced another superlative show to outwit Korean pair of Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae 21-15, 13-21, 21-16 in the men's doubles final. In the women's doubles final, Japan's Arisa Igarashi and Ayako Sakuramoto beat Kim Hye Jang and Kong Hee Young of South Korea 21-15 21-13

In the mixed doubles final, China's Jiang Zhen Bang and Wei Ya Xin prevailed 21-18 21-17 over Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue. Axelsen vs Lee Lee, 2019 Hong Kong open winner, had finished as runner-up in the last edition and his dream of winning the title remained unfulfilled after he went down in the final for the second time in two years. Lee made a good start, opening up a 6-3 lead. But Axelsen slowly build up the momentum to gather a 11-8 advantage at the break. Lee kept fighting but couldn't pose a real threat as Axelsen took five game points and converted after Lee went long. The script didn't change despite the change of sides as Axelsen moved from 10-6 to 19-6 with a series of booming smashes to dismantle Lee's defence and complete the win in no time.

# Barcelona again held to draw at Getafe, Griezmann misses penalty as Atletico's win streak ends

**PTI ■ BARCELONA**  
Barcelona was bested by Getafe's defence again in a 1-1 draw in La Liga, while Atletico Madrid's club record winning streak ended after a late penalty miss by Antoine Griezmann. Barcelona got its first goal in five visits to Getafe thanks to Jules Kounde in the 10th minute on Saturday, but Getafe equalized and clamped down to get a fourth consecutive draw at its stadium against the powerhouse. The last time Barcelona won at Coliseum Stadium was in 2019, making the fixture an annual quagmire for the Catalan club. Real Madrid will aim to take

advantage of the slips by its title rivals when it hosts Las Palmas on Sunday. Atletico's 15-win streak ended in a 1-0 loss to Leganes, its first loss since October 27. Atletico remained one point ahead of Madrid. Barcelona was five points behind the front-runner. This round marks the beginning of the second half of the league. **Barcelona frustrated again** Barcelona was coming off huge wins: A 5-2 thrashing of Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final and a 5-1 win over Real Betis in the Copa del Rey. Barcelona visits Benfica in the Champions League on Tuesday. But José Bordalás's Getafe, with its physical, defensive style, once again frustrated

Barcelona in Hansi Flick's first visit as its coach. "This was another exercise in survival," Bordalás said. "Taking a point today is like getting a win." Kounde put Barcelona ahead when Pedri threaded a pass to meet the right back's move into the area. Goalkeeper David Soria blocked his first effort but Kounde scrambled the rebound out of Soria's grasp and over the line. Moments after Raphinha headed a cross by Kounde into the side netting, Getafe leveled in the 34th during a defensive letdown by the visitors. Mauro Arambarri put in a loose ball after Iñaki Peña did well to make a one-handed save of a volley by Coba de Costa. "We controlled the game but



they scored on the one chance they had, it is too bad," Kounde said. "We didn't have our finishing touch." **Griezmann misses spot kick** Griezmann had a chance to at least snatch a point for the league leader after a video review awarded Atletico a 90th-minute penalty for a handball by defender Sergio González. But the French forward stroked his spot kick wide. Griezmann and Julián Alvarez

hit the woodwork in the first half, but the leaders couldn't respond after Leganes defender Matija Nastasic scored with a 49th-minute header. Last week, Atletico broke its own record of 13 consecutive victories from 2012-13. Leganes returned to the first division this season and has become a giant-slayer in the top-flight. The modest club from Madrid stunned Barcelona when it was leader in December. Its win over Atletico lifted it into 15th place. "We don't have anything special, this is just the result of the hard work we put in each week," Leganes goalkeeper Marko Dmitorij said. "We have beaten two of the

three big teams in the league, so we have no excuse not to perform like this each time out." Atletico, which was the biggest spender for Spanish clubs in the summer, is trying to win its third league under Simeone after titles in 2014 and 2021. Simeone said that during those championship runs, his side lost to smaller clubs Almeria (in 2014) and Levante (in 2021), and that didn't stop them from still beating Barcelona and Madrid to the title. "We had 15 wonderful games, a record in the history of this club. It was a great run that benefitted us in the league, Copa del Rey and Champions League," Simeone said. Atletico defenders Javi Galán

and Clement Lenglet received their fifth yellow cards of the season and will miss the next round against Villarreal. But first, Atletico hosts Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League on Tuesday. **Kike Garcia blasts Betis** Alaves striker Kike Garcia scored a hat trick to lead a 3-1 win at 10-man Real Betis. The 35-year-old Garcia, known more as a workhorse than a big scorer, earned a penalty after being fouled by Marc Bartra and opened the scoring in the 11th. After Betis lost Romain Perraud to a red card for a dangerous foul in the 55th, Garcia spun before firing home in the 80th and thumped in a header for his treble.