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**INSIDE**

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# JUSTICE FOR MURDERS MOST FOUL

## Life sentence for Sanjoy Roy

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In what the parents of the victim called a "travesty of justice," for which they held the Kolkata Police and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) responsible, the Sealdah Sessions Court on Monday sentenced convict Sanjoy Roy to life imprisonment until death - and not death, as the prosecution and the public had wanted - for committing the rape and murder of a 31-year-old postgraduate lady doctor from RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. Roy, a former civic volunteer who was working with the West Bengal Police at the time, was pronounced guilty of the RGKMCH rape and murder case on Saturday, with the quantum of punishment delivered by District and Sessions Judge Anirban Das on Monday. Judge Das stated that the crime did not fall under the "rarest of the rare" category, which is why he did not impose the death penalty on the convict. He also ordered the State Government to pay compensation of Rs 17 lakh to the parents who lost their daughter in the chilling crime "that shook the conscience of the country." Roy was found guilty on January 18, 2025, under sections 64, 66, and 103(1) of the BNS. However, the mother of the victim, who broke down in tears immediately after the judgment was pronounced, said, "We cannot discard the



RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder case convict Sanjoy Roy being taken to the CBI office at CGO Complex, in Kolkata. PTI

order, but we think it is a rarest of rare case, as the rape and murder occurred inside the workplace, which is a second home, and that too by a civic police officer who is considered a protector of citizens." The family did not want money; they wanted justice, she said. She trailed off, saying, "Now we have understood that it is not enough to be the parents of a meritorious child... or enough to labor hard to see the child succeed... it is also

inside the seminar hall. The family will move the higher court to challenge the order. The victim's body was found in a semi-nude condition inside the seminar hall of the Chest Medicine Department of the hospital in the early hours of August 9, triggering nationwide outrage. Even as the medical fraternity, civil society, and the general public erupted in anger, promising a prolonged movement in the days to come, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee - whose government was primarily held responsible by the victim's family for destroying evidence and hushing up the case - promptly laid the blame at the Centre's door, calling it a failure of the central agencies that had been handling the case to ensure a death sentence for the convict. "I am very upset... my party too is... we wanted the death sentence... All of us had demanded the death sentence, but the court has given a life term until death. The case was forcibly taken from us. Had it been with the Kolkata Police, we would have ensured that he was given a death sentence... We don't know how they conducted the investigation. In many similar cases that were probed by the State Police, the death penalty was ensured in a record time of 55 to 60 days recently... I am not satisfied with the proceedings," the Chief Minister said.

Continued on page 2

## Woman sentenced to death in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■ KOCHI

A court in Kerala on Monday sentenced a woman to death for the sensational murder of her boyfriend in 2022. The Neyyattinkara Additional District Sessions Court also sentenced her uncle, Nirmalakumaran Nair, the third accused in the case, to three years of imprisonment. The 24-year-old convict, Greeshma, had sought leniency in sentencing by citing her academic achievements, lack of prior criminal history, and the fact that she is her parents' only daughter. In its 586-page verdict, the court observed that there was no need to consider the convict's age and other circumstances over the gravity of the crime committed, according to the prosecutor. The victim, Sharon Raj, was a BSc Radiology student and a native of Parassala in the Thiruvananthapuram district. The court also observed that the convict conspired to operate the crime in phases, she had a criminal background as she attempted to murder the youth earlier and tried to end her life after the arrest to divert the investigation, the prosecutor said. The trial court found Greeshma guilty under Sections 364 (kidnapping or abducting to murder), 328 (causing hurt by poison), 302 (punishment for murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) of IPC. Her uncle Nirmalakumaran Nair was also found guilty under Section 201 (causing disappearance of evidence), while her mother was acquitted due to lack of evidence. The prosecution charge was that Greeshma, who was in a relation with Raj for more than a year, wanted to get rid of him as her family had fixed her marriage with a soldier. Although she asked Raj to



Convict Greeshma being taken to a hospital for medical examination after being sentenced to death by a Kerala court for the murder of her boyfriend in 2022, in Thiruvananthapuram. PTI

back off, the latter did not heed to her demand. This made her to bump him off. Accordingly Greeshma invited Raj to her house and administered him with a concoction laced with a lethal herbicide on October 14, 2022. She was helped by her mother, Sindhu and uncle, Nirmalakumaran Nair in destroying the evidence. After consuming the concoction Raj fell ill and breathed his last on October 25, 2022 following multi-organ failure. The poison consumed by him had resulted in irreversible damage to his liver, kidney and lungs. AM Basheer, a short story writer in addition to being the Additional Sessions Judge at Neyyattinkara, described the murder as a rarest of rare case and the crime was executed brilliantly. "The

accused does not deserve any leniency," said the judge while reading out the 580-pages long verdict. The case was investigated by the Crime Branch of Kerala Police and the charge sheet was submitted in 73 days. The Kerala High Court has to ratify the verdict before the hangman gets ready with the noose. The verdict is based on circumstantial evidence and not on documentary evidence. Expressing satisfaction with the judgment, mother of the victim, Priya, told reporters that she was grateful to the court for issuing such an exemplary order. Special Public Prosecutor VS Vineeth Kumar, told reporters that the verdict was fully justified and the court observed that this case is falling under the rarest of rare category. "The court noted that the convict was a brilliant criminal who meticulously planned the brutal murder," he said. He added that despite Greeshma's belief that she could not be held guilty, the scientific investigation conducted by the probe team ultimately led to her arrest. The court also rejected Greeshma's claim that she had no criminal background stating that she had attempted to poison Sharon by mixing paracetamol tablets into fruit juice. However, that attempt failed when he refused to drink it, citing its bitter taste, on 22 August 2022, the court noted. The court also observed that the woman's actions sent a harmful message to society and violated the sanctity of love, Kumar added. Welcoming the verdict, D Shilpa, the then Superintendent of Police, who oversaw the probe, said it was a victory for the joint efforts of the police investigation team. "We faced several challenges in various phases of the probe but the joint efforts by the officers helped in solving the case," she told reporters.

## MARKETS



## WEATHER



## Uttarakhand to implement UCC on 26 Jan



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN/NEW DELHI

Uttarakhand is all set to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) on the occasion of Republic Day making it the first State in the country. Sources said a cabinet meeting led by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Monday decided to start the process of enforcement of the UCC on January 26 as the cabinet also approved the rules under UCC as how to move ahead in the historic step. In fact last month the State government had announced that UCC would be implemented in January and with municipal elections scheduled for January 23 the results of which would be declared on January 25, sources said the government is prepared to announce UCC implementation on Republic Day. "The mandatory communiqué in this regard will be given the Union Home Ministry sooner," said a senior government source. Set to become the first Indian state to roll out the UCC, its rules manual includes provisions for tatkal registration, door-to-door services in remote areas and a state-wide mock drill on Tuesday. The list of services provided on the portal includes registration of marriage, divorce, and live-in registrations, termination of live-in relationships, intestate succession and declaration of legal heirs, testamentary successions, appeal in cases where application is

rejected, access to information, and complaint registration. After the meeting Dhami informed that preparations for implementing the UCC in the state are almost complete. "The training process for the UCC implementation is almost complete. During the cabinet meeting, we discussed implementing it as soon as possible. After reviewing everything, we will soon announce its implementation date," Dhami stated. Responding to a question, the chief minister said that its implementation will bring a big change in the state. He added that his party had promised to bring UCC before the 2022 elections, and the process was initiated in the first cabinet meeting after assuming power. "We constituted an expert committee to draft the UCC, following which a bill was passed in the state assembly," he said. The Governor and subsequently the President have given their assent to the bill, making it an Act. As Uttarakhand is set to become the first state in independent India to implement uniform laws for all its citizens, Dhami dismissed the Congress's allegations that UCC represents divisive politics, calling them baseless. "This is not any divisive politics. UCC has a uniform system and uniform law for all," CM said. According to officials, online portals have been developed for citizens and officials, featuring Aadhaar-based verification, AI-based translation services in 22 Indian languages, and data integration across more than 13 departments/services (e.g., birth-death registrations, district/high courts, etc.). "The government has set separate fees for expedited registration under the Tatkal service. The registration and termination process for live-in relationships has also been simplified. Termination applications by one partner will require confirmation from the other partner. In testamentary succession, wills can be uploaded on the portal for online registration, modification, revalidation, or revival," a statement from the state government read.

## Indian Army jawan killed in J and K ops



Security personnel stand guard near the site of the encounter, at Gujjarpatli area in Sopore, Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir. PTI

In an overnight anti-terrorist operation, a soldier of the Indian Army laid down his life in the line of duty in the Gujjarpatli area of Sopore in North Kashmir's Baramulla district on Monday. This is the first incident of terrorist-related violence this year in which a soldier has sacrificed his life in the valley. Braving adverse weather conditions, the security forces have been maintaining a tight vigil along the Line of Control and the International Border amid reports of desperate infiltration bids by heavily armed terrorists from across the border in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the entire security grid has been beefed up in the run-up to the Republic Day celebrations across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Continued on page 2

## TRUMP STRIKES BACK



President-elect Donald Trump takes the oath of office during the 60th Presidential Inauguration in the Rotunda of the US Capitol in Washington. PTI

Donald J Trump was on Monday sworn in as the 47th president of the United States, marking his remarkable return to power for a second term four years after he left the American capital as a pariah. The 78-year-old Republican leader storms back to the White House with a strongman persona and a vision of an all-powerful presidency with a promise to aggressively reset US policies in a range of domains, including immigration, tariffs and energy. Trump registered a spectacular victory over his Democratic

rival Kamala Harris in the November 5 presidential election, defying two assassination attempts, two presidential impeachments and his criminal conviction. Four years back, Trump had left Washington as a pariah in the face of his unsuccessful attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election to stay in office. His victory in the bitterly fought election was widely acknowledged as the most momentous comeback in American political history. JD Vance was sworn in as the vice president ahead of Trump. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended the

inauguration ceremony as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's special envoy. The inauguration ceremony was held indoors under the Capitol Rotunda against the initially planned outdoor venue in view of frigid temperatures in the US capital city. The ceremony was attended by Trump's wife Melania, his daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner, and billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Tim Cook. On the first day in office, Trump is expected to sign a slew of executive orders, including kicking off a process to end birthright citizenship.

## Fire Breaks out near Kinnar Akhara camp at Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHA KUMBH NAGAR

A fire broke out near the Kinnar Akhara camp in Sector 16 of the Maha Kumbh on Monday morning, triggering panic among devotees and camp residents. This is the second fire incident at the Kumbh in two days, raising concerns about fire safety measures at the massive religious gathering.



Workers move the charred remains of a tent site, a day after a fire broke out at the Maha Kumbh Mela due to a cylinder blast, in Prayagraj. PTI

Witnesses reported seeing smoke rising from a nearby camp early in the morning, leading to a commotion as people rushed to contain the blaze. Quick action by pilgrims and residents prevented the fire from spreading, and fire department personnel, supported by several fire engines, arrived shortly afterward to extinguish the flames.

Continued on page 2

## BJP expands freebies to free-for-all Capital

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP is set to broaden the ambit of freebies in the national Capital by including male students and senior citizens in the existing free bus ride scheme for women by the AAP led Delhi government ahead of the high-octane Delhi assembly elections. The BJP will release the second part of the 'Sankalp Patra' (manifesto) for the upcoming state assembly polls on Tuesday in the presence of former union minister Anurag Thakur. It is expected the second part will have three to five poll promises including free bus rides to women, male students and senior citizens

and free 'clean drinking' water. There were speculations that the second part of the manifesto will also include 300 free units of electricity for households. However, party sources said that the BJP, which is vying to end its drought of not being in power in the national capital for more than two decades, will wait for the ruling party to first announce its scheme regarding electricity bill and strategies accordingly if they want to increase the units. The AAP led Delhi government currently has a scheme that provides electricity free up to 200 units for households. In a bid to counter the AAP's free bus ride for women, which proved



BJP MP Anurag Thakur with Delhi party President Virendra Sachdeva addresses a press conference, in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri

to be an impactful scheme in the last assembly elections in Delhi, the BJP is set to extend this ride to senior citizens above the age of 40 and students without any age restriction.

In one of its poll promises, AAP has also announced free bus rides for male school and college students, along with a 50 per cent concession on Metro fares for all students, if his party is voted back to power.

The BJP will also promise 20,000 litres of free 'clean drinking' water. "We are promising clean drinking water unlike the AAP that gives dirty water to the people. Hence, this will be different from AAP's scheme which provides water that is not fit to drink," a party leader said. The BJP has already released the first part of its manifesto on January 17. The party promised a monthly aid of Rs 2,500 to women, and Rs 21,000 to pregnant women in its manifesto for the Delhi assembly elections. It made a total of six poll promises in the first part of the 'Sankalp Patra'. Addressing the media, Thakur had assured the people of Delhi that no existing freebies will be discontinued. After the release of the first part, South Delhi BJP MP and Chairman of the Assembly

Election Manifesto Committee Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that there is a lot of enthusiasm among the people about the BJP manifesto. He said that only the first part of the manifesto has been released. "The remaining two parts are also being finalized and they will be released soon. The women of Delhi are very happy about the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana' released in the first part of the BJP's manifesto. BJP workers are taking these announcements to every house. Women are especially thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said, adding that the women do not believe in the announcement made by AAP. The second part of the manifesto will focus on schemes keeping women and youth in the focus largely.



# NCLT orders liquidation of Go First



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Monday ordered the liquidation of Go First, the budget carrier that stopped flying nearly two years ago amid financial woes. In May 2023, the airline filed for a voluntary insolvency resolution process. The tribunal, in a 15-page order, said it is ordering the liquidation of the corporate debtor Go Airlines (India) Ltd. On Monday, the NCLT said the Committee of Creditors (CoC) in the legislative scheme is empowered to take the decision to liquidate the corporate debtor, at any time after its constitution and before confirmation of the resolution plan. "It is well settled that the decision taken by the CoC for liquidation in commercial wisdom of the CoC should

not be interfered with by the Adjudicating Authority. Further, the resolution for liquidation of the corporate debtor was approved by the CoC with 100 per cent voting. Therefore, this Adjudicating Authority sees no merit in interfering with the commercial wisdom of the CoC," it noted. The order comes a little over two months after the Supreme Court, on November 7, 2024, ordered the liquidation of the once-storied airline Jet Airways, which had stopped flying in April 2019. Go Air, which was rebranded as Go First, flew for more than 17 years before suspending operations on May 3, 2023. Dinkar Tiruvannadapuram Venkatasubramanian has been appointed as the liquidator. The liquidator has been asked to follow up and continue to investigate the financial

affairs of the corporate debtor. "The liquidator shall also follow up the pending applications for their disposal during the process of liquidation, including the initiation of steps for recovery of dues of the corporate debtor as per law," according to the order. Further, the liquidator should submit a preliminary report to the tribunal within 75 days from the date of commencement of the liquidation. During the insolvency resolution process, there were at least two bidders in the fray -- Busy Bee Airways, along with SpiceJet chief Ajay Singh, and Sharjah-based aviation entity Sky One. Travel portal EaseMyTrip's Co-Founder Nishant Pitti was the majority shareholder in Busy Bee Airways. In between, aviation regulator DGA deregistered the 54 aircraft of Go First.

The resolution process did not take off, and now, the tribunal has ordered the liquidation of the airline. The cash-starved airline reported a loss in the range of Rs 1,800 crore, including an Rs 800 crore notional loss due to accounting standards in the financial year ended March 2023. It started domestic operations in 2005-06 with the first flight from Mumbai to Ahmedabad, and then in 2018-19, launched international operations. Since commencing operations, Go First had placed two orders for 72 A320 neo planes each with Airbus, one in 2011-12 and another in 2016-17. On May 13, 2021, when the coronavirus pandemic headwinds were blowing strong, the airline announced rebranding itself as 'Go First' with a focus on an ultra-low-cost business model.

# SG raises halal-certification of non-meat products in SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Solicitor general of India Tushar Mehta on Monday raised in the Supreme Court the issue of halal certification of non-meat products such as iron bars and cement, asking why should non-believers be made to pay higher cost for halal-certified products. The law officer made the submissions before the apex court which was hearing the pleas challenging a notification prohibiting the manufacturing, storage, sale and distribution of food products with halal certification within UP, except for items produced for export. "So far as halal meat is concerned, nobody can have any objection. But your lordships would be shocked, as I was shocked, that even cement and iron bars used are to be halal certified," Mehta submitted before a bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih. He said the halal-certifying agencies were charging and the total amount collected in the process might be a few lakh crore. "Even 'atta' (wheat flour) and 'besan' (gram flour) has to be halal-certified. How can 'besan' be halal or non-halal?" asked Mehta. The counsel appearing for the petitioners said the Centre's policy says it was a matter of lifestyle. "All this is voluntary. Nobody

is forcing anyone," the petitioners counsel said. The top law officer referred to non-believers, who did not consume halal-certified products, and asked why they should be made to pay a higher price only because some people wanted halal-certified products. The petitioners' counsel said it was a matter of choice. The bench was informed that the Centre had filed an affidavit in the matter. The top court granted four weeks to the petitioners to file a rejoinder and said the matter would be heard in the week commencing March 24. The November 18, 2023 notification was issued by the office of the commissioner, Food Safety and Drug Administration, Uttar Pradesh, under the provision of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. In its counter affidavit filed in the top court, the Centre said the grievance of the petitioner related to the November 18, 2023 notification issued by the Food Safety and Drug Administration of Uttar Pradesh, which fell entirely under the jurisdiction and authority of the state. It said the Centre's Ministry of Commerce and Industry had no role or authority over such state-level regulations or notifications and an FIR was registered against one of the petitioners at Lucknow in a case related to Halal certification.

The affidavit said the ministry was primarily concerned with the promotion and regulation of international and domestic trade, industrial growth, and export promotion in India. It said the ministry had no direct or indirect role in the enforcement, regulation or administration of laws relating to food safety, drug administration or any other matter raised in the petition. "With an objective to streamline the halal certification process of meat and meat products as halal from India, Department of Commerce and APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) which is a regulatory body for export of meat, agricultural and processed food products requested QCI to develop a national scheme for certification of halal products," it said. The affidavit said the Quality Council of India (QCI) developed the scheme titled "India Conformity assessment Scheme (i-CAS)-Halal" in accordance with international standards. The apex court had in 2024 sought responses from the UP government and others on separate pleas challenging the notification prohibiting the manufacturing, storage, sale and distribution of food products with halal certification within Uttar Pradesh, except for items produced for export.

# Reliance Power appoints Neeraj Parakh as CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Power on Monday said it has appointed Neeraj Parakh as Chief Executive Officer. His appointment is effective from Monday for a period of three years, Reliance Power said in an exchange filing. Parakh's appointment as the company's Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is subject to the approval of members, it said. He is not related to any of the directors of the company. Parakh joined the Reliance Group in June 2004 as an additional manager in the Central Technical Services team at Reliance Infrastructure (Reliance Infra). From his initial focus on planning, project monitoring, technical services, and project execution, he advanced to operations and maintenance roles in both Reliance Power and Reliance Infra. "His expertise extends to navigating complex regulatory requirements and tax matters, enabling the Reliance Group to maintain compliance across multiple domains while ensuring smooth project operations," the company said.

# Fire Breaks out near Kinnar akhara camp at Maha Kumbh

From page 1

Although no injuries or significant property damage were reported, the incident has highlighted the need for stricter safety protocols. An official from the Mela administration confirmed that the cause of the fire is still being investigated. This comes just a day after a major fire in Sector 19 at the Geeta Press Gorakhpur camp caused extensive damage. Following Sunday's incident, the administration had already declared a fire safety alert across the Kumbh area. "We are now conducting rigorous checks of fire extinguishing equipment in all camps to ensure such events are avoided," a senior official stated. Residents near the Kinnar Akhara described the panic caused by the fire. "Smoke was suddenly visible, and people quickly gathered to help control the situation. Thankfully, the fire was contained before it caused serious harm," said Ramesh Tiwari, a pilgrim staying nearby. The fire broke out close to the Samajwadi Party's camp, further adding to the urgency of the response. With two fires in quick succession, safety measures at the Maha Kumbh are now under scrutiny, as officials work to reassure millions of visitors.

# Delhi warms up as AQI crisis continues

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi experienced another warm day, with bright sunshine pushing the maximum temperature to an unprecedented 24.5 degrees Celsius on Monday. This is the second consecutive day when the maximum temperature settled five notches above the normal. This unseasonal warmth, coupled with minimal mist in the morning, made the city feel more like a summer day. However, by evening, the mercury dipped, bringing relief to residents. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) attributed the unusual warmth to a change in wind patterns caused by a western disturbance. The IMD has predicted rain due to Western Disturbance on Wednesday and Thursday in the national capital region. According to the IMD, Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 11.4 degrees Celsius, 3.8 notches above normal, and a thin layer of fog enveloped parts of the city on Monday morning. The minimum temperature in Palam recorded 10.4 degree Celsius; Lodhi Road 11.2 degree Celsius and Ridge 11.2 degree Celsius. On January 19, the city recorded a maximum temperature at 26.1 degrees Celsius, marking the warmest January day in six years. The maximum

temperature recorded on that day by the observatory at Safdarjung -- Delhi's primary weather station -- was seven notches higher than normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Data showed that the last time Delhi recorded a higher January maximum temperature was on January 21, 2019, at 28.7 degrees Celsius. A second western disturbance is expected to influence the region from January 22, likely bringing isolated light rain in the city on the same day, the IMD said in its forecast, adding that it would raise the maximum temperature further. IND said severe winter in the Capital was all but over, with consecutive western disturbances not allowing a sustained dip in the temperature. The lowest maximum temperature recorded so far this season is 4.5°C, on December 12, 2024. The lowest maximum was 14.6°C, recorded on December 27, 2024. "No significant change in minimum temperatures likely over Central India during next 24 hours and gradual rise by 2-4°C during subsequent four days," the IMD said. For Tuesday, the weather office has predicted partly cloudy skies. The predominant surface wind is expected to blow from the northwest, with speeds lower than 6 kilometres per hour

during the morning. Smog and shallow fog is likely to form in most areas during the early morning, with moderate fog in isolated places. The wind speed will gradually increase, reaching 10-12 kilometres per hour from the northwest during the afternoon. It will fall to less than 6 kilometres per hour during the evening and the night. Meanwhile, Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the 'very poor' category of 314 at 4 pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Many areas of Delhi recorded an AQI above the 350 mark. These include Anand Vihar (407), Ashok Vihar (366), Bawana (362), Dwarka Sector 8 (379), Jahangirpuri (373), Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium (375), Mundka (389), Narela (357), Nehru Nagar (397), Okhla Phase-2 (370), Patparganj (393), RK Puram (380), Rohini (370), Sirifort (371), Vivek Vihar (390) and Wazirpur (381) among others. In the NCR region, the AQI on Monday morning in Noida remained at 242, in Gurugram at 282, in Greater Noida at 228, and 226 in Ghaziabad. The IMD said the weather is set to change midweek as two western disturbances bring light rain to Delhi-NCR, Punjab, Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh, and North Rajasthan on Wednesday and Thursday.

