

Preparations underway for Mauni Amavasya Amrit Snan

BISWAJEET BANERJEE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

As Mahakumbh 2025 approaches its most auspicious bathing festival, Mauni Amavasya Amrit Snan, preparations are in full swing to accommodate an expected turnout of 10 crore devotees at the sacred Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj.

smooth flow of pilgrims. Officials have been instructed to enforce sector-wise management, wherein devotees will return from the same sector or zone they enter. Movement to Sangam Nose and other zones will be strictly restricted to prevent overcrowding.



measures. Essential materials like straw, sacks, and casa will be made available to ensure the safety and comfort of devotees.

passengers will be guided to color-coded shelters based on their destinations. These shelters will ensure orderly boarding through the use of color-coded tickets, preventing confusion and minimizing the risk of stampedes.

planning, and extensive security arrangements are being put in place to provide devotees with a divine and memorable experience.

Hindu code of conduct to be distributed

BISWAJEET BANERJEE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

For the first time, a comprehensive Hindu Code of Conduct will be distributed to one lakh Sanatanis at the Maha Kumbh. Prepared by scholars from Kashi, this 300-page document has been finalised after approval from Shankaracharyas, Ramanujacharyas, and prominent saints.



have gone into creating this code, Prof. Ramnarayan Dwivedi, General Secretary of the Kashi Vidwat Parishad.

Saraswati highlighted the significance of the initiative, saying, "For centuries, there has been no structured revision of Hindu practices. This code will instill discipline and preserve the values of Sanatan Dharma."

'Sadhuon Ke Mann Ki Baat' to be organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popular Mann Ki Baat initiative, a special program 'Sadhuon Ke Mann Ki Baat' will be organised at the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj.



prominent saints from all Akharas, including Sanyasi, Bairagi, and Udasini sects. Notable participants include Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Balakanand Giri of Taponidhi Shri Panchayati Akhara Anand, Mahant Ravindra Puri (President of the All India Akhara Parishad), Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Arun Giri of Shri Panch Dashnam Akhara, Maha Mandaleshwar Kankeshwari Devi, Shri Mahant Madhvas of Shri Panch Digambar Ani Akhara, Shani Dham Peethadheeshwar Maha Mandaleshwar Paramhans Danti Maharaj,

and Maha Mandaleshwar Computer Baba of Shri Digambar Akhara, among others. With millions of saints and sages attending the Prayagraj Mahakumbh, the event bridges devotees and the saintly community, offering discourses and satsangs on spiritual growth and liberation.

Congress accuses UP Government of mismanagement, corruption

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress leaders have accused the state government of mismanagement and corruption in the preparations for Mahakumbh 2025, alleging inadequate facilities for pilgrims and misuse of allocated funds.

More than 1.21 lakh devotees availed Ayush services

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

More than 1.21 lakh devotees have availed Ayush services at the facilities set up at Maha Kumbh by the Ayush ministry in collaboration with the National Ayush Mission, Uttar Pradesh.



chronic conditions. Foreign devotees are also utilising Ayush services, including OPD consultations, the statement said. Also, daily therapeutic yoga sessions are being conducted from designated camps in the Sangam area and Sector-8, led by trainers from the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY), Ministry of Yoga, Delhi.

Dr Akhilesh Singh, Ayush nodal officer at Maha Kumbh, said, "Our team not only treats patients but also informs them about the economic potential of medicinal plants. By promoting their cultivation, we aim to create a source of livelihood for people alongside improving their health."

Devotees visit Dwadash Madhav Parikrama gallery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In addition to the sacred dip in the Triveni Sangam, the circumambulation of the twelve temples, known as the Dwadash Madhav Parikrama, holds immense significance in the Maha Kumbh journey.



the Dwadash Madhav Parikrama. INTACH has also published a research-based booklet with insights from priests, temple committee members, and other knowledgeable contributors.

1947, Sant Prabhudatta Brahmachari revived the Parikrama in 1961 during the month of Magh with the support of Shankaracharya Niranjan Devtrirth and Dharmasmat Swami Karpatri Ji Maharaj.

'Jugaad' for helmet rule sparks debate on civic sense and road safety

BISWAJEET BANERJEE LUCKNOW

A creative yet controversial workaround by petrol pump staff in Uttar Pradesh to enforce the helmet rule has sparked widespread debate on social media and among citizens.

helmet secured with a rope. After refuelling, the rider returns the helmet and rides off. The unique arrangement ensures riders momentarily comply with the law to access fuel.



rules has been contentious across the state. In a separate incident in Hapur, a lineman from the electricity

department was denied fuel for not wearing a helmet. Frustrated, he retaliated by cutting off the power supply to the petrol pump.

"But incidents like this make it difficult for us to enforce rules. We don't want to face backlash, so we try to find middle ground." Experts and citizens alike believe that these incidents reflect a deeper issue with civic responsibility in India.

sentiment. "Wearing a helmet is for our own safety, not the government's benefit," said Sunita Mishra, a homemaker from Lucknow.



FIRST COLUMN

SEEKING TRUE SHELTER IN THE DIVINE

Amid the chaos of desires, ego and karmaphal, how do we find lasting peace



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We are small, ignorant, helpless and unsafe. There should not be any doubt about our smallness with eight billion of us on the earth's planet itself. How knowledgeable we are or can be? Knowledge is unlimited. How much can we learn in one lifetime? Helpless we are from the time we are born till the time comes to dispose of our bodies. Just count how many people we need daily to survive well. And unsafe all of us are, as the Covid-19 pandemic proved. Therefore, we instinctively seek shelter all the time. An infant needs his parents. As one grows, one takes shelter from education to maintain oneself. Education/training over, time comes to seek shelter in a job or a business.

The idea is to have the shelter of enough money to be able to survive decently. Sex overpowers thinking beginning from a young age. Some are drawn towards fame like a sportsperson, while others get into politics, etc. for power. The most fortunate seek the shelter of God. Shelter of God is crucial to exist well. Let us see the degree of difficulty for a quality life. Our nature ('svabhava') is a huge handicap. Something or other from lust