# Jaishankar carries Modi's letter to Trump's inauguration

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar is representing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as his Special Envoy at the inaugural function of the United States President-elect Donald Trump in Washington DC on Monday. He is carrying a

letter from the Prime Minister for President-elect Donald Trump, sources said here. He also said it has been the general practice to send Special Envoys of the Prime Minister to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Heads of State and Government. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh attended the swearing-

in ceremony of the president of Nigeria in May 2023 while then Minister of Earth Sciences Kiren Rijiju attended the swearing-in ceremony of Maldivian president in November 2023, the sources said citing past precedents. Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari attended the swearing-in ceremony of the Iranian president in July last

year and MoS for external affairs Pabitra Margherita attended the oath taking ceremony of president of Indonesia and president of Mexico in October 2024, the sources said. In June 2022, the then MoS for external affairs Raj Kumar Ranjan Singh attended the swearing-in ceremony of the president of Philippines, they added.

# MHA probes 17 deaths in Rajouri

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A high-level inter-ministerial team headed by a Director rank officer of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), deputed by Home Minister Amit Shah, Monday visited Badhaal village in Rajouri to ascertain the cause of death of 17 members of three families under mysterious circumstances since December 7, 2024. The central team headed by Director GK Garg arrived in Rajouri on Sunday and held a detailed discussion with the district health and police authorities to gather the latest inputs. A team from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), is also camping in the border district for the last few days to unravel the mystery behind the sudden deaths of villagers. So far 17 villagers have lost their lives in the area. According to officials of the health department patients complained of fever, pain, nausea, and loss of consciousness before dying within days of their admission to hospitals. According to official sources the team, accompanied by dozens of senior officers from various departments met members of the bereaved families.

# Amitabh Sells Mumbai duplex for ₹83 Crore

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a mega real-estate deal, veteran Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan has sold his spacious duplex luxury apartment at Oshiwara in north Mumbai for Rs 83 crore to a couple of Mumbai-based buyers. As per the property registration documents reviewed by proptech platform squareyards.com on the website of Inspector General of Registration (IGR), the transaction was registered on January 17, 2025. Big-B had purchased this property in April 2021 at Rs 31 crore and has now sold it for Rs 83 crore in a deal that reflects a marked 168 per cent increase in value. In essence, the 82-year-old mega star has made a cool profit of Rs 52 crore in less than four years from the asset. Amitabh has sold his duplex luxury apartment -- measuring 5,704 sq ft (529.94 sq mtrs) of built up area and a carpet area of 5,185.62 sq. ft (481.75 sq. mtrs) -- to businessmen Vijay Thakur and Kamal Thakur, both residents of nearby Andheri for Rs. 83 crore. The apartment also features a spacious terrace measuring



4,800 sq. ft (445.93 sq mtrs) and includes six mechanized car parking spaces. The transaction incurred a stamp duty payment of Rs. 4.98 crore and registration charges of Rs. 30,000. The property is located in The Atlantis, a residential project by Crystal Group at Oshiwara, spread across 1.55 acres, offering 4, 5, and 6 BHK apartments. A bustling northern suburb of Mumbai, Oshiwara is known for its vibrant lifestyle and strategic location near the Lokhandwala Complex. Interestingly enough, less than six months after he purchased the property, had in November 2021 rented out

the apartment to Bollywood actress Kriti Sanon for a rent of Rs 10 lakh per month (Rs. 1.20 crore per annum) and a security deposit of Rs 60 lakh, as per the IGR lease documents reviewed by Square Yards. Hailed as Shahenshah of Bollywood, Amitabh has acted in more than 200 films in a five-decade-long career and is considered one most successful actors in the history of Indian Cinema. After he enjoyed superstardom between 1975 and 1988. However, he witnessed a downhill in his career between 1989 and 1999, a period which saw the failed business venture Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Limited which he launched in 1996. The Big-B staged a comeback after 2000. The most popular television show "Kaun Banega Crorepati" brought him fortune and made him a household name in the country. A recipient of several National Awards, Padma Vibhushan, Dadasaheb Phalke Award and others, Amitabh is celebrated for his towering presence in Bollywood, legendary acting skills and a leading television host.

# Life sentence for Sanjoy Roy

From page 1

Following allegations that the Calcutta Police, led by then Police Commissioner Vineet Goyal, was engaged in a cover-up, the Calcutta High Court had promptly transferred the case to the CBI, which expressed its displeasure at how the crime scene had been tampered with. After taking up the case, the CBI arrested the then Principal of RGMCH, Sandip Ghosh, and the officer in charge of the local Tala Police Station on charges of destroying evidence. Ghosh was also arrested for running a multi-crore racket, which included smuggling medical waste and other various

crimes. However, the CBI failed to submit the supplementary chargesheet, and both Ghosh and the officer managed to obtain bail. Junior doctors and other medical staff of the college complain that Abhaya, the victim, had to pay with her life because she had protested against what was happening inside the hospital. Incidentally, Ghosh is known for his close ties to top political circles in the State, which is why he evaded action despite repeated complaints being sent to the Health Ministry and even to the Police authorities about his alleged corrupt acts. Interestingly, as Mamata Banerjee is both the Health

Minister and Home Minister of the State, the political opposition has roundly held her government responsible for a number of scams plaguing the medical campus. While the parents of the victim directly blamed the Chief Minister and her government for a "miscarriage of justice," calling it an "institutional murder," Opposition BJP MP Samik Bhattacharya said, "The Chief Minister is blaming the CBI, but the police had destroyed the case well before it was handed over to the CBI... They will have to answer why the crime scene was allowed to be disturbed by so many outsiders... why the adjoining walls were demolished... why

the vaginal swab of the victim was not preserved at the correct temperature... who sent Sanjoy Roy to that room... and why the CFSL reports were not properly evaluated." Congress leader Adhir Chowdhury, on the other hand, said, "The common people of Bengal are disappointed... The people will never believe this government again." The Left also lambasted the State Government and the CBI, with State CPI(M) Secretary Md Salim saying, "Like the Sharada, Narada, and teachers' job scams, this is another instance of how the Centre and the State work in close cooperation."

# Indian Army jawan killed in J and K ops

From page 1

Both venues for the Republic Day functions in Srinagar and Jammu have been fortified with additional deployments and round-the-clock vigil. According to a spokesman for the Indian Army, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the security forces in the Gujjarpatli area of Sopore upon receiving specific intelligence about the presence of terrorists in the area late on Sunday evening. Confirming the same, the Srinagar-based Chinara Corps, in a post on X, said, "On 19 Jan 25, based on specific

intelligence input regarding the presence of terrorists, a Joint Cordon & Search Operation was launched by the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police at Gujjarpatli, Sopore, Baramulla." "Suspicious activity was observed by vigilant troops, and on being challenged, terrorists opened indiscriminate fire. Our troops effectively retaliated. In the ensuing firefight during the day, one soldier suffered critical injuries and was evacuated for necessary medical care, where he succumbed to the injuries." Indian Army jawan Sw

Pangala Kartheek laid down his life in the line of duty. Meanwhile, MA Sports Stadium, the venue for the main function in Jammu, has been declared out of bounds for the general public as part of the mandatory security protocol. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha will preside over the Republic Day function, with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah as the chief guest. Similarly, Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary and Cabinet Ministers Javid Ahmad Dar, Sakina Itto, Satish Sharma, and Javed Rana will take the salute at

functions in Srinagar, Baramulla, Anantnag, Kathua, and Udhampur districts, respectively, as per an order issued by the General Administration Department. In the remaining 14 districts, respective District Development Council (DDC) chairpersons will take the salute at the main functions held at the district headquarters. The security forces have intensified checking of vehicles and pedestrians across several parts of the Jammu region, particularly in border areas.



# BJP holds meeting of its candidates along with MPs, party leaders

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with party workers and leaders on January 22, the BJP on Monday held a meeting of its candidates along with the seven BJP Delhi MPs and senior party leaders including party Vice-President and Delhi BJP Election Incharge Baijant Panda. The meeting was also held to oversee preparations and campaign pitch in Delhi in areas allotted to them ahead of the assembly elections. With less than 15 days left for voting for the state assembly polls, the BJP is leaving no stone unturned to make sure that it ends its 27 years of being away from power in the national Capital. In the meeting, party's general secretary B L Santhosh was also present. The candidates were briefed regarding the 'Mera Booth Sabse Majboot' programme of

the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, slated to be held on Wednesday, where he will interact with party workers in the meeting. Senior party leadership including Rajya Sabha MP from Bihar and Minister of State of Coal and Mines Satish Chandra Dubey informed the candidates of the programme and asked to ensure maximum participation of booth level workers in the programme. Sharing a message on social media platform X on Saturday, the Prime Minister said that the people of Delhi are looking to give a landslide victory for the BJP. During the meeting with party workers, views would be shared with some of them, who must also share their views during the interaction, PM Modi added. "Delhi is determined to give a landslide victory to BJP in the

Assembly elections. On January 22 at 1 p.m., there will be a great opportunity to interact with dedicated workers in the program 'Mera Booth Sabse Majboot'. For this, you must share your views. I will talk to some of you," the PM wrote on X. Except for BJP's ally Janata Dal (United)'s candidate Shaileendra Kumar, who is fighting from Burari seat, rest 69 were present including Chirag Pawan-led LJP (RV)'s candidate from the reserved seat of Deoli. The BJP is fighting and has given one seat each to its ally LJP (RV) and JDU keeping in mind the upcoming Bihar elections. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will also hold 15 election rallies and public programmes in the national



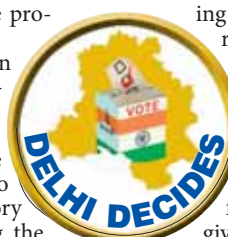
capital, starting from January 23, while campaigning for the party. A party leader said, "UP CM Yogi Adityanath will play a crucial role in campaigning in Delhi for BJP. His presence as UP CM in Delhi will impact voters who belong to Uttar Pradesh. Yogi Adityanath will do 14 rallies and public programmes starting from January 23." Besides Yogi, Modi is likely to

address around three rallies and BJP national president J P Nadda will also address several public meetings in various constituencies. "Shah will address four rallies and hold four roadshows. Nadda is also likely to address 10-12 rallies," said a Delhi BJP leader associated with the poll campaign. "The party has requested three rallies of the prime minister -- one in

Yamuna Khadar in northeast Delhi, another in Karkardooma in east Delhi and third one near Dwarka in west Delhi. At least two of these rallies are certain to be approved by the party leadership," the Delhi BJP leader said. The BJP has already declared its list of 40 star campaigners, including Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, Piyush Goyal, Hardeep Puri and Dharmendra Pradhan. Besides Adityanath, Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Dhami and Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnis will be among the chief ministers of BJP-ruled states, who will be holding rallies in the national capital. "There is a lot of demand for campaigning by CM Adityanath. The party has planned for at least one public meeting of him in each of the 14 districts. Dhami is also in

demand as there is a sizeable number of voters originally from Uttarakhand in various constituencies, especially in trans Yamuna areas," said the Delhi BJP leader. Besides, many candidates have demanded meetings and rallies of famous Purvanchali leaders and party MPs Manoj Tiwari and Ravi Kishan. "These two have a huge following in Delhi, especially in areas dominated by Purvanchali voters. Tiwari, who is a Bhojpuri actor and singer, campaigns across the country because of his popularity among UP and Bihar migrants living in different states," said another party leader. In the meeting, apart from the Prime Minister's programme, they were asked to share the feedback they have been receiving. Party leaders also asked if there is anything the party can provide to enhance their campaign

as there is less than two weeks left for the polls. "These candidates have now been campaigning for about 15 days. They must have an idea of what the situation is on ground. The party asked for their feedback and also assured them of any help they need to win these elections. We have also asked them to ensure that there is maximum participation of booth level workers in their respective seats," a party leader said. The meeting, which was held at the state party office, also included District Presidents from all the assembly constituencies who also shared their feedback. Kalkaji candidate Ramesh Bidhuri, New Delhi candidate Parvish Sahib Singh Verma, Bijwasan candidate Kailash Gahlot and Gandhi Nagar candidate Arvinder Singh Lovely were also present at the meeting.



## Political parties take potshots at each other using AI content

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The high voltage campaign for Delhi assembly polls is seeing a digital battle between the BJP, AAP and Congress taking potshots at each other through memes to woo voters. The AI-driven videos and memes are laced with humour and satire. The national capital will go to polls on February five, and the results will be announced on February eight. While the BJP labelled AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal "Ghoshna Mantri", the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) hit back, describing it as "Gali Baaja Party" (party of abuses). The BJP's Kalkaji candidate Ramesh Singh Bidhuri has become the focus of AAP's campaign, highlighting his "hinni" (doe) jibe at Chief Minister Atishi that has been described by the ruling party as



abusive and anti-women. AAP has posted on social media a satirical video featuring Bidhuri and Amit Shah, humorously portraying a "Gali Championship," where Bidhuri emerges as the undisputed winner, even beating other BJP leaders and candidates. On the other hand, the BJP, looking to dislodge AAP from power, has come up with posters depicting AAP as

"AAPda" (disaster) with slogans like "Aao IDA ko ukhad phenkengay", directly targeting the incumbent's infrastructure development promises. The Congress too is not far behind. Looking to reclaim its lost ground after drawing a blank in the 2015 and 2020 Assembly polls, it has come up with sharp satires in the form of memes and AI-generated video campaigns using the sto-

rytelling format. A post shared by the Congress, shows a razor blade with the tagline "GST", calling the BJP-led Union government a "pocket maar sarkar". The grand old party has also come up with an AI-generated video titled "Fekne Mein Vishwa Vijeta", in which the narrator explains a game, similar to an Olympic-style competition, that involves contestants delivering the most exaggerated claims, with one participant ultimately winning the title. The video concludes with the winner declaring, "Mitron, fekne se mera pooro nata hai", taking a jab at BJP's poll promises that its political rivals have termed rhetoric. The AAP has launched sharp retorts, taking on both the BJP

and Congress, alleging that the grand old party's Delhi unit has been turned pawns in the electoral game of chess by the BJP and its senior leader Amit Shah. The BJP also took a swipe at AAP over its Mohalla clinic, with a parody of a Bollywood movie song, claiming that all such health facilities that have been much touted by the AAP government are under lock and keys while the liquor shops are open and the Yamuna has turned into a drain. In response, AAP came up with a parody of another Bollywood movie song, taking a swipe at the BJP's 15-year stint in the MCD and claiming that the people of Delhi don't like lies and has kept the BJP out of power.



## BJP leaders visit EWS flats

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and North West Delhi MP Yogender Chandolia on Monday live-streamed and "exposed" on social media the grim state of Central Government-constructed flats in the JJ Cluster area of Bawana which AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal has "refused" to distribute to the needy. The field visit came a day after Kejriwal offered to build new affordable houses for sanitation employees in NDMC and MCD, inviting sharp criticism from the BJP which slammed the former Chief Minister for not utilising the already available houses for the poor and "selling fresh dreams" to them. Addressing the media, Sachdeva said, "Today, we inspected the dilapidated flats, which are a consequence of



Kejriwal's obstinacy and political rivalry, thereby exposing his double standards." The BJP leaders highlighted how the flats' walls have collapsed due to a lack of maintenance and the premises are covered with dense overgrowth of wild plants and weeds. Sachdeva claimed that 50,000 flats were left to deteriorate solely because Arvind Kejriwal insisted on renaming the flats after himself and sought personal credit for the Central Government's project. He further stated that the

Central Government allocated around Rs 12,000 crore for constructing these flats for sanitation workers and the poor. However, even after being elected as Chief Minister thrice, Kejriwal has neglected their allocation and instead made hollow promises of new flats. Sachdeva assured that once a BJP-led government comes to power in Delhi, the party will repair these flats just as the Central Government has built solid houses for four crore citizens across India.

## LG takes strong note of attack on Saif by Bangladeshi national

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of attack on Saif Ali Khan allegedly by a Bangladeshi national, Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has asked the authorities to take action as there are organised syndicates and vested interest groups which facilitate the settlement of such immigrants, facilitate their employment on the basis of forged documents such as Aadhar, Voter ID and Ration Card. Stating this on Monday, Raj Niwas said on Monday Saxena has taken note of the grave criminal incident involving a high profile Bollywood actor in Mumbai, wherein a Bangladeshi national was involved in house break and criminal assault. It has been widely reported that the concerned individual was living under an assumed identity and was working at a restaurant. The LG has observed that the involvement of illegal Bangladeshi/Rohingya infiltrators in criminal/illegal activities in Delhi cannot be ruled



out. It is underscored that such illegal immigrants are often employed by shopkeepers and other residents as workers/house help at far lower wages than the prescribed minimum wages, thereby depressing local labour markets. Saxena has directed that a special campaign be launched to identify such infiltrators on a mission mode. An outreach programme may be launched through print and social media to generate public awareness on the importance of verification of employees/domestic help and workers including construction labour in the interest of their own security. Resident Welfare Associations/Shopkeeper

Associations may also be sensitized about the need of antecedent verification before employment. For those employers who are providing employment, accommodation or shelter to such illegal immigrants without antecedent verification, suitable legal action may also be initiated. Earlier, BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj on Monday launched a scathing attack on AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal over his alleged silence on the Bangladeshi accused in Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan stabbing case. Swaraj's critique of AAP and its supremo came during the inauguration of BJP's election office in the Greater Kailash constituency for the upcoming Delhi elections. "I want to ask Arvind Kejriwal why he has gone quiet now that it has been revealed the accused is Bangladeshi. Whenever the Election Commission verified and removed illegal Bangladeshi voters from the electoral rolls, AAP always opposed it," she added.

## BJP leader accuses AAP of supporting separatists, questions spate of bomb hoaxes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Dubbing the Aam Aadmi Party a party of "algawwad", "atankwad" and "afwah", BJP leader Anurag Thakur on Monday accused it of supporting separatists and raised questions on the spate of hoax bomb threats to schools in Delhi. Congress and AAP appear different outwardly but are the same inside, Thakur said at a press conference. "AAP came to power talking about corruption of the Congress. But now the 'A' in AAP is also known for 'arajak-ta' (anarchy), 'algawwad' (separatism), 'atankwad' (terrorism), 'afwah' (spreading rumours) and 'apraadhi' (criminals). What compels AAP to join hands with such anti-national forces," Thakur said. The Congress and AAP, he said, were seen as joining hands on the issues of hanging of Afzal Guru and surgical strikes. When the entire country was waiting for the hanging of the Parliament attack accused Afzal Guru, some peo-



ple were trying for a presidential pardon for him, Thakur said. He did not take any names. "Whose NGO came forward for commuting of Afzal Guru death sentence. Whose relatives, parents were part of it. Will (Delhi Chief Minister) Atishi and (Arvind) Kejriwal say something or keep mum?" he asked. Thakur went on to ask which politicians stayed at the homes of "terrorist sympathisers" during Punjab polls. He claimed that there were political parties who supported the separatists and terrorists and also received

donations from them. "There are some who spread rumours of bomb blasts and put the parents of school children in Delhi under distress, Thakur added. He again addressed Atishi and Kejriwal and queried, "Who are connected to those spreading bomb blast rumours. Atishiji, Kejriwalji will you respond?" Kejriwal and AAP are "old players" at creating "anarchy and sensation", he alleged.

## Top priority to provide employment opportunities to youngsters: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said that his top priority would be to provide employment opportunities to youngsters, if re-elected to power. Addressing a "janasabha" in the Vishwas Nagar Assembly constituency ahead of the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls, Kejriwal said, "The biggest work I am going to do is on employment. I will arrange employment for our youngsters. Providing employment to our youngsters will be my top priority." During his address, the AAP national convener also highlighted the achievements of his party's government in Delhi over the last 10 years, including providing free electricity, water and quality healthcare to people, as well as improving the condition of government schools. "We are providing free electricity, water, healthcare and

good government education. You can call your relatives in BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana, and ask if they get zero electricity bills," Kejriwal said. The former Delhi chief minister warned the voters against supporting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), claiming that if they vote for the saffron party, it will shut down the mohalla clinics, stop the free bus rides for women and "you will have to pay for bus tickets". Kejriwal outlined key promises under the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) manifesto for the upcoming polls, such as a monthly assistance of Rs 2,100 each for women under the "Mahila Samman Yojana" and free healthcare services for senior citizens under the "Sanjeevani Yojana". He also slammed the BJP over the alleged breakdown of law and order in Delhi. "They (BJP leaders) never say what they have done for the city in the last 10 years. All they do is abuse me. They call me by different abusive names," he said.



## Such persons should be barred from contesting: SC judge on Tahir Hussain's plea for interim bail to contest Delhi polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday passed some strong observations in the matter pertaining to a bail plea filed by All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) candidate and Delhi's northeast district riots case accused Mohd Tahir Hussain, by saying "such persons should be barred from contesting." The AIMIM candidate, formerly with the Aam Aadmi Party, who is an accused in the 2020 Delhi riots, is from the Mustafabad constituency, sought bail to campaign for the upcoming Delhi elections. The Supreme Court has listed the matter for Tuesday. A bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and Ahsanuddin Amanullah adjourned the hearing due to paucity of time but just as it was rising for the day, Hussain's lawyer mentioned the matter and requested for a hearing on January 21. The court, however, took strong note of Hussain's bail



plea and observed that people like the petitioner "should be barred" from contesting elections. "Jail mein baithe ladte hain na chunava ab toh (these days elections are contested from jail)...It is easy to win elections sitting in jail," the bench observed. Justice Mithal is part of the two-judge bench that also includes Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah. "All such persons should be barred from contesting the elections," the bench remarked in

response. His lawyer submitted Hussain's nomination was accepted. The Delhi High Court on January 14 granted custody parole to Hussain to file nomination papers from the Mustafabad constituency on an AIMIM ticket. It, however, refused his plea for interim bail from January 14 to February 9 to fight the polls, saying the gravity of allegations against Hussain, being the main perpetrator in the violence, resulting in the death of

several persons, could not be overlooked. The high court said about 11 FIRs were registered against him in connection with the riots and he was admittedly in custody in a related money laundering case and UAPA case. The senior counsel counsel appearing for Hussain argued fighting elections was a complicated process, which required him to not only file his nomination by January 17 but also open a bank account and campaign. Maintaining that contesting elections was not a fundamental right, the police had alleged that Hussain who was the "main conspirator" and "funder" of the February 2020 riots could complete formalities and fight polls on custody parole. Violence broke out in northeast Delhi on February 24, 2020, leaving 53 dead and several injured. According to the prosecution, on February 26, 2020, complainant Ravinder Kumar

informed the Dayalpur Police Station that his son Ankit Sharma, posted in the Intelligence Bureau, was missing since February 25, 2020. Sharma's mortal remains were reportedly recovered from Khajuri Khas nullah in the riot-affected area and his body bore 51 injuries. Hussain, in the bail plea, said he spent 4.9 years in jail and though the trial started in the case, only 20 of the 114 prosecution witnesses were examined so far. Pleading he had suffered a long incarceration, Hussain said the fact that several witnesses were still left to be examined meant the trial wouldn't be over soon. The co-accused, his plea said, allegedly involved in the riotous mob and committing the offence of murder were granted bail by the high court.



## AAP takes a dig at BJP, launches blank book on saffron party's achievements

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up its attack on the BJP, the AAP on Monday launched a book "Bhajpa ki Uplabdhayan" (Achievements of BJP in Delhi) -- with all blank pages, mocking the saffron party for failing to fulfill its election promises. Launching the book at a press conference at the AAP headquarters, senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh flipped through the blank pages and said the BJP made several promises to win the 2014 elections and again after coming to power, but failed to deliver on them. The book highlights that PM Modi's unfulfilled promises -- such as regularizing Delhi's unauthorized colonies, depositing Rs 15 lakh in every citizen's account, providing permanent housing for all, doubling farmers' incomes, and reducing the



prices of petrol, diesel, and cooking gas cylinders -- have not been fulfilled. Additionally, the book suggests that to strengthen the nation and support PM Modi, individuals should continue paying taxes on everything without hesitation. "In 1925, the RSS was established in the country, in 1952, Jansangh was formed, and in 1980, the BJP was founded. After that, the BJP ruled in many states and made numerous promises. But despite making several promises to the public, after 2014, when PM

Modi took office, he promised things like transferring Rs 15 lakh into people's bank accounts, creating 2 crore jobs every year, providing pucca houses to all in slums, selling petrol at Rs 50 per litre, and strengthening the rupee against the dollar." He (Modi) also promised to give registry rights in unauthorized colonies. "Today, AAP will release a book showcasing what he has been able to achieve so far. The BJP won't tell you this, but we will reveal it," Singh said, taking a jibe at the party.



# Rahul writes to Nadda, Atishi on plight of AIIMS patients

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has written to Union Health Minister J P Nadda and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, flagging the plight of hundreds of patients and their family members huddled on the footpath and subway outside AIIMS here and sought concrete steps to resolve this "humanitarian crisis".

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha also urged the central government to take concrete steps to strengthen the public healthcare system in the upcoming budget and increase the necessary resources for it.

In a post in Hindi on X, Rahul said, "I have written letters to the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Union Health Minister to provide better facilities to the patients and their families coming to Delhi AIIMS from all over the country."

"Recently I saw that in freezing cold these people are forced to sleep in the subway under the metro station, where there is no provision of drinking water or a toilet. There are heaps of garbage lying around. The arrival of such a large number of patients to Delhi AIIMS also shows that people are not getting affordable and good quality health facilities where they live," Rahul said.

"I hope that taking cognizance of my letter, the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Union Health Minister will take immediate steps to resolve this humanitarian crisis," he said.

In his letter to Nadda, Gandhi said he wants to bring to his attention "the distressing situation" outside AIIMS, Delhi and went on to add that during his recent visit to the area he was saddened to see hundreds of patients and their family members huddled on the footpath and in the subway in the bitter winter cold, with



only thin blankets to protect them without drinking water or sanitation facilities.

"Many of these patients travel from across the country, spend their life savings, and wait for months on end for medical care at India's premier medical institution. I am sure you will agree that no one should face such hardship, especially while already battling serious medical conditions," he said.

While AIIMS Delhi delivers excellent and affordable care, the condition of patients and their families shows that health-care is still out of reach for crores of Indians, he said in his letter dated January 18.

"As public representatives, we must all work together to address these issues. I urge you to take immediate and timely steps to address the situation at AIIMS Delhi. The government of India should work with the AIIMS leadership, the Government of Delhi and

charitable organizations to provide heating, bedding, water, and shelter to patients and expand permanent facilities for accommodation," Gandhi said in his letter to Nadda.

In addition, reducing the long wait times would help reduce patients' uncertainty, he said. "Crucially, the larger systemic issue is that AIIMS Delhi is overburdened because crores of people do not have access to affordable and high-quality healthcare where they live. I urge you, as Health Minister, to recognise and address this systemic issue," Rahul said.

As a first step, the new AIIMS facilities across the country should be operationalised at the earliest, he said.

"I hope the Government will use the upcoming Budget to review its overall approach, and substantially increase its investment in public healthcare. I request your prompt

intervention on this pressing humanitarian issue. You have my full support in any endeavour to reduce the suffering of countless patients and their families," the Congress leader said.

In his letter to Atishi, Rahul urged the Delhi government to take immediate and timely steps this winter. "More permanent solutions to accommodate patients by building and expanding permanent facilities should also be explored, in partnership with AIIMS and the Government of India, as well as charitable organisations," he said.

The Congress leader on Thursday had met several patients and their families camping on the roads, footpaths and subways around the AIIMS and enquired about their problems and grievances. He had accused the Centre and the Delhi government of showing "insensitivity" towards them.

## NCC cadets should contribute to PM's Viksit Bharat dream: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Noting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is an ex-cadet of the National Cadet Corps (NCC), Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday exhorted cadets to contribute to the Prime Minister's dream of making India a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Addressing a gathering of cadets and officers during his visit to the ongoing Republic Day NCC camp at Delhi cantonment, he also said he sees an image of India in NCC cadets.

A total of 2,361 NCC cadets from across the country are taking part in the month-long camp, which began on December 30, and will culminate with the Prime Minister's rally on January 27. The annual event is also witnessing the participation of 917 girl cadets, the largest contingent so far.

Appreciating the unity and discipline shown by cadets at the NCC camp, the defence minister said, "India has many bodies but one soul, many branches but one root, many rays but one light".

In his address, Rajnath Singh also recalled that before foraging into politics, he himself was "a student, a cadet of NCC, and



Ranjana Dimri

a physics teacher".

The energy and enthusiasm of the cadets reflect that India has and will have a bright future. NCC ingrains in youth leadership quality and discipline, he added.

The defence minister also spoke of the 'Viksit Bharat' vision of the government and the role the cadets can play in realising the ambitious vision that seeks to make India a developed nation by the time it completes 100 years since its Independence in 1947.

"Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, himself an ex-cadet of the NCC, has given the vision

of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. So, its current cadets have a responsibility to contribute to his 'Viksit Bharat' dream," he said.

However, Rajnath Singh emphasised that 'Viksit Bharat' does not mean merely physical development on land, but a holistic growth of entire society.

Praising the NCC's role in inculcating discipline and leadership qualities among cadets when they are young, the defence minister said there is a "spark within" the cadets that forges a way of life for them in such a way that irrespective of

the profession they will choose later, they will all contribute to nation-building.

Rajnath Singh also recalled his visit to Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai, a place, he said, also reminds one of the deadly 26/11 terror attacks in that city in 2008.

He also mentioned the last words spoken by Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan before he laid down his life while battling the terrorists in the attack. "That was his (Major Unnikrishnan's) leadership quality (shown during the combat)," the defence minister told the cadets, exhorting them

to become leaders in life.

Rajnath Singh also exhorted them to "think big" and never get disheartened in life, nor have a narrow-minded thinking. "A person becomes significant in life not by virtue of the big posts one holds, but by the human qualities they have," he said.

"There is a need to move forward by breaking free from shackles of thoughts," he said, and urged people to never harbour conceit.

Earlier, he was accorded a welcome by a group of cadets drawn from all three wings of the NCC and later also reviewed a guard of honour given by them at the venue.

The defence minister also handed Raksha Mantri Padak and Commendation Cards to several NCC cadets, chosen for their exemplary performance and devotion to duty, at an investiture ceremony held during his visit. Rajnath Singh also visited the 'Flag Area' and interacted with a few cadets.

On Saturday, Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth visited the NCC camp and lauded cadets as "ambassadors" of 'Viksit Bharat' while urging them to continue working tirelessly towards the vision of making India a developed country by 2047.

## SC stays proceedings in defamation case against Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed trial court proceedings against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a criminal defamation case filed against him for alleged defamatory remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Naveen Jha, a BJP worker, had filed the case against Gandhi in 2019 for his alleged remarks against Shah.

During one of his public speeches in Chaibasa before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Gandhi had allegedly referred to Shah as a "murderer".

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta issued notice to the Jharkhand government and the BJP leader while seeking their response on Gandhi's appeal.

"Issue notice. Till further orders, further proceedings in the trial shall remain stayed," the bench said.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Gandhi, said there are several judgments which say that only the aggrieved person



can file a criminal defamation complaint.

He submitted that the defamation complaint cannot be filed by a proxy third party.

Senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani appeared for Jha. Gandhi has challenged the Jharkhand High Court order, which rejected his petition to quash proceedings against him in a trial court in connection with the complaint.

The Congress leader had contested the decision of a magisterial court in Ranchi, which instructed him to personally appear before the court to undergo trial. Later, Gandhi moved the high court, which issued a stay order on any further actions in the lower court against him.

After recording the statements of the complainant and witnesses, the magistrate had found merit in the case against Gandhi and directed him to appear before the trial court on February 4, 2023.

Later, the HC, while issuing a stay on the notice issued by the magistrate, ordered that "no coercive steps" be taken against Gandhi.

## Lakhimpur Kheri case: SC seeks report from UP police on Ashish Mishra 'influencing' witnesses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a report from UP Police after allegations, accusing Ashish Mishra of influencing witnesses in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence case, surfaced. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh directed the Lakhimpur Kheri superintendent of police (SP) to file the report in the court.

"In our considered view the veracity, genuineness and reliability of such material can only be gone into by the police administration. The police administration may submit a report in support or against the allegation made in the application seeking cancellation of bail," the bench said.

Mishra, son of former Union Minister Ajay Mishra, denied the allegations in his affidavit, and said every time the matter was listed, such averments were made for the cancellation



of his bail granted by the top court.

Advocate Prashant Bhusan, appearing for complainants, claimed he had an audio recording of an attempt made to influence crucial witnesses in the case. He also alleged Mishra attended a public meeting in violation of bail conditions. Seeking the cancellation of Mishra's bail, Bhusan said the court may ascertain the authenticity of the material brought before it.

Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for Mishra, opposed Bhusan's submission, saying his client was being targeted unnecessarily. He said his client was in Lok Sabha secretariat in Delhi on the day of the alleged public meeting. The bench asked Bhusan and Dave to submit their material to Ruchira Goel, UP Government's Standing Counsel, for handing it over to the Lakhimpur Kheri SP. Bhusan said the inquiry

should be carried out by some senior officers and not the SP as he may come under the influence. The bench said the SP was fairly a senior IPS officer and the court should trust the officers.

The hearing was posted after four weeks. On November 27, last year, the top court directed Mishra to respond to the allegations that witnesses of the case were being threatened. The apex court granted bail to Mishra on July 22 last year and restricted his movement to Delhi or Lucknow.

On October 3, 2021, eight people, including four farmers, were killed in Tikunia in Lakhimpur Kheri district during a protest by farmers against Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's visit to the area. Four farmers were mowed down by a sports utility vehicle. A driver and two BJP workers were then allegedly lynched by angry farmers. A journalist also died in the violence.

## Road safety: SC asks States, UTs to file report on compliance of Motor Vehicle Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant order, the Supreme Court on Monday directed 23 states and seven union territories to file compliance reports indicating implementation of the Motor Vehicle law's recent provisions besides rules on electronic monitoring and road safety measures. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan noted five states and a UT, namely, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Delhi, had filed their compliance reports.

The top court on September 2, 2024 passed directions on the implementation of Section 136A of the Motor Vehicles Act read with Rule 167A of the Motor Vehicles Rules which allow authorities to electronically monitor speeding vehicles.

The bench has now asked the remaining 23 states and seven UTs to file their compliance reports which will be shared with



the Supreme Court committee on road safety.

The apex court panel, in turn, would look into all aspects and provide its inputs which could be considered by the Centre in framing the standard operating procedure on electronic monitoring and enforcement of road safety measures, the bench said.

Senior advocate Gaurav Agrawal, assisting the bench as an amicus curiae, informed the bench that six states had filed their reports and the necessary directions may be passed with

regard to them.

The bench said it would consider the aspect on March 25 and its panel on road safety, in the meantime, could seek assistance of the six states while deliberating upon the reports.

Section 136A, introduced in 2021 in the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, aims to deploy advanced technologies such as speed cameras, closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, speed guns, body-worn cameras, and automatic number plate recognition systems to ensure better traffic

management and enforcement of traffic laws.

It also emphasises electronic monitoring on national highways, state highways, and urban roads in cities with a population exceeding one million.

Rule 167A of the Motor Vehicles Rules deal with the implementation and other regulatory aspects of road safety measures.

Under the rule, the state governments have to ensure installation of electronic enforcement devices at high-risk and high-density corridors on national and state highways, and at critical junctions at least in major cities with more than a million population and also including 132 cities as specified in the rules.

"Section 136A of the Motor Vehicles Act is an innovative provision with the potential to transform road safety enforcement by leveraging technology. Proper implementation will ensure road discipline and allow for the efficient prosecution of violators," the bench had observed.

## Yasin Malik trial: SC asks J and K HC to ensure proper VC facilities in Jammu court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the registrar general of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court to ensure proper video-conferencing facilities at a Jammu special court hearing two cases against jailed JKLF chief Yasin Malik and others. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan further directed the Delhi High Court registrar general to ensure proper video-conferencing facilities in Tihar jail where Malik is lodged in a separate terror financing case.

Both High Court registrars were directed to file the status reports on February 18 by the

bench, which posted the hearing on the CBI plea on February 21. "We have perused the observations made by the (special) judge (of the Jammu court). At two places, he has recorded that the video-conference system in his court was not functioning properly," the court said.

The bench therefore directed the registrar general of Jammu and Kashmir High Court to look into what was "stated by the learned judge" and "take immediate steps for installing a proper system" to conduct the hearing through video-conferencing.

"The system should be such that there can be effective cross examination by using the system," it added.

The top court asked the registrar general to "do the needful" and submit a report by February 18 before it after deputing an expert to examine the newly-installed VC system in Jammu court.

"We also direct the registrar in-charge of IT (information technology) of the Delhi High Court to visit the jail at Tihar to see whether (VC) facilities are good enough to enable the first respondent (Yasin Malik) to cross examine witnesses in the trial," it said.

The bench was hearing a plea of the CBI seeking the transfer of the cases' trials in the 1989 kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of former union minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, and the



1990 Srinagar shootout from Jammu to New Delhi.

At the outset, the bench was informed except Malik, all other accused were out on bail in the two cases.

The bench suggested it may transfer the trials to Tihar Jail by setting up a special court and other accused may appear through the VC facilities. The suggestion was opposed

by the counsel of the other accused.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, said it appeared all the accused were working in tandem to delay the trial.

An accused's counsel, however, said, "What is the harm in having the trial there at Jammu court and have Yasin Malik appear through the VC? It will be difficult travelling all the way to Delhi."

He said the offences alleged were old and the accused, who were in their 60s and 70s suffered from age-related ailments.

Mehta said while Malik refused to engage a lawyer, others opposed the transfer of trial.

The accused said they were old, but they should have been careful enough in younger days while committing the offences, he said.

The top court on December 18, last year, gave six accused two weeks to respond to the CBI's plea to transfer the trial of the cases.

The plea is over the two cases -- killing of four Indian Air Force personnel on January 25, 1990 in Srinagar and Rubaiya's abduction on December 8, 1989.

Malik, chief of the banned organisation JKLF, is facing trial in both cases.

The top court was hearing a CBI plea against the September 20, 2022 order of a Jammu trial court directing

Malik, serving a life term in Tihar jail, to be produced before it physically to cross-examine prosecution witnesses in the abduction case.

The CBI said Malik was a threat to national security and couldn't be allowed to be taken outside the Tihar jail premises. Rubaiya, who was freed five days after her abduction when the then BJP-backed V P Singh government at the Centre released five terrorists in exchange, now lives in Tamil Nadu. She is a prosecution witness for the CBI, which took over the case in early 1990s.

Malik has been lodged in Tihar jail after he was sentenced by a special NIA court in May 2023 in a terror-funding case.



# The unique discipline of Akharas at Maha Kumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

The Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj is not just a confluence of spiritual energy but also a showcase of unique traditions upheld by various Akharas. Each Shaivite Dashanami Akhara has its own internal governance, complete with dedicated "Kotwalis" (police stations) and "Kotwals" (chiefs) responsible for maintaining order within their camps. "The Kotwals are always Naga ascetics," explains Mahant Mahendranand of the Niranjani Akhara. "Their primary duty is to ensure discipline among the Nagas and other sadhus. They are empowered to impose penalties, both minor and severe, depending on the transgression."

**Punishments and Internal Laws**  
Akharas have their own sets of rules and unique methods of delivering justice. Minor offenses may result in unusual punishments, such as distributing datun

(chewing sticks) to all members or performing camp cleaning duties for a week. However, serious crimes like marriage, rape, or financial misconduct often lead to expulsion from the Akhara. Digambar Ganesh Puri, Kotwal of the Mahanirvani Akhara, shares, "the purpose of these punishments is not merely punitive but corrective. They aim to make the offender realize their mistakes. Most penalties are religious rather than financial." In the case of severe accusations, the individual must present their defense before a council under the "Dharmadhwaaja" (religious flag), where the final decision is made by the panch (council). The Akharas avoid external courts, resolving disputes internally through deliberation and consensus.

**Strenuous Rituals Begin for Naga Sannyas Initiates**  
On Saturday, over 900 ascetics of the Juna Akhara embarked on their Naga



Sannyas initiation. The day began with a collective dip in the Ganges, where each ascetic performed 108 immersions, chanting "Har Har Mahadev." Following this, the initiates underwent traditional tonsure and Janu (sacred thread) rituals. Back at the camp, the novices gathered around a sacred fire under the Dharmadhwaaja to begin intense spiritual practices. As per tradition, these ascetics, dressed only in loin cloths, must renounce worldly ties through rigorous rituals that last 48 hours. "Through these practices, the ascetics learn to conquer their senses and offer their weaknesses to the sacred fire," explained Shri Mahant Mohan Giri.

**Rituals of Renunciation**  
One of the most profound aspects of Naga initiation is the self-performed pinda daan (offering to ancestors), a ritual traditionally reserved for the deceased. By performing their own pinda daan, initiates symbolically renounce their previous lives, severing all social ties and familial obligations. "The pinda daan liberates them from worldly debts, including their duties toward ancestors," says Acharya Awadheshanand Giri. "It is a step toward complete surrender to spiritual life. Once they take this step, there is no return to the social realm." The initiation culminates with the distribution of symbolic items like the kandi (sling bag), saffron robes, loin cloths, and bhabhoot (sacred ash). With these rituals complete, the novices are formally inducted into the Naga order. The Akharas, with their disciplined structures and centuries-old practices, offer a glimpse into a world where spirituality and tradition merge seamlessly. The Maha Kumbh, thus, becomes not just a religious congregation but a celebration of India's profound spiritual heritage.



## Khoya-paya kendra reunites loved ones with their families

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

The Digital Mahakumbh Khoya-Paya Kendra established by the Yogi government at the Prayagraj Mahakumbh, has once again demonstrated its efficiency, reuniting two missing children with their families using state-of-the-art technology and through dedicated efforts in Sector 4. The two children, 7-year-old Dharamjeet and 6-year-old Vikas Kumar, were found by the police in different areas and brought to the Khoya-Paya Kendra. Their pictures were displayed on digital platforms and TV screens to ensure that the information reached their families quickly. Upon receiving the information, the families arrived at the center. After completing the identification process, the children were safely handed over to their mother in the presence of the police. The incident occurred on January 15. Both children were brought to the Lost and Found Center from the Jhansi area, and they identified themselves as residents



of Chainpur. The Digital Mahakumbh Khoya-Paya Kendra serves as a prime example of the efficient administration under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership and the use of modern technology for public welfare. ON Sunday, 10 Khoya-Paya Kendra were established throughout the fairgrounds, further enhancing the reach and efficiency of the initiative. This center plays a crucial role in reuniting lost individuals, particularly children, with their families during the grand Mahakumbh event. The government has not only ensured that Khoya-Paya Kendra is technologically advanced but has also emphasized quick processing, human sensitivity, and transparency. Devotees attending the Mahakumbh have expressed appreciation for this initiative. The center has not only provided relief to families but also fulfilled the government's responsibility towards the safety and faith of the public.

## The mystical world of Aghoris at Maha Kumbh

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

A surreal and intriguing sight greets visitors at the Aghori camp in Sector 19 of the Maha Kumbh. Men clad entirely in black, their bodies smeared with ash, long unkempt hair flowing down their backs, rudraksha beads adorning their necks, and piercing red eyes. Some wear black turbans while others have earrings dangling from their ears. Outside the camp, a large black flag with "Alakh Niranjani" flutters in the wind. This is the enigmatic world of Aghoris, a sect often shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. The Aghori way of life is not merely a set of practices; it is a spiritual journey that defies conventional norms. Bhola Nath, head of the Kathmandu Aghori Ashram, explains, "Aghor is not something you can learn from books. It is an experience that transforms you

from within. To walk this path, one must serve in an ashram under a guru for three years. Only then does the guru decide whether the seeker is ready for initiation." Aghoris have long been the subject of myths and misconceptions. One such falsehood is the idea that they engage in human sacrifice. Bhola Nath refutes this, stating, "There is a lot of misinformation about us. People spread rumors on social media, and some self-proclaimed Aghoris add to the confusion. It is true that ancient practices included symbolic offerings, but taking a life has never been a part of Aghor tradition. Even a single drop of blood was considered sufficient in ancient rituals." Their connection to cremation grounds is another aspect of their practices often misunderstood. These sacred spaces are central to their spiritual discipline, where they

engage in Shamsan Sadhana, Shiva Sadhana, and Shava Sadhana. In the latter, it is believed that the dead can fulfill certain desires during the rituals. Offerings of meat and liquor are made as part of these practices, which are conducted in strict secrecy, inaccessible to outsiders. One of the most controversial beliefs is that Aghoris consume the flesh of burning corpses. While some rituals may involve symbolic acts linked to decomposition, these are deeply philosophical rather than grotesque. Aghoris aim to transcend fears and attachments, seeing life and death as different manifestations of the same existence. Bhola Nath elaborates, "For an Aghori, everything is Shiva. The body, whether living or dead, is just a mix of five elements. Our rituals teach us to see beyond dualities like life and death."

## Government launches online bonfire wood booking service for devotees

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

In a move to ensure the comfort of devotees attending Mahakumbh 2025, the Yogi government has launched an online system for procuring bonfire wood. The Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation has made firewood depot locations accessible via Google. The move seeks to help pilgrims combat the cold during the event. Devotees, including those arriving from abroad, can easily locate depots by searching "firewood depot Prayagraj" online, streamlining the process and



ensuring a hassle-free experience. DSM Prayagraj RK Chandna announced that 16 firewood depots have been set up across the Mahakumbh area, with wood priced at Rs 600 per quintal. This initiative addresses the growing demand for firewood during the event and ensures a consistent supply. Sixteen depots have been established across the Mahakumbh area to provide bonfire wood, with major depots located in Sector 16. The Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation ensures wood availability at reasonable rates. Devotees can easily locate these depots by searching "firewood depot" online and use mobile navigation to reach the nearest depot effortlessly. According to the Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation, approximately 27,000 quintals of wood will be supplied during Mahakumbh. Firewood will be transported from various depots across the state and sold at the prescribed rate of Rs 600 per quintal. This digital initiative by the government ensures ease of access for devotees and contributes to a smooth and well-organized Mahakumbh experience.



## Woman from Thane loses ₹13.54 lakh to cyber 'suitor'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THANE/MUMBAI**

Thane Police investigating a cyber fraud case busted an illegal call centre in UP and arrested the main accused after a car chase on the Lucknow-Barabanki highway, a senior officer said here on Monday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone-I) Subash Burse said a woman from Mumbai in Thane district lodged an FIR last October stating that a man duped her of Rs 13.54 lakh

through a matrimony platform. "The man created a fake profile, posing as a successful diamond and jewellery businessman based in the USA. Over time, he gained the victim's trust and convinced her to pay large sums under various pretexts, including customs clearance for gifts and emergency funds under the pretext of an accident in Uganda," the DCP said. The digital trail led the police to Jaid Ful Khan, a 24-year-old salon operator from Bhopal. He

spilled the beans on the alleged mastermind, Eaz Ahmed Imtiaz Ahmed, a businessman based in Lucknow. On a tip-off received from a 12-year-old tea vendor, police located the illegal call centre, the police officer said. "When the suspect sensed police presence, he attempted to flee in his SUV, prompting a high-speed chase along the Lucknow-Barabanki highway. After a dramatic six-kilometre pursuit, the police apprehended him and seized his vehicle," he said.

## LS Speaker expresses concern over fewer sittings of legislative bodies

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA**

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla Monday expressed concern over the decreasing number of sittings of legislative bodies and urged presiding officers to make efforts to address the issue. Birla's remarks at the inaugural function of the 85th All India Presiding Officers Conference (AIPOC) here came amid reports that the Delhi Assembly held a mere 74 sittings in its entire five-year tenure. The Lok Sabha Speaker also flagged planned disruptions in Parliament and State Assemblies, and urged political parties to draft guidelines for maintaining the dignity of the House. Birla also favoured increasing the role of parliamentary standing committees to ensure accountability of elected Governments. "Standing committees are mini-Parliaments and there is a need to strengthen their functioning," he said. Birla urged lawmakers to prioritize efficient scheduling and effective utilization of parliamentary time in order to address pressing national issues and ensure that the voice of the people is adequately represented. He also observed that the issue of maintaining and enhancing the dignity and



prestige of our Houses is of utmost importance. He suggested that all parties should make internal Code of Conduct for Members' behaviour in the House so that the democratic values are respected. Observing that People's representatives should follow constitutional propriety, rising above political ideology and affiliation, the Speaker opined that people's representatives must respect healthy parliamentary traditions while expressing their ideologies and viewpoints. The 85th AIPOC was attended by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh, Bihar Assembly Speaker Nand Kishore Yadav, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and presiding officers of State legislative bodies from across the country. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar met Birla at the Raj Bhavan on Monday morning but was conspicuous by his absence at the two-day conference -- "75th Anniversary of Constitution: Contribution of Parliament and State Legislative Bodies in Strengthening Constitutional Values." According to a study by PRS Legislative, the outgoing Delhi Assembly, which held 74 sittings during its five-year term, met for an average of 15 days a year. On the days it met, the assembly sat for an average of three hours. The House passed only 14 bills during its term, the lowest number for any previous full-term assembly.

## Haryana Patwaris protest against corruption allegations

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GURUGRAM**

Patwaris and Kanungos in Gurugram are upset after the release of the recent list of corrupt Patwaris by the state government. The Revenue Patwar and Kanungo Association on Monday held a protest in Gurugram against a "secret" letter compiled by the Haryana Revenue and Disaster Management Department had also revealed that 370 patwaris (revenue officials) as corrupt across the state. 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. "A state-level meeting was held in Jind on Sunday. In the meeting patwaris and kanungo decided that, we will work wearing black armbands next three days across the state. We have also submitted a memorandum in the name of the Chief Minister today through the deputy commissioner for seeking their intervention into the matter," Satpal Patwari, president of Revenue Patwar and Kanungo Association, Gurugram said.

## Sambhal riots: Judicial panel to visit city on January 21

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SAMBHAL/UP**

The three-member judicial commission probing the Sambhal riots, will visit the city on January 21 to record written statements from the public, officials said on Monday. The Uttar Pradesh government constituted the judicial panel on December 11 to investigate the riots that erupted on November 24. Violence had broken out near the Shahi Jama Masjid during a survey, leading to clashes

between protesters and security personnel. Four people were killed and several others injured in the incident. The panel, accompanied by District Magistrate Rajendra Pensiya and Superintendent of Police Krishna Kumar, had earlier inspected the riot-affected areas including the Shahi Jama Masjid, on December 1. According to a statement issued by the District Information Department, Sohan Lal, Secretary of the

Judicial Inquiry Commission, said no written statements have been submitted to the commission so far, despite prior notification. The commission will now hold a session at the Public Works Department (PWD) guest house in Sambhal on January 21 accept written statements from individuals wishing to present their accounts of the riots. Authorities have urged those who wish to submit their statements to do so in writing before the commission's visit.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A giant leap in space

ISRO'S space docking underscores the nation's technical prowess and sets the stage for future space explorations

India's space programme, spearheaded by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has achieved yet another landmark with its first successful space docking experiment. This milestone represents a pivotal moment in the nation's space exploration journey, further cementing ISRO's reputation as a key player in global space technology. Space docking is the process of two spacecraft connecting in orbit, enabling the transfer of crew, equipment, or fuel. It is a critical technology for advanced space missions, including the construction of space stations, in-orbit servicing and interplanetary travel. The ability to dock spacecraft is a benchmark for spacefaring nations, signifying their capability to perform complex operations in space. ISRO's docking experiment involved two small, indigenously developed spacecraft launched into orbit. The mission demonstrated autonomous manoeuvring, where the spacecraft approached each other, aligned precisely, and successfully docked while orbiting Earth at high speeds.



The operation required intricate planning and the development of cutting-edge technologies such as precision navigation, control systems, and robotic mechanisms.

This docking experiment lays the groundwork for India's ambition to develop its own modular space station, a project slated for the next decade. Space docking technology is critical for future missions to the Moon and Mars. It facilitates the assembly of larger spacecraft in orbit and supports refueling and crew transfer, essential for long-duration missions. Mastery of docking technology positions India as a potential partner for international projects, such as the Lunar Gateway or other collaborative space station endeavours. The success underscores ISRO's ability to innovate and develop sophisticated technologies domestically, reducing reliance on external support. Executing a docking manoeuvre is no small feat. ISRO had to address multiple challenges, including developing highly accurate navigation and control systems capable of autonomous decision-making. Ensuring synchronisation of two spacecraft traveling at speeds exceeding 28,000 km/h. ISRO's successful space docking marks a critical step forward in India's space aspirations. It aligns with the organisation's vision to expand its presence in low Earth orbit and beyond. The achievement also inspires confidence in India's space capabilities as the nation eyes ambitious goals such as the Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission, lunar exploration, and interplanetary ventures. The international space community has lauded ISRO's accomplishment, recognising it as a significant technical breakthrough. It reaffirms India's position as a rising space power, capable of undertaking challenging and high-stakes missions. As the nation continues to push the boundaries of what's possible, this milestone serves as a foundation for even greater achievements in the years to come. With every new stride, India moves closer to its dream of being a leader in the final frontier.

Gateways to other collaborative space station endeavours. The success underscores ISRO's ability to innovate and develop sophisticated technologies domestically, reducing reliance on external support. Executing a docking manoeuvre is no small feat. ISRO had to address multiple challenges, including developing highly accurate navigation and control systems capable of autonomous decision-making. Ensuring synchronisation of two spacecraft traveling at speeds exceeding 28,000 km/h. ISRO's successful space docking marks a critical step forward in India's space aspirations. It aligns with the organisation's vision to expand its presence in low Earth orbit and beyond. The achievement also inspires confidence in India's space capabilities as the nation eyes ambitious goals such as the Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission, lunar exploration, and interplanetary ventures. The international space community has lauded ISRO's accomplishment, recognising it as a significant technical breakthrough. It reaffirms India's position as a rising space power, capable of undertaking challenging and high-stakes missions. As the nation continues to push the boundaries of what's possible, this milestone serves as a foundation for even greater achievements in the years to come. With every new stride, India moves closer to its dream of being a leader in the final frontier.

### PICTALK



School students perform during Kokborok Day celebrations, in Agartala

## Mahakumbh: Spiritual fervour meets economic revival



NAND GOPAL GUPTA NANDI

This edition of Mahakumbh is not only the world's largest religious congregation but also a showcase of Uttar Pradesh's evolving economic prowess and cultural magnificence

Over 3 crore devotees, both national and international, taking a holy dip on the debut day of Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, has just validated what we have been saying for the past several months. In terms of scale and grandeur, this edition of Mahakumbh would not only be the largest religious congregation on the planet. But it would also remain unmatched for a very long time. We estimate that it will eventually have around 400 million visitors (more than double the previous edition). But won't be surprised if the actual number exceeds our expectations, by a modest margin. Elaborate arrangements would be an understatement.

A more apt term would be epic-scale preparations. Yes, this is what went into this grand event which we would like to be remembered forever. The UP government had sanctioned more than 540 projects to create world-class amenities at an estimated expenditure in the vicinity of Rs 7,000 crore. You go to the site and you will notice a sprawling new city (covering 4,000 hectares) has been set up which has over 1.5 lakh tents and all basic amenities including advanced medical centres and distinct pockets for businesses.

There is hardly any name (big or small) in the consumer-facing business that you will find missing in action at the holy site serving the devotees with their offerings. On a cumulative basis, we are expecting a generation of economic activities worth Rs 2 lakh crore or over \$24 billion which is simply staggering. The security architecture created for this mega event is powered by artificial intelligence (AI), which is an added feature. Our objective has been simple. We wanted to create a site that would be the best possible amalgamation of religious fervour of the highest order and modern amenities of the best class. And from the initial response of the visitors, we seem to have succeeded to a large extent. It would be no exaggeration to say that we have spared no effort in ensuring that this grand religious event assumes an unmatched character. This was



our core focus right from day one of the planning stage as we knew that Mahakumbh this time would also be leaving a host of critical messages for the world. In symbolic terms, at a time when the geo-political turbulence is quite evident and religious intolerance is raising its head in many corners of the world, the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj is yet another occasion to prove the richness of our Sanatani heritage which is rooted in the philosophy of co-existence and welfare of the humanity. With thousands of foreign devotees (not only NRIs but devotees from other nationalities and religions too) expected to arrive at the holy site and experience the magnificence of Bharat's religious strength, the show has to also offer them a glimpse of the world's ancient society being in a serious resurgent mode. The event has to intrinsically validate our subtle claim of global leadership in several spheres. There is one more critical message that we wish to emanate from Mahakumbh this time. And that pertains to the growing economic prowess of Uttar Pradesh. From being in the disparaging 'Bimaru' state club till the recent decade, the turnaround in the state's economic fortune would be



OUR OBJECTIVE HAS BEEN SIMPLE. WE WANTED TO CREATE A SITE THAT WOULD BE THE BEST POSSIBLE AMALGAMATION OF RELIGIOUS FERVOUR OF THE HIGHEST ORDER AND MODERN AMENITIES OF THE BEST CLASS

quite evident at the site for which we have left no stone unturned. That millions of visitors should carry the impression of a modern and thriving economy is indeed an objective. We have been working quite hard in reviving the state's economy since 2017 trying to put it in the leader's club (among states) in the country. There has been a slew of policy and regulatory interventions which have delivered positive results. We are the third largest economy (state-wise) which has an impressive share of over 8 per cent in the national GDP. The annual growth of the state's economy in the last seven-eight years has been to the tune of 11 per cent, among the highest in the country. Despite being a landlocked state, we have a share of around 5 per cent in the national exports which has facilitated our defining Marketing Development Assistance scheme. This year, we will be announcing a new export policy that will take into consideration the new business opportunities (for the next five years) emerging from a far superior infrastructural base. We today have the largest rail network in the country, 38 per cent expressways' share of the national

kitty, four international and nine domestic airports. Further, seven new airports are under construction including the world-class Jewar Airport which will be unveiled soon. To energise grassroots economies, one of our major initiatives has been: the one-district-one-product scheme. Launched in 2018, this scheme seeks to identify the specific USP product of 75 districts and help the local stakeholders take that business to the next level with all-round support (training to marketing) from government agencies. Since the inception of the scheme, we have supported over 1,33,472 artisans across the state. The efforts to give a decisive rejig to the state economy have considerably paid off, propelling us to commit to further pushing our growth momentum and becoming a \$1 trillion economy in the not-so-distant future. This is the core objective of our economic salvation route, which we have been pursuing for quite some time. And I am quite confident, that the visitors to Mahakumbh this time, will also have a sufficient glimpse of it.

(The writer is Minister for Industrial Development & Export Promotion, Uttar Pradesh; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### GOVERNOR VS STATE GOVERNMENT

Madam —The dispute between the Tamil Nadu government and Governor Dr RN Ravi over vice-chancellor appointments has reached the Supreme Court. On January 17, 2025, a bench led by Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan intervened, stating that the matter would be resolved by the next hearing unless the parties reached an agreement. The Tamil Nadu Government has filed writ petitions accusing the Governor of delays and non-compliance with constitutional duties. The court has scheduled the next hearing for next Wednesday, signalling its readiness to resolve the deadlock. This conflict echoes previous legal cases on gubernatorial powers in university appointments. In The Chancellor, University of Kerala vs Governor of Kerala (2017), the Supreme Court affirmed that while the Governor holds discretionary powers in such appointments, consultation with the state government is crucial. Similarly, the 2019 West Bengal VC appointment case emphasised state autonomy in these matters, reinforcing the need for cooperation between the state and the governor. External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar, in his Nani Palkhivala Memorial Lecture, highlighted the importance of constitutional morality and the role of advisors in governance. His remarks, though not directly related to the Tamil Nadu case, underscore the significance of upholding constitutional norms. The Supreme Court's involvement could clarify the limits of gubernatorial power, setting a precedent for future state-governor conflicts. This case tests the balance between state autonomy and the governor's constitutional duties, with far-reaching implications for governance.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

#### STRICTER RULES FOR MIGRANTS

Madam —Many Indians move to Gulf countries to earn money within a short period. They live there for a few years, earn a substantial income and manage to survive under tough conditions. Even if the work is as labourers, the monetary com-

#### Indian women win Kho kho World Cup



The Indian women's team claimed the title of the first Kho Kho World Cup 2025 with their exceptional skills, invincible strategy, and incredible agility. On Sunday evening at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, India secured their victory by defeating Nepal with a massive margin of 78-40 in a historic match.

Dressed in blue jerseys, the Indian players dominated the game right from the start. Captain Priyanka Ingale delivered an extraordinary performance, scoring several crucial touch points, which helped the team maintain a consistent lead. Under her leadership, the team built a 34-point advantage and eliminated every possibility of a dream run for Nepal.

This victory stands as a living testament to Indian women's power and their growing influence in the world of sports. This historic achievement has not only brought glory to the nation but also inspired women athletes across the country. It symbolises the triumph of teamwork, determination, and relentless effort.

R K Jain | Barwani

#### FIRE BROKE OUT AT MAHAKUMBH

Madam —A fire broke out in the Maha Kumbh area in Prayagraj, leading to the burning of several tents. Two cylinders exploded in Sector 19 of the Maha Kumbh Mela, causing a massive fire in the camps. Firefighters are trying to douse the blaze. Although the police and administration team reached the spot, and the fire had been doused. But the issue has raised several questions on the safety of the devotees that have come from far areas to visit the spiritual atmosphere of the holy confluence and take a dip at the Triveni Sangam. The government and administration express sorrow over the incident and pray for the safety of all devotees. It is the government's responsibility to ensure security, control the fire, and prevent such incidents in the future. Instead of paying deep consideration for the advertisement, authorities should develop focus on the safety and security of the lives of devotees.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Sparking smile: Lessons from a children's elocution competition

From innovative tech-based ideas to timeless acts of kindness, the young participants presented thoughtful solutions that left me inspired about what truly makes us happy



ASHA IYER KUMAR

Last week, I had the privilege of being on the panel of judges for an elocution competition for students, with the topic 'The Perfect Solution to Make People Smile More.' It was an intriguing subject—one very close to my heart—because I am the kind of person who smiles a lot. A lot more than people sometimes care to respond to or reciprocate. On the street, in the metro, in the building gallery, during my walk—almost anyone I can get eye contact with, whether stranger or friend, gets a smile. It is the most inexpensive gift I can offer, regardless of whether it is valued or not. It's a heart-felt gesture that could be the very thing someone needs to make their day. The children who participated came up with some remarkable ideas—everything from making a smile a commodity that fetches monetary rewards or other tangible benefits to evoking emotional points that deeply resonated with the empathy in me. Given that the contest was called 'Pitch Perfect,' the students brought forth many innovative concepts to make people smile, many of which



revolved around technology. It was fascinating to imagine how new-age devices could inspire smiles, but I couldn't help wondering—do we really need tools and gadgets to smile? Can't we simply find natural reasons for it? Can't we create genuine moments that make people's eyes crinkle at the corners authentically?

As I waited for those ideas to unfold, I felt a gentle discomfort with the implicit belief that nothing happens these days without gadgets. But then came a few gems that emphasised the importance of compassion, empathy, and kindness as part of our daily lives—powerful ingredients for sparking smiles. This is what I want the younger generation to embody—an attitude that encourages them to be better people each day, spreading

smiles through simple acts of kindness, rather than relying solely on innovations. I was deeply moved by what some of the children shared. When I asked one young participant what act of kindness he had done that day to make someone smile or brighten their day, his answer was simple yet profound: "I told my mother how yummy the breakfast was, and it made her very happy."

My takeaway from the experience was this: the new generation is competitive, full of energy to beat the odds and rise to the top in life. But it is also brimming with humanness and rationality, qualities nurtured by the guidance of teachers, parents, and mentors. As they navigate the pressures of becoming super achievers, they still understand that the roots of happiness and peace lie in kindness and compassion. As is my habit, I often ask my students if they enjoy going to school and, if so, why. The answer I invariably hear is they like school not because of what they learn in class, but because of their friends. This sometimes makes me question my belief that schools

and universities should be temples of learning—platforms for young minds to ignite and soar.

Their answer also makes me wonder if there's more to be desired in how we mould our students. Have we focused too much on academic excellence at the cost of soul-nurturing education? Perhaps we need to spend less time teaching children skills to thrive in a competitive world and more time preparing them to be compassionate, kind-hearted individuals who bring joy to those around them. This competition, with all its innovation and spirited energy, reminded me that the most profound solutions to making people smile often lie in the simplest of acts: a word of appreciation, a compliment, a smile shared. As we look toward a future increasingly driven by technology, let's not lose sight of what makes us truly human. It's the little things that have the power to make the world a little brighter.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. Views are personal)





## FIRST COLUMN

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF EDUCATORS

Educators serve as mentors and guide, empowering students to become responsible citizens



SAKSHI SETHI

Education is not merely the transfer of knowledge. It is the shaping of minds, the fostering of growth and even more the cultivation of potential. As educators, the role extends far beyond delivering lectures or grading assignments. It encompasses mentoring, inspiring and empowering individuals to become critical thinkers and responsible citizens. Reflecting on our roles allows us to embrace our responsibilities more consciously and adapt to the evolving needs of learners and society. In contemporary education, the role of the educator has shifted from being the sole source of knowledge to a facilitator of learning.

This transition underscores the importance of guiding students to explore, question, and construct their understanding. It is about creating an environment where students feel safe to express their thoughts, make mistakes and grow from them. The role of an educator becomes especially significant when working with board students. When talking about them, the educator's primary responsibility is to ensure a strong understanding of the curriculum, including breaking down complex concepts, identifying and addressing knowledge gaps and providing effective study strategies.

Beyond teaching content, educators must help students develop time management and exam techniques to perform confidently under pressure. The role demands subject expertise and a keen awareness of the examination format and trends. Today, the modern educational landscape for board students includes challenges such as increasing competition, societal expectations, and the rapid integration of technology in learning. Educators need to stay adaptable, leveraging digital tools



to make learning engaging and accessible by recognising diverse learning styles employing strategies to meet those needs, and ensuring that every student feels included and valued. Additionally, acknowledging the diverse learning needs of students and personalising instruction whenever possible is also crucial for ensuring their success. There is no denying that students are at a critical juncture in their academic journey, preparing for examinations that often determine their future educational and career paths. Reflecting on our roles as educators in this context reveals the need for a balanced approach that combines academic rigour, emotional support, and life-skill development.

One of the most vital roles of an educator is to be a lifelong learner. Education is a dynamic field, and staying updated with pedagogical advancements, cultural shifts, and technological innovations is essential. This commitment to personal growth will not only enhance teaching effectiveness but will also model the value of continuous learning for students. Teaching values such as critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability prepare students for challenges beyond the examination hall. It is essential to emphasise that education is about equipping them with skills for life, not just marks on a report card. Reflecting on our roles as educators highlights the immense responsibility and opportunity, we have in shaping young lives. It requires academic expertise, emotional intelligence, and unwavering dedication. By nurturing not just the intellect but also the spirit of our students, we as educators can guide them toward success in their exams and, more importantly, in life. By embracing our multifaceted roles with passion and purpose, we can create transformative experiences for our students and leave an enduring legacy of knowledge and wisdom.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

## How skill-based degrees are redefining India's future



DINESH SOOD

By aligning with industry needs and empowering individuals with practical expertise, the nation is paving the way for a more inclusive and dynamic workforce



India's education system is undergoing a quiet revolution. As the global job market evolves, the emphasis on traditional degrees gives way to skill-focused education tailored to the demands of a dynamic economy. A prime example is the introduction of degree courses in salons, spas, beauty parlours, and other vocational domains. These courses signify a paradigm shift in how we perceive education, employment, and entrepreneurship in 'Viksit Bharat.' This development addresses critical challenges. It aligns with the growing aspirations of India's youth, caters to burgeoning private sector industries, and equips individuals with skills for self-employment, entrepreneurship and opportunities abroad.

## Growing Demand for Vocational Expertise

The global wellness industry, valued at over \$4 trillion, continues to expand, with India emerging as a key player. The beauty and wellness sector alone is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18 per cent over the next five years. The personal grooming industry demands nearly 1.3 million professionals annually, significantly surpassing the 3-4 lakh jobs the software industry adds yearly. This boom has created immense demand for skilled professionals, from hairstylists and spa therapists to salon managers and beauty wellness consultants. Recognising this, regulatory bodies like the UGC and AICTE have integrated skills courses into the education system. Indian universities now collaborate with training institutes to offer structured programmes like the Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Beauty and Wellness. These programmes cover skincare, makeup artistry and salon management.

Other universities offer diplomas and degree programmes in wellness and hospitality sectors, designed with industry leaders. Globally, institutions such as the London College of Beauty Therapy (UK) and the Australian Academy of Beauty Dermal and Laser offer world-class programmes. These courses adhere to international standards, providing globally recognised certifications that enhance employability abroad.

## Parity Between B Voc and BSc Degrees

An essential aspect of this transformation is recognising the equivalence of Bachelor of Vocation (B Voc) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees. While BSc focuses on academic learning, B Voc emphasises hands-on, industry-relevant training. Recent policy reforms place these degrees on par, ensuring vocational education is no longer seen as secondary but as an equally credible academic pathway. This parity allows B Voc graduates to access the same opportunities as BSc graduates in employment, higher education, or competitive exams. It underscores the value of skills and practical expertise in driving economic growth.

## Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and National Credit Framework

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) further strengthens this integration. RPL allows individuals to earn formal recognition for previous informal training or work experiences. When aligned with the National Credit Framework, credits earned in schools, vocational training institutions, or universities become seamlessly transferable across sectors. This fosters flexibility in education, empowering individuals to personalise their learning journeys and reduce redundancy. By integrating RPL with skill-based programmes, India's education system becomes more inclusive and adaptable. Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities Skill-based degree programs unlock diverse career pathways:

- 1. Private Sector Jobs:** Luxury wellness brands, fitness chains, and beauty franchises seek trained professionals. Graduates can secure jobs in high-end spas, salons, and wellness centres with lucrative salaries and career growth.
- 2. Self-Employment and Freelancing:** These courses

empower entrepreneurial individuals to establish businesses. Graduates can run boutique salons or offer personalised wellness services, catering to niche markets.

**3. Government Jobs:** Recognising vocational degrees has expanded opportunities in government roles. Graduates are eligible for positions in wellness centres and initiatives under schemes like Skill India and PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana).

**4. Global Opportunities:** Programmes often include internationally recognised certifications, enhancing employability abroad. For instance, graduates from LCBT in the UK find opportunities in European markets, while Australian academy-trained professionals thrive in Asia-Pacific regions.

## Breaking Stigmas Around Vocational Careers

Vocational careers have long been viewed as secondary options. Introducing structured degree programs challenges these stereotypes. Formal education in salons, spas, and beauty parlours combines technical skills, business acumen, and industry exposure, positioning these professions as aspirational.

This shift is especially empowering for women, who form a significant portion of the workforce in these fields and now gain access to recognised qualifications that enhance professional credibility. **Challenges in Implementation** India's higher education system, often criticised for being theory-heavy, struggles to improve practical skill sets. Initiatives like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and platforms like SWAYAM aim to modernise education, but challenges remain:

- 1. Quality Assurance:** Maintaining high standards and industry relevance requires collaboration with established industry players.
- 2. Awareness:** Many students and parents remain unaware of these

opportunities, favouring traditional careers. Awareness campaigns are crucial.

**3. Infrastructure and Faculty:** Vocational education requires specialised infrastructure and trained faculty. Institutions must invest in state-of-the-art facilities and continuous professional development for educators.

**4. Recognition and Accreditation:** Further integration into academia and government recruitment processes will enhance vocational degrees' credibility.

**Vision for the Future** Skill-based degree programmes signify societal reform, recognising youth aspirations and aligning education with market realities. By formalising careers through structured courses, India creates a skilled and confident workforce. These reforms reflect a commitment to inclusivity, providing pathways for diverse socio-economic backgrounds to pursue rewarding careers.

India is on the brink of an educational revolution. Skill-based degrees in fields like salons, spas, and beauty parlours redefine education. These programmes bridge the gap between aspiration and opportunity, equipping students with skills to thrive globally. As these initiatives gain momentum, scaling them, ensuring quality, and destigmatising vocational careers are imperative. With parity between B Voc and BSc degrees and the integration of RPL into the National Credit Framework, India's education system is transforming into a flexible and robust framework. These changes will meet today's demands and shape a prosperous future for the nation.

*(The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and a network Member of India International Skills Centres, an initiative of GoI. The views expressed are personal)*



THE BEAUTY AND WELLNESS SECTOR ALONE IS PROJECTED TO GROW AT A COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (CAGR) OF 18 PER CENT OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

## Balancing rights and order: Innovations in protest management

Protests are the lifeblood of democracy. For law enforcement, it must carefully balance between public safety and democratic freedoms

Thousands of people gather, holding banners and chanting slogans, their voices echoing through the streets. For law enforcement, these aren't merely demonstrations but skill, strategy, and restraint tests. Managing protests today demands more than enforcing law and order; it requires innovation, preparation, and trust.

Reflecting on this evolving role, a senior officer once remarked, "Our goal isn't to silence dissent but to ensure it unfolds safely for everyone involved. Effective protest management is about enabling expression while maintaining peace." This philosophy increasingly shapes how law enforcement approaches public demonstrations globally



O P SINGH

and in India.

**Dialogue Policing:** Dialogue policing, extensively practised in Sweden and Norway, prioritises proactive communication between police and protest organisers. Liaison officers meet organisers before demonstrations to discuss routes, safety measures, and mutual expectations. This approach fosters trust and de-escalates tensions

before they arise. Indian police have applied similar strategies during political rallies and cultural events, engaging community leaders to ensure peaceful outcomes.

**Leveraging Technology:** Technology is transforming protest management globally. In countries like Singapore and South Korea, drones with high-resolution cameras monitor crowd density and movement, while artificial intelligence (AI) tools analyse data to predict potential flashpoints. This enables law enforcement to allocate resources proactively and prevent crises. Indian police are increasingly adopting these tools. Drones were deployed during the farmers' protests and other large-scale events, offering real-time monitoring of crowd dynamics.

Social media monitoring cells track misinformation and narratives, enabling swift corrective measures. Law enforcement enhances its situational awareness and credibility by integrating technology with traditional methods.

**Non-Lethal Methods:** Germany sets a global benchmark for using non-lethal tools like water cannons, sound devices, and barricades to manage large gatherings. Officers trained in crowd psychology focus on isolating disruptive elements while respecting the rights of peaceful protesters. In India, non-lethal methods have been employed during sensitive protests, such as barricading roads to control crowds or using water cannons to disperse tense gatherings. The



focus remains on proportionality—ensuring responses are measured, harm is minimised, and democratic freedoms are respected. **Transparency and Accountability** Transparency is crucial for public trust. In New Zealand, body-worn cameras document police actions during protests, ensuring accountability and protecting officers from false accusations. Oversight bodies review

footage to ensure compliance with established protocols. In India, body-worn cameras have been introduced in several states, particularly during sensitive operations.

**Multi-agency coordination for Large Protests** Managing large-scale demonstrations often requires multi-agency collaboration. In the United States, unified command centres integrate local police, state law enforcement, and federal agencies for cohesive responses. These centres streamline resource sharing and operational alignment, which is critical for complex events. India's law enforcement regularly employs similar coordination during significant events, such as farmers' protests, political rallies, and national festivals. Central para-

military forces often supplement state police, ensuring adequate workforce and resources. Clear protocols and seamless coordination are the backbone of these efforts.

**Comprehensive Training:** Training is a cornerstone of effective protest management. Canadian police emphasise de-escalation, cultural sensitivity, and conflict resolution, with officers undergoing practical simulations to prepare for high-pressure scenarios. In India, the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has introduced advanced modules covering non-lethal tools, technology integration, and crowd psychology.

**Ethical Policing:** Ethical considerations are central to managing protests.

Globally, technologies like drones and AI are governed by protocols that protect privacy and civil liberties. Similarly, the principle of proportionality—using the minimum force necessary—guides actions to ensure demonstrators' rights are respected. In India, police increasingly emphasise ethical practices. Engaging community leaders, addressing grievances, and prioritising dialogue reflect a commitment to balancing public safety with democratic freedoms. The shift towards a restrained, people-centric approach underscores the evolving role of law enforcement in a modern democracy.

*(The writer is Director General of Police and Head of the Haryana State Narcotics Bureau; views are personal)*



# Hamas returns 3 Israeli hostages, Israel frees 90 prisoners

PTI ■ RAMALLAH

After 15 months of collective grief and anxiety, three Israeli hostages left Hamas captivity and returned to Israel, and dozens of Palestinian prisoners walked free from Israeli jail, leaving both Israelis and Palestinians torn between celebration and trepidation as the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took hold Sunday. The skies above Gaza and Israel were silent for the first time in over a year, and Palestinians began returning to what was left of the homes they fled across the war-ravaged enclave, started to check on relatives left behind and, in many cases, to bury their dead. After months of tight Israeli restrictions, more than 600 trucks carrying humanitarian aid rolled into the devastated territory.



Israelis celebrate the release of three hostages who had been held captive by Hamas in Gaza as they gather in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Sunday

AP/PTI

The ceasefire that went into effect Sunday morning stirred modest hopes for ending the Israel-Hamas war. But in Israel, the joy of seeing freed hostages Emily Damari, Romi Gonen, and Doron Steinbrecher reunited with their families was tempered by major questions over the fate of the nearly 100 others abducted in Hamas' Oct 7, 2023, attack, still in captivity in Gaza. Damari, Gonen and

Steinbrecher were the first among 33 Israeli hostages who are meant to be released in the coming six weeks in a deal that includes a pause in fighting, the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and increased fuel and aid deliveries for Gaza. What happens after the deal's first phase of 42 days is uncertain.

The agreement's subsequent stages call for more releases of hostages and prisoners and a permanent end to the war. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was pressured by the outgoing Biden administration and incoming Trump administration to secure a deal before the

president-elect's inauguration Monday in Washington, has said he received assurances from Trump that Israel could continue fighting Hamas if necessary. On Sunday, many Israelis stayed glued to TV screens all afternoon to glimpse the women being released through the windows of the Red Cross

ambulance. Footage showed them thronged by thousands of jostling Palestinians, including Hamas gunmen wearing green headbands, as militants handed them over to the Red Cross on a packed street in Gaza City. "An entire nation embraces you," Netanyahu said. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, a far-right

lawmaker who resigned on Sunday from Netanyahu's governing coalition over the ceasefire, said the nation was "happy and excited" for their release. In videos released by the Israeli government, the women were seen weeping and hugging their family members. Damari raised her bandaged hand in triumph. The military said she lost two fingers in the Hamas-led militant attack on Oct. 7, 2023, that killed over 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and resulted in the abduction of some 250 others. Applause erupted among the thousands who gathered to watch the poignant scenes on large screens at Hostages Square, the Tel Aviv plaza where families and supporters of hostages have been protesting weekly to demand a ceasefire deal. It took another seven hours for such scenes to unfold in the occupied West Bank, where the mood was initially subdued as the Israeli military warned that public celebrations for the released prisoners would be punished. But scuffles with Israeli security forces and hours of waiting did little to deter the crowds that flooded the streets around 1 a.m., as large white buses carrying 90 Palestinian detainees — all women or teens — exit-

ed the gates of Ofer prison, near the West Bank city of Ramallah. Drivers revved their engines in celebration. Fireworks erupted. Several men climbed on top of the bus and hoisted three Hamas flags. "God is greater!" the crowds shouted. Many of those released expressed elation tinged with grief for the devastation wrought by the war in Gaza. A "double feeling" is how the most prominent detainee freed, Khalida Jarrar, 62, described it. Jarrar is a leading member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a secular leftist faction that was involved in attacks against Israel in the 1970s but later scaled back militant activities. Since her arrest in late 2023, she was held under indefinitely renewable administrative detention — a widely criticized practice that Israel uses against Palestinians. "There's this double feeling we're living in, on the one hand, this feeling of freedom, that we thank everyone for, and on the other hand, this pain, of losing so many Palestinian martyrs," she told The Associated Press. All of those being released had been detained for what Israel called offenses related to its security, from throwing

stones and promoting violence on social media to more serious accusations such as attempted murder. The next release of hostages and prisoners is due Saturday. In just over two weeks, talks are to begin on the far more challenging second phase of the ceasefire agreement. In Gaza, there was palpable relief at the prospect of six weeks without fighting and Israeli bombardment that so far has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, 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 skies above the besieged territory were free of Israeli warplanes for the first day since a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023 that freed over 100 hostages, offering Palestinians a chance to take stock of the devastation. "This ceasefire was a joy mixed with pain," Rami Nofal, said a displaced man from Gaza City, explaining that his son was killed by Israeli bombardment. Masked Hamas militants appeared at some celebrations, triumphant as crowds chanted slogans in support of them. The Hamas-run police reemerged from months of hiding.

## Let America own 50% of TikTok: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

TikTok is back in the US after President-elect Donald Trump on Sunday praised it and said let the government own 50 per cent of the popular short video sharing platform.

TikTok went dark in the US on Saturday night because of a legislation, but it was back within less than 24 hours after Trump vowed to issue an executive order on his first day in office to delay the enforcement of the law. The short-video app is used by 170 million Americans. "As of today, TikTok is back. You know, I did a little TikTok thing. We have a guy, TikTok Jack. He's a young kid, like 21 years old. We hired this guy and I went on TikTok. We went on TikTok as Republicans never won the youth vote. They won a lot of votes, but they never won the youth vote. But we won the youth vote by 36 points. So I like TikTok," Trump told his supporters at a victory rally here. "Who in this audience goes with TikTok? Many? Frankly, we have no choice. We have to save a lot of jobs. We don't want to give our business to China. We don't want to give our business to other people," Trump added. Stating that the solution to the TikTok issue is a joint venture, Trump said, "They did that a long time ago when they had a different president. They didn't know that I was going to be the president. So I said, very simply, a joint venture. If you don't approve, they're out of business. They're worth nothing. If you do approve, they're worth like a trillion dollars." "So, I said, I'll approve, but let the United States own 50 per cent of TikTok. I'm approving on behalf of the nation. So, they'll have a partner, the United States, and they'll have a lot of bidders, and we will do what we call a joint venture deal," the President-elect said. "We're not putting up any money. All we're doing is giving them the approval, without which they have nothing," Trump said, adding, "Whether you like TikTok or not, we're going to make a lot of money."

## Trump vows to act at historic speed to fix 'every single crisis facing US'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

On the eve of his inauguration, President-elect Donald Trump promised his supporters and countrymen that he will act at historic speed to fix every single crisis facing the United States. "Starting tomorrow, I will act with historic speed and strength and fix every single crisis facing our country. We have to do it," Trump told his supporters at the Capitol One Arena, which was full to its capacity of 20,000 for a "Make America Great" victory celebration, with a large number of people waiting outside in chilling cold. Trump, 78, made a stunning comeback when he defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in last year's general election to become only the second person in US history to be sworn in as the president after a gap of four years. Trump, who will replace Joe Biden as the 47th president of the United States on Monday, arrived at the US Capitol on Saturday. On a jam-packed day full of engagements, Trump addressed thousands of his supporters at what he called a "victory rally." "Before even taking office, you are already seeing results that nobody expected to see. Everyone is calling it the Trump effect. It's you. You're the effect," Trump said. "Since the election, the stock market has surged, while small business optimism has soared a record 41 points to a 39-year high. Bitcoin has shattered one record after another. Major investment company DMACC Properties has announced that it will invest between USD 20 billion and USD 40 billion in the US.



Elon Musk, left, and President-elect Donald Trump embrace as they look at Musk's son X vJ A-Xii, at a rally ahead of the 60th Presidential Inauguration, Sunday, in Washington.

AP/PTI

"SoftBank, another great company, has pledged between USD 100 billion and USD 200 billion. These are all investments that are only being made because of the fact that we won the election," he added. Referring to meeting Apple CEO Tim Cook on Sunday, Trump said, "He said they're

going to make a massive investment in the US because of our big election victory." Giving an insight into his Day 1 plans, he told the cheering crowd, "Our incoming administration has achieved all of this in the Middle East in less than three months without me being the president.

We've already achieved more than what they've (Joe Biden administration) done in four years. "Just imagine all the good things we will accomplish together with four more years in the White House. We are going to do a lot of things. You're going to see something tomorrow. You're going to see executive orders that are going to make you extremely happy." Elaborating further, Trump said, "We have to set our country on the proper course. By the time the sun sets tomorrow, the invasion of our borders will come to a halt, and all the illegal border trespassers will, in some form or another, be on their way back home. Think of it. Millions and millions of people came into our country through open borders. No checks, no vetting, no anything. And a lot of those people are murderers." Trump also said the border security measures he will outline in his inaugural address on Monday will be the most "aggressive, sweeping efforts to restore our borders the world has ever seen." "We had the best, safest border in the history of our country," he said. Appearing briefly on the stage, Tesla owner Elon Musk, who has been made in-charge of the newly-created Department of Government Efficiency, said they are looking forward to making a lot of changes. "This victory is the beginning. What matters going forward is to actually make significant changes, cement those changes, and set the foundation for America to be strong for centuries, forever... And make America great again," Musk said.

## Biden pardons Fauci, Milley to guard against potential 'revenge' by Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Monday pardoned Dr Anthony Fauci, retired Gen Mark Milley and members of the House committee that investigated the Jan 6 attack on the Capitol, using the extraordinary powers of his office in his final hours to guard against potential "revenge" by the incoming Trump administration. The decision by Biden comes after Donald Trump warned of an enemies list filled with those who have crossed him politically or sought to hold him accountable for his attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss and his role in the storming of the US Capitol on Jan 6, 2021. Trump has selected Cabinet nominees who backed his election lies and who have pledged to punish those involved in efforts to investigate him. "The issuance of these pardons should not be mistaken as an acknowledgment that any individual engaged in any wrongdoing, nor should acceptance be misconstrued as an admission of guilt for any offence," Biden said in a statement. "Our nation owes these public servants a debt of gratitude for their tireless commitment to our country." The pardons,

announced with just hours left in his presidency, have been the subject of heated debate for months at the highest levels of the White House. It's customary for a president to grant clemency at the end of his term, but those acts of mercy are usually offered to Americans who have been convicted of crimes. Biden has used the power in the broadest and most untested way possible: to pardon those who have not even been investigated yet. The decision lays the groundwork for an even more expansive use of pardons by Trump and future presidents. While the Supreme Court last year ruled that the president enjoys broad immunity from prosecution for what could be considered official acts, the president's aides and allies enjoy no such shield. There are fears that Trump or future presidents could use the promise of a blanket pardon to encourage allies to take actions they might otherwise resist for fear of running afoul of the law. Trump, who takes office at noon, has promised to, in his first moments as president, pardon many of those involved in the violent and bloody Jan 6, 2021, attack, which injured

roughly 140 law enforcement officers. It's unclear whether those pardoned by Biden would need to apply for the clemency or even accept the offer at all. Any acceptance could be seen as a tacit admission of guilt or wrongdoing, validating years of attacks by Trump and his supporters, even though those who have been pardoned have not been formally accused of any crimes. "These are exceptional circumstances, and I cannot in good conscience do nothing," Biden said, adding that "Even when individuals have done nothing wrong — and in fact have done the right thing — and will ultimately be exonerated, the mere fact of being investigated or prosecuted can irreparably damage reputations and finances." Fauci was director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health for nearly 40 years, including during Trump's term in office and later served as Biden's chief medical adviser until his retirement in 2022. He helped coordinate the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and raised Trump's ire when he resisted the Trump's untested public health notions.

## 'UK-US relationship will flourish under Trump'

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has spoken of the relationship shared by the UK and the US as a "uniquely close bond" which would continue to flourish as Donald Trump is set to be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States of America in Washington DC on Monday. Extending "warmest congratulations" on behalf of the British government, Starmer sought to focus on Trump's historical ties with the UK — a reference to his familial connection through his Scotland-born mother. He stressed that the second Trump presidency would see both nations tackle "global challenges" together as they work towards growth on both sides of the Atlantic. "For centuries, the relationship between our two nations has been one of collaboration,

cooperation and enduring partnership. It is a uniquely close bond. Together, we have defended the world from tyranny and worked towards our mutual security and prosperity," said Starmer in a statement released by 10 Downing Street in London. "With President Trump's long-standing affection and historical ties to the United Kingdom, I know that depth of friendship will continue. The United Kingdom and the United States will work together to ensure the success of both our countries and deliver for people on both sides of the Atlantic," he said. Referring to his meeting with Trump back in September 2024, before Trump was elected to office in November, Starmer asserted that they have an agreement about the need to "deepen and invest in the transatlantic relationship."

## British Sikh groups disrupt some screenings of 'Emergency' in UK

London (PTI): British Sikh groups have organised protests against Kangana Ranaut's 'Emergency', disrupting the film's screening at some cinemas in the UK during its opening weekend. The Sikh Press Association (PA) group stated on social media that the film is seen as "anti-Sikh" and the protests have resulted in cancelled screenings in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands region of England. Community organisation Insight UK posted a video on its X platform showing protesters interrupting a screening of the film, directed by Ranaut who also essays the role of former prime minister Indira Gandhi, at a cinema in Harrow, north-west London. "Pro-Khalistan extremists storm Harrow cinema and

attempt to stop the screening of 'Emergency'," states Insight UK. Earlier, Sikh PA had released a statement to register the group's protest against the movie which covers the period of Emergency in India dating back to the 1970s. "UK Sikhs are protesting at cinemas (sic) across the UK regarding today's release of the film Emergency, a biopic of former India Prime Minister Indira Gandhi considered anti-Sikh propaganda," the group stated on X in time for the film's release on Friday. "The film stars and was created by Kangana Ranaut, a notorious actress/politician in India, who pushes bigoted rhetoric about the minority Sikh-Punjabi community. Indira Gandhi was the PM who initiated the #SikhGenocide before her

assassination," the Sikh PA statement adds. Meanwhile, Ranaut took to social media herself with a video expressing her gratitude and also voicing her disappointment regarding the film's reception in Punjab and among some Sikhs abroad. Speaking in Hindi, Ranaut said: "On behalf of Zee Studio, Manikarnika Film, and all the members of Ease My Trip, I would like to thank you all from the bottom of my heart. You all gave so much love and respect to our film. We don't even have words to express our gratitude. But, I still have some pain in my heart. Punjab. In the industry, it was said that my films perform the best in Punjab. And today is a day when my film is not even allowed to be released in Punjab.

## Teen pleads guilty to murder of three schoolgirls at UK dance class

London (PTI): An 18-year-old knife attacker accused of killing three schoolgirls at a Taylor Swift themed dance class in Southport, north-west England, last July pleaded guilty to all charges at the start of his trial at Liverpool Crown Court on Monday. Axel Rudakubana, born in the Welsh capital of Cardiff to a family of Rwandan heritage based in Lancashire in north-west England, was charged with 16 offences including the murder of Alice da Silva Aguiar, 9, Bebe King, 6, and Elsie Dot Stancombe, 7. He was also charged with the attempted murder of 10 other people including eight children, as well as the production of ricin and possession of an Al Qaeda training manual. In a surprise move in court on Monday, Rudakubana reversed his previous not guilty pleas at the start of the teenager's murder trial expected to last from four to six weeks. "You will understand it is inevitable the sentence to be imposed upon you will mean a life sentence," said Justice Julian Goose as he scheduled a sentencing hearing for Thursday. According to court reports, the accused wearing a face mask showed no emotion as the charges were read out to him. The attack, which took place during a summer holiday dance class for children at the Hart Centre in Southport, sent shock waves up and down the country.

## Houthis to limit their attacks in Red Sea

Dubai (PTI): Yemen's Houthi rebels have signaled they now will limit their attacks in the Red Sea corridor to only Israeli-affiliated ships, just as a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip entered its second day Monday. The Houthis' announcement, made in an email sent to shippers and others on Sunday, likely won't be enough to encourage global firms to reenter the route that's crucial for cargo and energy shipments moving between Asia and Europe. Their attacks have halved traffic through the region, cutting deeply into revenues for Egypt, which runs the Suez Canal linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. "The ceasefire is considered fragile," said Jakob P. Larsen, the head of maritime security for BIMCO, the largest international association representing shipowners. "It is assessed that even minor deviations from the ceasefire agreements could lead to hostilities, which would subsequently prompt the Houthis to again direct threats against a broader range of international shipping." The Houthis separately planned a military statement on Monday, likely about the decision. The Houthis made the announcement through their Humanitarian Operations Coordination Center, saying it was "stopping sanctions" on the other vessels it has previ-

ously targeted since November 2023. For Israeli ships, those "sanctions ... will be stopped upon the full implementation of all phases" of the ceasefire, it added. However, the center left open resuming attacks against both the United States and the United Kingdom, which have launched airstrikes targeting the rebels over their seaborne assaults. "In the event of any aggression ... the sanctions will be reinstated against the aggressor state," the center said. "You will be promptly informed of such measures should they be implemented." The Houthis have targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip started in October 2023, after Hamas' surprise attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage. Israel's military offensive in Gaza has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants but say women and children make up more than half the fatalities. The Iranian-backed Houthis have seized one vessel and sunk two in a campaign that has also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by separate US- and European-led coalitions in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets, which have also included Western military vessels.



**PUBLIC NOTICE**

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN  
Public Notice is hereby given to Inform General Public that 'Shree Gowda Padacharya Sansthan' (Shree Kavle Math) has sold its Premises more Particularly Described in the Schedule Hereunder Written Free from all Encumbrances to (1) M/s. Neel Corporation, having its Office at H-1480, Chitranjan Park, New Delhi, (2) Shri Sukh Didi Narula. THE SCHEDULE ABOVE REFERRED TO E-70, at Greater Kailash Part-I, New Delhi-48 NEW DELHI. Sd/- 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 Reporting Trustee Shree Kavle Math

**Public Notice**

This is to inform the general public that Sh. Satya Narayan is the GPA Holder of Plot Bearing No. 55-A, area measuring 65 sq. Yds. out of Plot No. 65, Killa No. 10, situated in the revenue estate of Village Hastal, Delhi Colony Known as Zaidar Enclave, Mohan Garden, in Block-K-1, Extn. New Delhi. He is in possession through GPA, ATS & WILL, dated 10.02.2003 executed by Sh. Shambhu Nath in favour of Sh. Satya Narayan in respect of said Plot. Sh. Satya Narayan intends to transfer the ownership of aforesaid plot by way of Registered Gift Deed to Mrs. Guddi. Subsequently, Mrs. Guddi is in the process of mortgaging the said property with SBFM India Home Finance Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Home Finance Co. Ltd.). Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property of the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-days period by contacting Law Veritas (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-4/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline: +910120-3101683, e-mail: accounts@lvorth.in

**ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT AT KATHIHAR DIVISION**

**E-Tender Notice No. EL/29/RT10. 2024/K/1151 Dated: 14-01-2025.** E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No. RT10. 2024** Name of work: At Kathihar Division- Comprehensive AMC of Greaves make 500 KVA DA Generator Sets for schedule maintenance of Diesel Engines and its Alternator in Power Cars with enroute escorting and operation of DG sets from originating to destination and back for a period of 03 years. **Tender Value: ₹3,92,75,071.19/-** Earned Money: ₹3,46,400/- **Date & Time of Closing of Tender: 15.00 hrs. of 07-02-2025 & will be opened at 15.30 hrs. of 07-02-2025.** The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

Sr. DEE (G&Chg), Kathihar



**PUBLICATION DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL**

(Area of Jurisdiction- Part of Uttar Pradesh) 600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow - 226007

Notice Under Rule 2 of Second Schedule to the Income Tax Act, 1961 Read with Section 29 of The Recovery of Debt Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993

DRD No. 541/2023 ICICI BANK LTD. Vs Mr. ASHISH KUMAR SARDANA & OTHERS

1. Mr. Ashish Kumar Sardana S/o Vinay Kumar Sardana R/o House No. C-16-435, Milan Vihar, Plot No. 72, IP Extension, Pratappganj, Delhi - 110092. Also at- Flat No. 1/1201 A, 13th Floor, Block A-1 GH-11, Ahinsa Khand-2, Indira Puram Ghaziabad-201010.

2. Mrs. Vinay Kumar Sardana S/o Jagan Nath Sardana R/o House No. C-16-435, Milan Vihar Plot No. 72, IP Extension, Pratappganj, Delhi-110092

Also at- Flat No. 1/1201 A, 13th Floor, Block A-1 GH-11 Ahinsa Khand-2, Indira Puram, Ghaziabad-201010. ...Defendants

This is to notify that a sum of Rs. 1,24,42,959/- (Rupees One Crore Twenty Four Lac. Forty Two Thousands, Nine Hundred and fifty Nine Only) together with pentadentite and future interest @6.00% per annum with monthly rest from the date of filing 31.01.2022 original application jointly & severally with its cost succeeds in fully till realization is made has become due from you as per the Certificate bearing No. 541/2023 dated 02.01.2023 in Original Application No. 121/2022 in passed against you by the D.R.T., Lucknow.

2. You are hereby directed to pay the sum within 15 days of the receipt of this Notice, failing which the recovery shall be made in accordance with the Recovery of Debts Due to Bank and Financial Institution Act, 1993.

3. You are hereby ordered to declare on Affidavit the particulars of asset on or Before 21/04/2025

4. You are hereby ordered to appear before the undersigned on 21/04/2025 at 10.30 A.M.

5. In addition to the sum aforesaid you will also be liable to pay the following Costs.

Details of costs:- Application fee Rs. 150,000/- Counsel fees & Clerks Rs. NIL Publication charges Rs. NIL Miscellaneous Expenses Rs. NIL Clerical Charges Given under my hand and seal at Lucknow this 20th day of December, 2024.

Recovery Officer-I Debts Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow

**PUBLICATION DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL**

(Area of Jurisdiction- Part of Uttar Pradesh) 600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow - 226007

Notice Under Rule 2 of Second Schedule to the Income Tax Act, 1961 Read with Section 29 of The Recovery of Debt Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993

DRD No. 592/2023 ICICI BANK LTD. Vs Mr. VIKRANT SINGH & OTHERS

1. MR. VIKRANT SINGH 501, GREEN VILLEY APARTMENTS, SECTOR 42/43, NHPC COLONY FARIDABAD, HARYANA-121001. ALSO AT- FLAT NO 81-802, 18TH FLOOR, JKG PALM COURT, GH-1D, SECTOR-16C, GREATER NOIDA (WEST) 201308.

ALSO AT- IDEA CELLULAR LIMITED, A-26/5 MOHAN CORPORATIVE, MATHURA ROAD, N.D. GURGAON, HARYANA- 120022

2. MRS. RITU SINGH 501, GREEN VILLEY APARTMENTS, SECTOR 42/43, NHPC COLONY FARIDABAD, HARYANA-121001. ALSO AT- FLAT NO 81-802, 18TH FLOOR, JKG PALM COURT, GH-1D, SECTOR-16C, GREATER NOIDA (WEST) 201308.

3. M/S JKG CONSTRUCTION PVT LTD., CORPORATE OFFICE: D-64, KAUSHAMBI, GHAZIABAD. ...Defendants

This is to notify that a sum of Rs. 57,66,319/- (Rupees Fifty Seven Lak Sixty Six Thousands, Three Hundred and Ninety Three Only) together with pentadentite and future interest @7.00% per annum with monthly rest from the date of filing 02.05.2022 original application jointly & severally with its cost succeeds in fully till realization is made has become due from you as per the Certificate bearing No. 576/2023 dated 30.11.2022 in Original Application No. 517/2022 passed against you by the D.R.T., Lucknow.

2. You are hereby directed to pay the sum within 15 days of the receipt of this Notice, failing which the recovery shall be made in accordance with the Recovery of Debts Due to Bank and Financial Institution Act, 1993.

3. You are hereby ordered to declare on Affidavit the particulars of asset on or Before 17/03/2025.

4. You are hereby ordered to appear before the undersigned on 17/03/2025 at 10.30 A.M.

5. In addition to the sum aforesaid you will also be liable to pay the following Costs.

Details of costs:- Application fee Rs. 62,000/- Counsel fees & Clerks Rs. NIL Publication charges Rs. NIL Miscellaneous Expenses Rs. NIL Clerical Charges Given under my hand and seal at Lucknow this 20th day of December, 2024.

Recovery Officer-II Debts Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow

**PUBLICATION DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL**

(Area of Jurisdiction- Part of Uttar Pradesh) 600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow - 226007

Notice Under Rule 2 of Second Schedule to the Income Tax Act, 1961 Read with Section 29 of The Recovery of Debt Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993

DRD No. 576/2023 ICICI BANK LTD. Vs Mr. VIKRAM SINGH & OTHERS

1. VIKAS KUMAR SHARMA S/o SHIV RAJ SHARMA, House No-267, Near Shiv Mandir, Kidwai Nagar, Sonda Modi Nagar, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201010

Also at: Flat No. 2705, 5th Floor Tower A1, Victory Ace, Sec-143, Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar-201301.

2. BAFTA W/O VIKAS KUMAR SHARMA, House No-267, Near Shiv Mandir, Kidwai Nagar, Sonda Modi Nagar, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201010

3. DREAM PROCON PVT. LTD. Corporate Office at: D1, Sector-3, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301

...Defendants

This is to notify that a sum of Rs. 67,91,393/- (Rupees Sixty Seven Lak Ninety One Thousands, Three Hundred and Ninety Three Only) together with pentadentite and future interest @7.00% per annum with monthly rest from the date of filing 02.05.2022 original application jointly & severally with its cost succeeds in fully till realization is made has become due from you as per the Certificate bearing No. 576/2023 dated 30.11.2022 in Original Application No. 517/2022 passed against you by the D.R.T., Lucknow.

2. You are hereby directed to pay the sum within 15 days of the receipt of this Notice, failing which the recovery shall be made in accordance with the Recovery of Debts Due to Bank and Financial Institution Act, 1993.

3. You are hereby ordered to declare on Affidavit the particulars of asset on or Before 17/03/2025.

4. You are hereby ordered to appear before the undersigned on 17/03/2025 at 10.30 A.M.

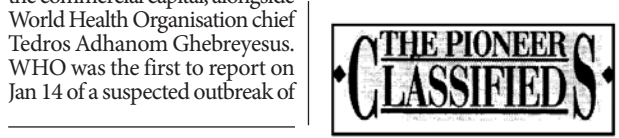
5. In addition to the sum aforesaid you will also be liable to pay the following Costs.

Details of costs:- Application fee Rs. 77,000/- Counsel fees & Clerks Rs. NIL Publication charges Rs. NIL Miscellaneous Expenses Rs. NIL Clerical Charges Given under my hand and seal at Lucknow this 19th day of November, 2024.

Recovery Officer-II Debts Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow

**Sample from remote Tanzanian region tests +ve for Marburg disease**

Arusha (Tanzania): Tanzania's president said Monday that one sample from a remote part of northern Tanzania tested positive for Marburg disease, a highly infectious virus which can be fatal in up to 88% of cases without treatment. President Samia Suluhu spoke in Dar es Salaam, the commercial capital, alongside World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. WHO was the first to report on Jan 14 of a suspected outbreak of Marburg that had killed eight people in Tanzania's Kagera region. Tanzanian health officials disputed the report hours later, saying tests on samples had returned negative results. Suluhu said Monday that further tests had confirmed a case of Marburg. Twenty-five other samples were negative, she said. Like Ebola, the Marburg virus originates in fruit bats and spreads between people through close contact with the bodily fluids of infected individuals or with surfaces, such as contaminated bed sheets. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains, diarrhea, vomiting and in some cases death from extreme blood loss. PTI



**CHANGE OF NAME**

Correct and full name of my father is Chander Deep Bhutani but it is written as Chander Deep in my Aadhaar card, educational certificates, Voter card. Shivam Deep r/o Top floor, House-26, Road-27, East Punjabi Bagh, Delhi-110026. PD(1284)C

I, Sanuj S/o Dharma Pal Singh R/o House No-82, Block-H, Kunwar Singh Nagar, Ranholia, Nangloi, Delhi-110041, inform that I have changed the name of my minor daughter Shanvi to Shanvi Sansanwal for all future purposes. PD(1285)A

I, Suchi Garg W/o Sh. Ankur Garg D/o Sh. Anil Kumar Goel R/o H-1816 Prateek edifice, Sector-107, Noida, it is hereby inform to the public at large that my name has been changed from Suchi Goel to Suchi Garg due to my marriage with Mr. Ankur Garg. PD(1286)C

I, Raziya Tak, D/o, Mohammad, Fakarodin, R/O, B- 798, Jahangirpuri Delhi - 110033, that I, have Changed My Name from Raziya Tak to Rajiya, for all Purposes PD(1289)C

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**PIRAMAL CAPITAL & HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED**

Registered Office Address: Unit No.501, 6th Floor Piramal Amiti Building, Piramal Agastya Corporate Park, Kamani Junction, Opp Fire Station, LBS Marg, Kurli (West), Mumbai- 400 070. CIN: L65910MH1984PLC032639, Website: www.piramalfinance.com. Branch Address: Dhiraaj Bauge, Building "A" Ground & 1st Floor, Beside Axis Bank, Opp. Monalisa Building, Agra Road, Hari Niwas Circle, Naupada, Thane (West) - 400 602.

**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 undersigned is the Authorised Officer of Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited (PCHFL) 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 PCHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated hereon 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 PCHFL 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. 01400005002 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Abdul Hussain (Borrower) Shanno Hussain (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 737467 /- ₹ Seven lakh Thirty Seven Thousand Four Hundred Sixty Seven Only) NPA (09-12-2024)	Flat No. 389, First Floor, Sector A-6 Pocket-11, Block - 7 Dda Flats Narela Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110040
(LC No. 19600043572 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Namd Lal Prasad (Borrower) Dewanti Devi (Co Borrower 1) Lovesh (Co Borrower 2)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 2105558 /- ₹ Twenty one lakh Five Thousand Five Hundred Fifty Eight Only) NPA (09-12-2024)	Plot No. Rzf-77/17-4, 3rd Fr Khasra No. 43/ 15, Gali No. 11 Raj Nagar-2, Palam Colony New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110075
(LC No. 19700044244 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Bhagwanti. (Borrower) Ravi Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1420202 /- ₹ Fourteen lakh Twenty Thousand Two Hundred Two Only) NPA (09-12-2024)	Propno.-65,2nd Fr Without Roof Kh No.224, village Bindapur Anup Nagar Uttam Nagar New Delhi Delhi - 110059
(LC No. 19700044419 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Ramesh Kumar (Borrower) Suman Devi (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1471977 /- ₹ Fourteen lakh Seventy One Thousand Nine Hundred Seventy Seven Only) NPA (09-12-2024)	Plot No-RZ-C-15, Second Floor, Khasra No 261, Village Bindapur, Bindapur Extn. Uttam Nagar, New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110059
(LC No. 23400002298 of Agra Branch) Zeeshan Khan (Borrower) Mahenzab Subhani (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 581888 /- ₹ Five lakh Eighty One Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Eight Only) NPA (09-12-2024)	Second Floor Flat No. 203 On Khet No. 87kh, 88kh,89,90,90k,92, Etc. Classic green Apartment Maheshpur Anoushahr, Koil Aligarh Aligarh Uttar Pradesh - 202001
(LC No. 27900001638 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Anil (Borrower) Kanta Devi (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 835599 /- ₹ Eight lakh Thirty Five Thousand Five Hundred Ninety Nine Only) NPA (09-12-2024)	Flat No. 1F01, Third Floor Rhs, Khasra No. 206/9,ambuj City, Akbarpur Beharapur Ghaziabad, Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201009
(LC No. 13100001613 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Kapil Manchanda (Borrower) Sandeep Manchanda (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1413769 /- ₹ Fourteen lakh Thirteen Thousand Seven Hundred Sixty Nine Only) NPA (03-11-2024)	Plot No -47-A, First Floor (rhs), Ram Dutt Enclave Uttam Nagar Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110059
(LC No. 24900001493 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Jeetender (Borrower) Rajinder Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1317886 /- ₹ Thirteen lakh Seventeen Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Six Only) NPA (03-10-2024)	Rz-231-b, 2nd Floor (Front Side) Kh No-67/11, Gali No. 6, Vill-palms Sada Nagar New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110045
(LC No. 24900001498 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Jeetender (Borrower) Rajinder Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1171611 /- ₹ Eleven lakh Seventy One Thousand Five Hundred Eleven Only) NPA (03-10-2024)	Rz-231-b, 2nd Floor (Front Side) Kh No-67/11, Gali No. 6, Vill-palms Sada Nagar New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110045
(LC No. 13000002250 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Rites Engineering Works (Borrower) Raj Kamal (Co Borrower 1) Satya Prakash Sharma (Co Borrower 2) Sangeeta Sharma (Co Borrower 3)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 119306 /- ₹ One lakh Nineteen Thousand Three Hundred Six Only) NPA (09-09-2023)	M. Machine. Name :- Vertical Machining Centers / Cosmos CNC Vertical Machining Center;Ap_Model_No. :- Model CVM 640,
(LC No. 13000002599 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Kuku Embroidery (Borrower) Sukhbir (Co Borrower 1) Gaurav Titoria (Co Borrower 2) G R Enterprises (Co Borrower 3)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 216275 /- ₹ Two lakh Sixteen Thousand Two Hundred Twenty Five Only) NPA (09-02-2023)	M. Machine. Name :- Star Kahoinar Machinery; Ap_Model_No. :- Computerised Embroidery Machine,
(LC No. 19600004541 of Gurugram - MG Road Branch) Deepika (Borrower) Pramod Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 288496 /- ₹ Twenty Eight lakh Eighty Four Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Eight Only) NPA (08-09-2022)	Plot No. C-157, Ugf, Rear Side Block-c, Mansa Ram Park,uttam Nagar,Khasra No.10/3 Saikn Nagar, Uttam Nagar New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110059
(LC No. 24900001724 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Sita Ram Verma (Borrower) Anita Devi (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 160126 /- ₹ Sixteen lakh One Thousand Two Hundred Sixty Six Only) NPA (20-07-2022)	C-132, 3rd fr front side with roof blk-C Gali No-36 kh no.117/9 vil- Palam Mahavir Enclave-III New Delhi Delhi - 110045
(LC No. HLSA0003857/B of Delhi - Shahdara Branch) Anil Kumar Srivastava (Borrower) Kiran Srivastava (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1719506 /- ₹ Eleven lakh Seventy Nine Thousand Five Hundred Sixty Eight Only) NPA (04-12-2024)	FF-B, First Floor Without Roof Rights, H No.18 & 19, Khasra No.504/1, Near-Shalimar Tower, Extended Lid Dora, Village Burari, Delhi North Delhi - 110084
(LC No. HLSA0003857/B of Delhi - Shahdara Branch) Anil Kumar Srivastava (Borrower) Kiran Srivastava (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 1386983.14 /- ₹ Thirteen lakh Eighty Six Thousand Nine Hundred Eighty Three Only and Fourteen Paise) NPA (04-12-2024)	FF-B, First Floor Without Roof Rights, H No.18 & 19, Khasra No.504/1, Near-Shalimar Tower, Extended Lid Dora, Village Burari, Delhi North Delhi - 110084
(LC No. BLSA00017604 of Moradabad Branch) Sarfaraj Hussain (Borrower) SHAMEEM NAZ (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 855032.62 /- ₹ Eight lakh Fifty Five Thousand Thirty Two Only and Sixty Two Paise) NPA (03-11-2024)	Gata no 25, Village sherpur mafi Near ever green inter college Moradabad Uttar Pradesh 244411
(LC No. M0277942 of Bahadurgarh Branch) Manu Manchanda (Borrower) Bhavya Manchanda (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2024 / ₹ 5259527.56 /- ₹ Fifty Two lakh Fifty Nine Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Seven Only and Fifty Six Paise) NPA (04-12-2024)	Flat No. 1 on 3rd Floor with Roof Rights, Left Side Of Built Up Property Bearing No.262, Out Of Khasra No.47/3, Village Hastal, Land Measuring 121 Sq. Yds., West Delhi-110059

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to PCHFL as aforesaid, PCHFL 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 PCHFL. 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 : 21-01-2025 Place



# Infrastructure sector needs ₹15 Lakh Crore annual outlay to achieve Viksit Bharat target: Mandaviya

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday said the government's infrastructure investment budget should be Rs 15 lakh crore per annum, against Rs 11.5 lakh crore at present, for the next 25 years to achieve 'Viksit Bharat @2047' and social security for all.

This assumes significance in view of India's 100 years of independence in 2047 and the government's goal of 'Viksit Bharat@2047'.

Addressing the inaugural of ISSA-ESIC International Seminar 'Formalization & Social Security Coverage for Workers in the Informal Sector Challenges & Innovation', Mandaviya stated that the infrastructure investment budget was Rs 1.2 lakh crore in 2012 and this budget was Rs 2.4 lakh crore in 2014 under the Narendra Modi-led government.

"In 2024, the budget has been pegged at Rs 11.5 lakh crore.



We have to take it to Rs 15 lakh crore. When the government will invest Rs 15 lakh crore on infrastructure for the next 25 years, only then India will become a developed country (by 2047)," he said. He pointed out that the Indian economy is rapidly expanding, increasing the people's purchasing power and creating new jobs in the new sector. The minister is of the view that the government would have to

provide social security to workers in these new sectors. He noted that these gig workers who would be part of new sunrise sectors need social security under the government schemes. Mandaviya noted that the social security coverage was 24 per cent a decade ago, in 2014. Now, he said, it is 48 per cent which excludes food security and if we add food security to this, then the social security

coverage in the country is 68 per cent, which is a big achievement.

India has 1.4 billion population and under these circumstances, the government has done unmatched work in providing social security in the last decade, he noted.

Social security means health, pension, livelihood and food security. Today 600 million population have health security in India who get free treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh, he explained. India has brought 800 million people under the food security ambit. Every citizen gets 5 kg of foodgrains free of cost, he noted.

He said that informal workers are getting benefits from all these schemes in the country. In the last 10 years of the Modi government, 250 million people have come above the poverty line, mainly because of getting social security, he pointed out.

Today 630 million people are in the workforce in India and the female ratio in the workforce

participation has increased from 22 per cent a decade ago to 44 per cent at present, he noted.

India is emerging as a big market with FDI flowing and ease of doing business ranking has improved to 63 rank from 140 a decade ago, he noted.

The number of startups has increased here. Indian companies are going to become global companies, he stated.

Stressing that Social security should be available to all workers, he stated that about 2000 years ago, Chanakya talked about it saying that an ideal government or economy is the one which makes provisions and ensures that the lowest strata of society or people living below the poverty line, live life with dignity.

"Now we see those people as formal or informal sector workers or government employees. Those people who are self-employed also come under the definition of workers and should get social security," he said.

# Volta, Lumax among 18 firms selected in PLI scheme in third round

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



As many as 18 companies, including Volta, MIRC Electronics, Lumax and UNO Minda, with a committed investment of Rs 2,299 crore, have been selected to avail benefits under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for white goods sector, an official said on Monday.

In October last year, 38 companies had filed applications with proposed investments of Rs 4,121 crore under the scheme in the third round.

"In the third round of the online application window of the PLI scheme, a total of 38 applications were received. After reviewing these applications, the government has provisionally selected 18 new companies. These companies include 10 manufacturers of components of air conditioners and eight manufacturers of LED Lights, with committed investment of Rs 2,299 crore," the commerce and industry ministry said. In addition, it said, six existing

PLI beneficiaries have been provisionally selected to upgrade to higher investment categories, committing an additional investment of Rs 1,217 crore.

It added that for air conditioners, companies will be manufacturing components like compressors, copper tubes, and heat exchangers among others. Similarly, for LED lights, LED chip packaging, drivers, engines, light management systems and metallised films for capacitors will be manufactured in India. "Altogether, 84 companies under the PLI Scheme for White Goods are set to bring investments of Rs 10,478 crore, resulting in production worth Rs 1,72,663 crore," it

said. According to the ministry, Volta Components has committed to invest Rs 256.73 crore to manufacture compressors. With Rs 51.5 crore investment, MIRC Electronics has proposed to make AC products like motors and heat exchangers.

The other applicants which are provisionally selected in the third round of PLI scheme for Air Conditioners included Jupiter Aluminium Industries with a committed investment of Rs 618 crore, Ram Ratna Wires (Rs 253 crore), SMEL Steel Structural (Rs 541.29 crore), and Next Generation Manufacturers (Rs 121.35 crore).

Similarly in the LED lights category, Lumax Industries has committed Rs 60 crore investment to make LED drivers. UNO Minda would invest Rs 19.82 crore. Out of 38 applications received during the third round, 11 are being referred to the Committee of Experts (CoE) for examination and its recommendations.

# Settlement with borrowers only after exhausting all options, RBI to ARCs



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Monday asked Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) to go for settlement with borrowers only after exhausting all possible ways to recover dues.

The central bank has revised the 'Master Direction - Reserve Bank of India (Asset Reconstruction Companies) Directions, 2024 dated April 24, 2024'. Every ARC should frame a board-approved policy for the settlement of dues payable by the borrowers.

The policy should, inter alia, cover aspects like a cut-off date for one-time settlement eligibility, permissible sacrifice for various categories of exposures while arriving at the settlement amount and the methodology for arriving at the realisable value of the security, said the revised

guidelines on settlement of dues of borrowers by ARCs.

"Settlement with the borrower shall be done only after all possible ways to recover the dues have been examined and settlement is considered as the best option available," it said.

Further, the settlement amount should preferably be paid in a lump sum. Where the settlement does not envisage payment of the entire amount agreed upon in one instalment, the proposals should be in line with and supported by an acceptable business plan (where applicable), projected earnings and cash flows of the borrower.

The guidelines provide procedures to be followed in cases where the settlement of accounts pertaining to a borrower with an aggregate value of more than Rs one crore or less.

# Sensex rallies 454 points, Nifty ends above 23,300 on gains in banking shares, firm global trends

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex spurted by 454 points and Nifty closed above 23,300 on Monday following gains in banking, financial and power stocks amid firm global trends.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 454.11 points or 0.59 per cent to settle at 77,073.44 as its 17 components advanced and 13 declined. Intra-day, it surged 699.61 points or 0.91 per cent to 77,318.94.

The NSE Nifty climbed 141.55 points or 0.61 per cent to 23,344.75 with 29 of its constituents ending higher. Among Sensex shares, Kotak Mahindra Bank jumped over 9 per cent after the firm posted a 10 per cent growth in its consolidated net profit at Rs 4,701 crore, aided by performance of capital markets-linked arms.

Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv, NTPC, State Bank of India, Power Grid, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra and Asian Paints were the other gainers. However, Zomato fell the most by 3.14 per cent after food delivery platform reported weaker-than-expected financial results for the December quarter. Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti and Tata Motors were also among the laggards. "A strong positive



sentiment from Asian markets bolstered domestic markets, starting the week on a healthy note. Further, a robust initial set of earnings from the banking and financial sectors triggered a broad-based rally, driven by the likelihood of improved earnings in the near future.

"However, uncertainties surrounding Trump's policies continue to linger, with investors eagerly waiting for more clarity," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 0.82 per cent and midcap index climbed 0.66 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, telecommunication surged the most by 2.18 per cent, followed by bankex (2.03 per cent), power (1.39 per cent), financial services (1.24 per cent), utilities (1.17 per cent) and capital goods (0.96 per cent). BSE consumer discretionary, auto and FMCG were the laggards.

As many as 2,503 stocks advanced while 1,557 declined and 168 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Global markets also advanced ahead of the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump. Trump announced that he had a 'very good' telephone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping and that the outcome was positive. Analysts said that it indicates that initially Trump would go slow on tariffs and would prefer to negotiate.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Seoul ended lower. Markets in Europe were trading higher. US markets ended in the green on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.36 per cent to USD 80.50 a barrel. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,318.06 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

# Rupee further rises five paise to close at 86.55 against US Dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated five paise to close at 86.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as an overnight decline in crude oil prices and the US dollar index supported investor sentiments.

Besides, a positive trend in domestic equities also helped the local currency, Forex traders said the rupee is likely to trade within a volatile range of 86.20-86.80 ahead of key events in the global and domestic economic landscape. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a strong note at 86.48 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.46 and a low of 86.57.

It finally closed at 86.55 (provisional), a rise of five paise against the US dollar. In the previous session on Friday, the rupee settled at 86.60.

According to Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the rupee strengthened against the greenback on the weak tone in the US Dollar index and positive domestic markets. Overnight decline in crude oil prices also supported the rupee.

"We expect the rupee to remain weak on underlying strength in the US Dollar and importer demand for Dollars. However, any further correction in crude oil prices and extended gains in the domestic markets may

support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said. The US markets will remain closed due to the Martin Luther King Junior Day holiday.

USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 86.40 to 86.75.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading down 0.17 per cent to 109.16. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.50 per cent to USD 80.39 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 454.11 points, or 0.59 per cent, to settle at 77,073.44 points, while the Nifty rose 141.55 points, or 0.61 per cent, to 23,344.75 points.

# Engineers to protest privatisation of discoms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lakhs of power engineers will hold a nationwide agitation on Thursday against the government's attempt to privatise two discoms in Uttar Pradesh, a statement said.

Members of National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOEEE) will also protest against the

government's move to hand over the power department of Chandigarh to a private entity.

The protest will be held in the state/ UT capitals on January 23, the statement by All India Power Engineers Federation (AIPEF), a part of NCCOEEE said.

NCCOEEE has demanded cancellation of pre-bidding conference for appointing a transaction consultant for

privatization of UP's Purvanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd (PVVNL) and Dakshinanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd (DVVNL), AIPEF Chairman Shailendra Dubey said. "On what basis will the assets worth billions of rupees of UP discoms PVVNL and DVVNL be handed over to private houses through their privatisation?"

# Agriculture ministry launches first-ever national edible oil consumption survey



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union agriculture ministry has launched its first-ever survey to assess edible oil consumption patterns in India, aiming to effectively implement the new Mission on Edible Oils-Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds), a senior government official said.

The 45-day questionnaire-based survey, which began on January 9, will continue until

February 23. The initiative comes as India - the world's largest consumer and importer of edible oils - lacks recent data on consumption patterns.

"The survey aims to capture the consumption pattern and choice of edible oils, which will help in policy decisions," the official told PTI.

Industry reports indicate that per capita annual consumption of edible oil has risen to over 20 kg in India, significantly exceeding the recommended limits of 12 kg by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and 13 kg by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

This marks a substantial increase from 2.9 kg in 1950-60, driven by factors such as rising incomes, urbanisation,

and changing dietary habits. The comprehensive survey focuses on household cooking oil preferences and includes questions about demographic details, domicile, and residence type.

It explores specific aspects such as types of oils used, deep-frying frequency, seasonal usage patterns, and factors influencing oil selection, including health benefits and price considerations.

The questionnaire also assesses public awareness about health risks like trans fats, attitudes toward oil reuse, and concerns about oils in packaged foods. Additionally, it examines consumer behaviour related to advertisements, label-reading practices, and

willingness to pay premium prices for healthier oil options. Survey results will help determine priority oilseeds under the NMEO-Oilseeds programme, scheduled to launch in the upcoming kharif (summer) season starting July. The mission, with a financial outlay of Rs 10,103 crore over seven years, aims to increase domestic oilseed production from 39 million tonnes in 2022-23 to 69.7 million tonnes by 2030-31.

Currently, India imports 55-60 per cent of its edible oil requirements from countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Argentina, Brazil, Russia, and Ukraine. In the 2023-24 oil marketing year, India's edible oil imports reached approximately 15.96 million tonnes.

# Hindenburg says not under investigation by US SEC

PTI ■ TORONTO/NEW DELHI

US short-seller Hindenburg Research has said it is not under investigation by the US SEC as it rubbished alleged links of its founder to a hedge fund for preparing reports targeting companies.

"Hindenburg is not under investigation by the SEC, to our knowledge, and any suggestion to the contrary is false," the firm said after a Canadian portal cited documents filed before a court in Ontario to allege that its founder Nate Anderson was under cloud for alleged links with hedge funds.

Citing a cache of documents filed at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in a complex defamation lawsuit, the Market



Frauds portal said the head of Canada's Anson hedge fund, Moez Kassam admitted his firm has shared research "with a wide variety of sources" including Hindenburg's Nate Anderson. Hindenburg colluded with Anson while preparing a report.

The preparation of bearish reports without disclosure of

participation can be charged as securities fraud by the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Hindenburg said the report "is largely based on an anonymous Tongan blog that is rife with factual errors, wild theorizing, and demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of US law" and that it was "irresponsible" to "syndicate such rumours".

While short sellers borrow security, sell it on the open market, and expect to repurchase it for less money after their damning report against the company brings stock down, involvement of hedge funds raises eyebrows as they could also place parallel bets, putting more downward pressure on stock prices.

# Kotak Mahindra bank shares surge post earning report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Kotak Mahindra Bank on Monday jumped more than nine per cent after the firm posted a 10 per cent growth in its consolidated net profit at Rs 4,701 crore, aided by the performance of capital markets-linked arms.

The stock surged 9.15 per cent to settle at Rs 1,919.60 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it zoomed 9.68 per cent to Rs 1,929.

On the NSE, it soared 9.06 per cent to Rs 1,918 per share. The stock was the biggest gainer among the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty firms.

The company's market valuation rallied Rs 31,999.66 crore to Rs 3,81,649.82 crore. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 454.11 points or 0.59 per cent to settle at 77,073.44. The NSE Nifty climbed 141.55 points or 0.61 per cent to 23,344.75.

The firm announced the earnings on Saturday. On a standalone basis, the private sector lender's net profit for the October-December period rose by 10 per cent.

The capital market arms - Kotak Securities and Kotak Mahindra Capital - delivered a 59 per cent growth in its profit at a combined Rs 542 crore.

# Central Bank of India Q3 profit jumps 33 per cent to ₹959 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Central Bank of India posted a 33 per cent increase in its profit at Rs 959 crore in the third quarter ended December 2024.

The bank had earned a net profit of Rs 718 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Total income increased to Rs 9,739 crore during the quarter under review against Rs 9,139 crore in the same period last year, the Central



Bank of India said in a regulatory filing. The interest income of the bank also rose to Rs 8,509 crore during the quarter compared to Rs 7,809 crore in the same period a year ago.

Operating profit of the bank improved to Rs 1,963 crore as against Rs 1,931 crore in December 2023.

On the asset quality side, the bank's gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) declined to 3.86 per cent of the total loans at the end of December 2024 from 4.50 per cent a year ago. Net NPAs or bad loans also came down to 0.59 per cent from 1.27 per cent at the end of the third quarter of the previous fiscal.

# Paytm Q3 consolidated loss narrows to ₹208.5 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, has reported a narrowing of consolidated loss to Rs 208.5 crore in the third quarter ended December 31, 2024 mainly on account of reduction in expenses across the board, mainly on payment processing charges and employee costs.

The company had posted a loss of Rs 221.7 crore in the same period a year ago, the company said. The revenue from operations



of Paytm declined by 35.8 per cent to Rs 1,827.8 crore during the reported quarter, from Rs 2,850.5 crore in the December 2024 quarter driven by dip in revenue from payments and financial services (34 per cent), payment services (40 per

cent) and marketing services (48 per cent). The revenue was, however, up 10 per cent on a quarter-on-quarter basis showing a sign of recovery in the company's business.

The company is also looking for international expansion. It has set-up three overseas step-down subsidiaries of Paytm Cloud Technologies in the United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

"We believe that our technology-led merchant payments and financial services distribution business

model has the potential for expansion in similar international markets. "We have developed a portfolio of innovative hardware, software and services stack in India, which can be deployed and monetised internationally. We are exploring various approaches, including organic expansion/local licenses, strategic investment and partnerships," the filing said. During the quarter, Paytm's gross merchandise value (GMV) reached record high to touch the Rs five lakh-crore mark.



# Praggnanandhaa defeats Harikrishna; Gukesh, Erigaisi draw in second round of Tata Steel Chess

**PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE**  
Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa defeated compatriot Harikrishna, while Arjun Erigaisi settled for a draw in the second round of 87th Tata Steel Chess Tournament here. This was after world champion D Gukesh played out a draw with Russian-turned-Slovenian Vladimir Fedoseev while Leon Luke Mendonca lost another game, this time to Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. The 19-year-old Praggnanandhaa's win over Harikrishna was a masterclass on defence and counter-attack. Playing white for the second time in as many days, Harikrishna could not find his magical touch even though he performed slightly better in the middle game. The younger Indian took him to the ropes and eventually the endgame, which should have been drawn. Harikrishna faltered when it

was necessary to put up resistance and Praggnanandhaa made the most of it to emerge victorious. Erigaisi pressed hard against local hero Anish Giri, who was almost winning against Gukesh in the opening round. The battle took a steep turn with both players fighting for advantage in the rook and knight endgame but as it turned out, the draw was a result that most experts expected. Fabiano Caruana was the player of the day as he gradually crushed second best Dutchman Jorden van Foreest right from the early middle game. It was an innocuous London system that Caruana started with and then capitalised on an unforced error to win a pawn which proved decisive. Earlier, after a tension filled game against Giri, Gukesh relaxed with his black pieces and was never in any problem against Fedoseev,



who is perceived as a strong opponent at all levels. With black, Gukesh was looking only optically worse but the Indian equalised without much trouble



leading to an endgame with rook and four pawns apiece where the draw was a just result. For Mendonca it was a bad day in office as he chose to

play the French defense and faced some new ideas by the Uzbek, who has been constantly working to get positions in which he can out-calculate his opponents. The early middle game saw both players castling on opposite flank and it was Mendonca's king that came in to scrutiny soon. Abdusattorov is a fierce attacker and he pounced on his chance to score his first victory. This was the first game to end in the day. In the challengers' section, R Vaishali was forced to split the point with 14-year-old Chinese sensation Miaoyi Lu after an intense battle with white pieces. Divya Deshmukh also opened her account in this section drawing with top seed Nguyen Thai van Dam of Czech Republic. After her first-round loss, this was an easy comeback for Divya, who is having her second stint here. **Results round 2:** Masters: Vladimir Fedoseev

(Slo, 1) drew with D Gukesh (Ind, 1.5); Erigaise Arjun (Ind, 0.5) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 0.5); P Harikrishna (Ind, 1) lost to R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 1.5); Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 1.5) beat Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 0); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 1.5) drew with Max Warmerdam (Ned, 1); Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 1.5) beat Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 0.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 1) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 1). **Challengers:** Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 0.5) drew with Nguyen Thai van Dam (Cze, 1.5); R Vaishali (Ind, 1.5) drew with Miaoyi Lu (Chn, 1.5); Nodirbek Yakubov (Uzb, 1.5) drew with Nodirbek Kazybek (Kaz, 0.5); Benjamin Bok (Ned, 1.5) beat Ediz Gurel (Tur, 1); Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 0.5) drew with Aydin Sulemanli (Aze, 1); Svane Frederik (Ger, 1.5) beat Oro Faustino (Arg, 0); Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 0) lost to Erwin LAmi (Ned, 1.5).

## Satwik-Chirag eye first title of season, Lakshya Sen aims to bounce back

**PTI ■ JAKARTA**  
Star Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will be eying its maiden title of the year while Lakshya Sen will look to put behind a disappointing start to the season when the Indonesia Masters Super 500 tournament gets underway here on Tuesday. The world No 9 duo of Satwik and Chirag has been in a fine form, reaching semifinals of the last two tournaments — Malaysia Open Super 1000 and India Open Super 750 — over the last as many weeks and will be keen to cross the final hurdle. Satwik-Chirag had lost each of the two semifinals in straight sets and their aim would be to go the distance in the upcoming tournament. They will open their campaign with a round of 32 clash against Chinese Taipei's Chen Zhi-Ray and Yu Chieh



Lin. The challenge, however, would be greater for India's singles players Sen and PV Sindhu when they take the court here. The 23-year-old Sen, who had finished fourth in last year's Paris Olympics has lost twice in the first round over the last two weeks, will be determined to put his best foot forward in the round of 32 clash. Priyanshu Rajawat will also begin his campaign at the same stage, taking on Japan's

player Gregoria Mariska Tunjung. Sindhu lost in the quarterfinals of the India Open and the two-time Olympic medallist Indian star will be keen to make amends. In women's singles qualification, Isharani Baruah will face compatriot Rakshitha Ramraj while Tanya Hemanth will clash against Chinese Taipei's Tung Ciou-Tong. Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa will begin their women's doubles campaign in round of 32 against Thailand's Ornicha Jongsathapornpan and Sukitta Suwachai. Tanisha will team up with Dhruv Kapila for their mixed doubles' round of 32 game against Indonesia's Adnan Maulana and Indah Cahya Sari Jamil. In the same round, Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Gadde will face off against England's Gregory Mairs and Jenny Mairs.

## Skater Shruti Kotwal hopes to qualify for Winter Olympics through AWG

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Indian skater Shruti Kotwal has set her sights on the Asian Winter Games (AWG) in Harbin, China, next month as a platform to qualify for the 2026 Winter Olympics to be held in Italy. Kotwal, who is training in the United States, will be leading the country's 41-member athlete contingent in the AWG to be held from February 7 to 14. Kotwal said the AWG will be a big opportunity for her to test herself against the best skaters in the world. "I'm focusing on the 500m and 1000m events for Olympic qualification. The timing requirements are incredibly challenging - sub-40 seconds for the 500m and under 1:20 for the 1000m. My Indian national record is 41.97 seconds and I need to skate under 40 seconds to qualify," Kotwal told SAI Media. This will be Kotwal's



second appearance in the AWG after 2017, when the Asian meet was held in Japan. "Countries like South Korea, Japan, and China consistently produce strong skaters who are technically and physically exceptional. I've faced some of these competitors in previous events and understand their strengths. It's a tough field," said the 33-year-old from Pune. Several Indian speed skaters are training in Korea

## Singapore signs Anup Sridhar as additional singles coach



**PTI ■ SINGAPORE**  
India's Asian Championships Bronze-winning former shuttler Anup Sridhar was on Monday roped in as a singles coach by the Singapore Badminton Association (SBA). However, South Korean Kim Ji-hyun will continue to be the head coach for SBA's men's and women's teams. "We do not have a start date as it is dependent on the work visa approval, and we certainly want Anup to join us as soon as possible," Prof David Tan, SBA's Vice President (Business Development and Communications), told PTI. "All I can say is that it is not a short-term contract, and all other terms are confidential," he added. Tan also refuted media reports that the 41-year-old Sridhar, who has three international titles and a Commonwealth Games mixed team bronze to his credit, was going to be the men's singles head coach. "SBA is indeed appointing Anup Sridhar to this role as Singles Coach, but this is not as men's singles head coach as erroneously mentioned by the media in India, as well as by the commentator during the live telecast of the quarterfinals match between Loh Kean Yew and Viktor Axelsen in the India Open," Tan said. SBA had advertised for the position of an additional singles coach. The required qualifications included a minimum of five years' experience within a national badminton team structure with a primary focus on singles. Sridhar was captain of the Indian Thomas cup team in 2006 and 2008.

## Sunrisers Eastern Cape beat Durban Super Giants by six wickets in SA20

**PTI ■ GQEBERHA**  
Sunrisers Eastern Cape defeated Durban Super Giants by six wickets to enter the playoffs of the SA20 here. After three consecutive defeats, the defending champions have certainly turned the corner and seemed to have peaked form, that has seen them win back-to-back SA20 championships in the last two seasons. Last season's leading wicket-taker Marco Jansen (2/23) led the comeback by delivering a special new-ball performance for the Sunrisers Eastern Cape on Sunday night. Jansen was well supported by Englishmen -- pacer Richard Gleeson (2/19) and left-arm spinner Liam Dawson (2/11) along with Otneil Baartman (2/30) as they restricted the visitors to 115/8. Sunrisers Eastern Cape then chased down the target with six wickets in hand with as many as 28 balls remaining.



Asked to bowl, Jansen knocked over Durban Super Giants opener Brandon King with the second ball of the innings which sent a near-capacity St George's Park crowd into raptures. "Glad to have it on a string. Going well at the moment. It's not easy to bowl in the powerplay, for me it's all about taking wickets and everything just falls in place," Jansen said. "I try to bowl in the channel consistently. We have the best crowd in the country, appreciate them coming out." Durban Super Giants innings was held together by New

## Iga Swiatek's drug-case ruling will not be appealed by World Anti-Doping Agency

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Iga Swiatek's one-month suspension for failing a drug test will not be appealed by the World Anti-Doping Agency because her explanation "is plausible," WADA announced on Monday. WADA released its decision just minutes after Swiatek, a five-time Grand Slam champion and former No. 1-ranked women's tennis player, sealed a 6-0 6-1 victory against Eva Lys to reach the Australian Open quarterfinals. Unlike the Swiatek case, WADA did appeal the exoneration of current men's No. 1 Jannik Sinner and a hearing is scheduled to be heard at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne, Switzerland, in April. Sinner was not suspended because the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) determined he was not negligent for two positive tests



for an anabolic steroid in March. The resolution of Swiatek's case was made public by the ITIA in late November. She already had been sidelined provisionally, missing three tournaments in October, and finished her ban during the sport's offseason. "WADA sought advice from external legal counsel, who considered that the athlete's contamination explanation was well evidenced, that the ITIA decision was compliant with the World Anti-Doping Code, and that there was no

sleeping. The ITIA said it determined her level of fault was "at the lowest end of the range for no significant fault or negligence." That "scenario," WADA said on Monday, "is plausible and that there would be no scientific grounds to challenge it." On the eve of the Australian Open, Swiatek described the initial period she was sidelined, which she chalked up at the time to personal reasons, as "pretty chaotic" and said, "For sure, it wasn't easy; it was probably, like, the worst time in my life." "It got pretty awkward. Like, we chose for the first tournament to say personal reasons because we honestly thought the suspension is going to be lifted soon," Swiatek said in Melbourne. "From the beginning it was obvious that something was contaminated because the level of this substance in my urine was so low that it had to be contamination.

reasonable basis to appeal it to the CAS," Monday's statement from WADA said. Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine, a heart medication known as TMZ. Swiatek failed an out-of-competition drug test in August, and the ITIA accepted her explanation that the result was unintentional, and caused by the contamination of the non-prescription medication melatonin that she was taking for issues with jet lag and

# Novak Djokovic is ready to concentrate on his quarterfinal showdown with Carlos Alcaraz

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Novak Djokovic got the mea culpa he wanted from the Australian Open's local broadcaster and its employee who insulted him on the air and so, according to tournament organisers, the 24-time Grand Slam champion is ready to concentrate on his quarterfinal showdown with Carlos Alcaraz. "Novak acknowledges the apology has been given in public as requested," read a statement issued Monday by Tennis Australia, "and is now moving on and focusing on his next match." That, perhaps, will draw a curtain on the bizarre off-court distraction as Djokovic pursues what would be an 11th championship at Melbourne Park and a record 25th major trophy overall. After winning at Rod Laver Arena on Sunday evening to set

up the contest against No. 3 Alcaraz, Djokovic declined to do the customary post-match on court TV interview, but didn't immediately say why, eliciting some jeering from spectators. Only later that night, at his news conference, did Djokovic explain that he was taking a stand to protest comments made by Tony Jones on Channel 9 on Friday. Djokovic, a 37-year-old from Serbia, did not name Jones, but said a "famous sports journalist who works for official broadcaster Channel 9... Made a mockery of Serbian fans and also made insulting and offensive comments toward me." Jones called Djokovic overrated and a has-been and made what seemed to be a reference to when the player was deported from Australia in 2022 because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19. Djokovic added that he would



continue to avoid speaking to the network without an apology from it and Jones. Those finally arrived on Monday. Nine Network said in a statement it apologised "for any offense

caused from comments made" while live on air. "No harm was intended towards

Novak or his fans," the statement continued. "We look forward to further showcasing his Australian Open campaign at Melbourne Park." During an appearance on a TV show Monday, Jones said he intended his words as "banter" and apologized to Djokovic "if he felt that I disrespected him." "I considered it to be humor, which is consistent with most things I do," Jones said. "Having said that, I was made aware ... That the Djokovic camp was not happy at all with those comments. I immediately contacted the Djokovic camp and issued an apology to them. And as I stand here now, I stand by that apology to Novak." Jones also offered words to Serbians. "I do feel as though I've let down the Serbian fans," he said. "I'm not just saying this to try and wriggle out of trouble or

anything. I genuinely feel for those fans." Serbia's ambassador to Australia, Rade Stefanovic, even got involved Monday, telling the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper that Jones' comments were "clearly unprofessional," including a "most concerning" reference to what happened three years ago when Djokovic was kicked out of the country ahead of the tournament amid the pandemic. Before Jones and his employer offered their apologies, Djokovic posted a message on social media reiterating why he declined to speak. That drew a reply from billionaire X owner Elon Musk, who said, "It's way better just to talk to the public directly than go through the negativity filter of legacy media." Djokovic replied to Musk's tweet with "Indeed" and a raised-hands emoji.



# Mbappé puts on a show again with two goals as Real Madrid beats Las Palmas

**PTI ■ MADRID**  
With Kylian Mbappé putting on a show again, Real Madrid returned to the top of the Spanish league. Mbappé continued his scoring streak with a brace as Madrid routed 10-man Las Palmas 4-1 on Sunday, prompting a big ovation at Santiago Bernabeu stadium for the France star who has struggled at times in his first season with the Spanish powerhouse. "It's always a dream to get a standing ovation at this stadium," Mbappé said. "I'm really happy, I've adapted to the team and I can play the way I want to. Everyone enjoys the team's game. All the Real Madrid players are leaders because it's the best team in the world. We have to be united because we have to win a lot of things. You always have to win at Real Madrid." Mbappé now has scored four goals in his last four matches with Madrid.

Brahim Díaz and Rodrygo also scored for Madrid as it overtook Atletico Madrid to begin the second half of the league season. Madrid is two points ahead of city rival Atletico, which on Saturday saw its record 15-game winning streak end in a 1-0 loss to Leganes. Madrid opened a seven-point lead over third-placed Barcelona, which drew 1-1 at Getafe on Saturday. "It was an important match for us," Mbappé said. "We knew what happened yesterday with Atletico's defeat and Barcelona's draw and we wanted to get the win. We started badly because we conceded an early goal, but the team's reaction was outstanding. We looked for space and played fast and with quality." It was the second straight victory for Madrid after an embarrassing 5-2 loss to Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final in Saudi Arabia on Jan. 12. After Rodrygo was fouled,



Mbappé converted an 18th-minute penalty kick on Sunday after the visitors had taken the lead through Fábio Silva one minute into the match at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. Díaz put Madrid ahead in the 33rd and Mbappé added his second goal in the 36th after an assist by Rodrygo. Rodrygo scored his third goal in three matches in the 57th. Mbappé thought he had scored a hat trick near the end of the first half but his goal was disallowed for offside. He also hit the woodwork in first-half stoppage time. Jude Bellingham had a goal disallowed after video review in the second half. "Mbappé's great form is helping us a lot," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Our work today was very good. We managed to get the right balance to handle the good moments and the difficult ones." Las Palmas, sitting in 14th place

and enduring a three-game losing streak across all competitions, had Benito Ramírez sent off for a high kick in the 64th. He initially was shown a yellow card but video review determined he deserved a red card. Defender David Alaba made his return to action after a long knee-injury layoff in the 77th. He hadn't played since December 2023. Madrid was without forward Vinícius Júnior because of a suspension. **President Pérez** As the only candidate, Florentino Pérez was reelected Madrid president on Sunday, securing his control of the club until 2029. Other results Earlier Sunday, fourth-place Athletic Bilbao won 2-1 at 13th-place Celta Vigo, while ninth-place Rayo Vallecano drew 1-1 at 10th-place Osasuna. Valencia moved out of last place by beating Real Sociedad 1-0 at home for its first league win since November.



## Elena Svitolina rallies to reach the Australian Open quarterfinals for third time

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Elena Svitolina was 4-1 down before she went on a roll and took 11 of the next 12 games in a 6-4 6-1 victory over Veronika Kudermetova on Monday to reach the Australian Open quarterfinals for the third time. The 30-year-old Ukrainian is into the last eight at a Grand Slam for the 12th time and will next play No. 19 Madison Keys, who had a 6-3 1-6 6-3 win over Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and 2023 Australian Open runner-up. Keys has twice reached the semifinals in Australia, in 2015 and 2022, and entered the season's first major with a title in Adelaide earlier this month. Svitolina is back in the quarterfinals in Australia for the first time since 2019. "Feels like a lifetime ago," Svitolina said. Since then, she has married French player Gael Monfils in 2021 and the pair had a daughter, Skai, in 2022. "Many things happened and I'm really pleased with the performance throughout the tournament. Really enjoying this win today." After dropping two early service games to Kudermetova, she said her only goal "was just trying to fight." "It's the only thing I can do when things are not going your way, put your head down and get back to work," she said. "Really happy I could come (back) into the match and then win in straight sets." In a message written on a TV camera lens after the match,

the No. 28-seeded Svitolina wrote "The Spirit of Ukraine" and drew a heart shape. Svitolina, the No. 28 seed, wore a red dress, red shoes and a red cap for the match. People in the crowd waved the yellow and blue Ukraine flag. Kudermetova took a medical timeout for on-court treatment on her abdomen after falling behind 5-4 the first set. She left the court for treatment after losing the first set. Kudermetova saved a breakpoint and held for 1-1 in the second set, following up a forehand winner down the line with a loud roar. That was the end of her celebrating. It wasn't just power and pace from Svitolina that was the difference between the pair. After bringing Kudermetova to the net with a drop shot and then lobbing over her to start the next game, Svitolina punched the air. There was no handshake at the net with Kudermetova, a 27-year-old from Russia, but no animosity, either. Svitolina's husband, Monfils, was playing later Monday against No. 21 seed Ben Shelton on Margaret Court Arena. The 38-year-old Frenchman reached the fourth round with an upset over fourth-seeded Taylor Fritz, the US Open runner-up last year. Other quarterfinalists will be decided when defending champion Jannik Sinner and No. 13 seed Holger Rune meet in an afternoon match and five-time major winner Iga Swiatek takes on Eva Lys, the lucky loser from qualifying, in a night match.

## Rishabh Pant named captain of Lucknow Super Giants for upcoming IPL 2025

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**  
Dynamic keeper-batter Rishabh Pant was on Monday named the captain of Lucknow Super Giants for the upcoming IPL and he vowed to give his "200 percent" to win the team's maiden title. Pant was picked at the mega auction for an IPL record Rs 27 crore by the franchise owner Sanjiv Goenka. "I will give my 200 percent. That's my commitment to you. I will try whatever is there in my power to repay the faith. I am really excited and looking forward to new beginning and new energy. And have a blast out there with lot of fun," Pant told mediapersons after being unveiled as the new skipper. "We start with new hope and aspirations. And most importantly, new confidence. I wanted to introduce you all to our new captain Rishabh Pant," Goenka said. This is Pant's second stint as a



leader in the IPL. At his former franchise Delhi Capitals, the captaincy became a point of contention, leading the 27-year-old Pant to opt out of DC's retention plans after unsuccessful negotiations. Pant beat Nicholas Pooran to secure the top job after Rahul didn't feature in the list of LSG's retained players. LSG had retained Pooran, Mayank Yadav, Ravi Bishnoi, and Ayush Badoni before the auction.

Right after the auction, Goenka made a cryptic remark that the franchise wanted to keep players who put the team first ahead of their personal goals and milestones, which was construed as a dig at Rahul who often struggled to score at a brisk pace. Asked about his new team going the distance in the IPL, Pant sounded optimistic. "Definitely happy with the team. We have a mix of youth and experienced players. We

have not been where we wanted to be... That's the journey how we can take this franchise to newer heights. Despite DC's interest in keeping him, they were not fully committed to him leading the side, prompting Pant to re-enter the auction. At the auction, they pipped Sunrisers Hyderabad, LSG to get Pant for Rs 20.75 crore, eventually they had to raise their price to Rs 27 crore to outbid Delhi Capitals' right-to-match card. "I know it's a new beginning for me, new franchise, new owner. The ideology of captaining the side doesn't change. We will add a lot of things which we will discuss with the management and will see how we would take this forward in a better way." Speaking about his captaincy mantra, "I've learnt from a lot of captains, seniors. You don't only learn from captains, a lot of senior players are also there.



## Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi named in Mumbai squad for next Ranji game

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
India captain Rohit Sharma will show up in a Ranji Trophy match for the first time in almost a decade after he and rising star Yashasvi Jaiswal were named in Mumbai's squad for their fixture against Jammu and Kashmir, starting January 23 at MCA-BKC Ground here. The team will continue to be led by the seasoned Ajinkya Rahane, the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) said while announcing the squad on Monday. Rohit had confirmed his participation for the next round of the Ranji Trophy match on Saturday during a press conference to announce India's squads for limited-overs series against England and the Champions Trophy next month. When asked if he would play in the next domestic game for his state team, Rohit replied, "I will". Of late there have been questions over Rohit's form in the longest format after his forgettable outing in his last eight Tests, including against New Zealand at home and against Australia Down Under. The India skipper had showed up for a training session for Mumbai on January 15 as it became clear after the team's disastrous tour of Australia that the BCCI has made it mandatory for the players to feature in domestic circuit. Soon after, Jaiswal too joined the Mumbai camp which trained at the BKC ground as he had a few batting sessions

with his domestic team. The BCCI recently made it mandatory for all contracted India players to participate in domestic cricket except when there are fitness issues. Rohit had cited a busy schedule with the national team among reasons for not playing domestic cricket. "(In) the last 6-7 years, I can at least tell about what has happened with me since I've started playing Test cricket regularly, which is from 2019, you hardly have any time (in hand)," he told media. "And then, when you play so much international cricket through the year, you need some time off as well as a cricketer just to refresh, get your mind right, just to be ready for the upcoming season." "But we have addressed it now and nobody takes it for granted or anything like that. It is just based on looking at how one has gone through the season, how much rest he needs. "Based on all of that, we decide what is going to happen with certain players. Now it's been made mandatory that if there is time, you have to play domestic cricket," he said. Mumbai squad: Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ayush Mhatre, Shreyas Iyer, Siddhesh Lad, Shivam Dube, Hardik Tamore (wk), Akash Anand (wk), Tanush Kotian, Shams Mulani, Himanshu Singh, Shardul Thakur, Mohit Awasthi, Sylvester Desouza, Royston Dias, Karsh Kothari.

## Yes, transition phase is coming but I don't need to prove anything to anyone: Axar Patel

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**  
A contender to take veteran Ravindra Jadeja's place permanently at some point, spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel is aware of the possibilities that may arise during India's big Test transition but he doesn't feel the need to prove "anything to anyone" to make his case. Axar, who turned 31 on Monday, has been Jadeja's under-study for the past decade with same skill-sets but with a bit of less finesse than his fellow senior Gujarati. In his 11-year-international career, Axar has taken 184 wickets across three formats and 55 of them have come in 14 Tests, two of which were in Bangladesh when Jadeja was unfit. Talk about Indian cricket's transition and whether he stands to gain, India's T20 vice-captain's offered a matter of fact response. "Yes, a transition phase is coming, and ultimately, it's the selectors' and captain's call. I don't feel the need to prove anything to anyone," Axar gave an uncomplicated answer. "My approach is to focus on fulfilling the role assigned to me and continuously improving myself. If I perform well, my



place in the team will take care of itself automatically." In his mind, he is an all-format player and that belief is unshakable. "I just keep telling myself that I have played all three formats be it Tests, ODIs, or T20s. My focus is on doing well whenever I get an opportunity, rather than feeling the need to prove anything to anyone, whether I'm picked or not. "I don't take the pressure of thinking that I deserve a spot. It is always about the team combination and whether there is any room for me." He wasn't disappointed when he didn't make the cut for Border-Gavaskar

Trophy as it was not meant to be. Instead, he concentrated on a T20I series in South Africa where he played all the games. "When it comes to selection or the Australia series, I think more about where I can get opportunities rather than whether I deserve a place. "It's all part of a cricketer's journey -- only 15 players can be in the squad and you can't take your place for granted. I don't think in those terms." There has been a lot of chatter about communication between the Gautam Gambhir-led support staff and the players during the series Down Under. When asked about it, Axar carefully sidestepped the issue but did say that in a fast-paced format like T20, it is more about specific strategic inputs and roles. In that regard, he felt that "communication is pretty clear." "I was not with the team for last two and half months so I do not have much idea what was going on in Australia. But it's the same support staff, we just have the inputs that is required from bowling coach and the batting coach. "T20 is a fast-paced format, so it's about making correct decisions, so we discuss that only. What role do I have to play?"

# Champions League makes January debut with high-stakes clash of PSG and Manchester City

**PTI ■ GENEVA**  
The first Champions League games to be played in January include one with shocking possible consequences in an unpredictable debut season for the 36-team format. Paris Saint-Germain vs Manchester City on Wednesday is a clash of super-wealthy state-backed teams currently a barely believable 25th and 22nd in the standings. If the 2020 beaten finalist and 2023 champion play at a draw at Parc des Princes, both could start the 18-game final round on January 29 outside the top-24 places that qualify for the knockout stage. The new format that replaced the

traditional groups — now with eight games instead of six, facing eight different opponents, and two in January — is unknown territory even for UEFA, whose preseason prediction that eight points should ensure advancing likely will fall short. However, few imagined what would play out in the first six rounds. Man City and PSG have struggled, Real Madrid has lost half its games in 20th place despite adding Kylian Mbappé to a title-winning team, and lowest-ranked debutant Brest has cruised to four wins and seventh in the standings, just ahead of Lille. "It would have been impossible to list these eight clubs as being in the top eight

positions," Giorgio Marchetti, the UEFA deputy general secretary, told The Associated Press in a recent interview. "There is a lot of new fresh air." "I think the format has an impact," Marchetti said, pointing to comments by Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi that it is more difficult to prepare for eight different opponents instead of three. "It is more of a challenge." Which positions are teams playing for? The top eight in the standings on January 29 advance directly to the round of 16 that starts in March. They will likely include current leader Liverpool and second-place Barcelona which are the only two teams already certain to finish in the top 24. Liverpool is the only team to



win all six games. Teams placed from ninth to 24th go into the new knockout playoffs round. Nos. 9-16 will be seeded in the draw on January 31 and will play the second leg at home. Teams

placing 17 to 24 host the first legs. Nos. 25-36 in the standings are eliminated and do not transfer to the Europa League. Already out are Leipzig, Slovan Bratislava and Young Boys

which each lost all six games. Tuesday games Liverpool hosts Lille and Barcelona is at 15th-place Benfica. Atletico Madrid in 11th place can rise above visiting Bayer Leverkusen, which is in fourth place with just one point more. Aston Villa, the 1982 European Cup winner, can qualify for the round of 16 with a win at 16th-place Monaco. Stuttgart, in 26th place, is favored to win at Slovan and move to 10 points, which would put pressure on PSG and Man City. Wednesday games Real Madrid hosts struggling Salzburg, and third-place Arsenal can secure its round of 16 entry — and do Man City a

favor — by winning at home against 24th-place Dinamo Zagreb. Sixth-place Inter Milan goes to Sparta Prague, and Bayern Munich, in a surprising 10th place with 12 points, travels to Feyenoord which is 18th with 10 points. Brest goes to Schalke's stadium in neutral Germany to face Shakhtar Donetsk, which has four points and likely must win to stay in contention. Why is the Champions League playing in January? For the money, mostly. The most influential clubs wanted a bigger and more lucrative Champions League and got two extra midweek matches for all. The congested calendar for soccer left few options. Historically, European club

competitions took a midwinter break until March. Then February was occupied in 2001 by the Champions League when a new format with a second group stage started. February stayed on the calendar when the round of 16 started in 2004, and for the next two decades. So when UEFA decided in 2022 on this eight-game league phase, January was needed even though some leagues in Nordic countries do not start until March, and others are still on midwinter breaks. Austrian champion Sturm Graz, which plays at Atalanta on Tuesday, has not played a domestic game since December 7 and will not resume until February 1.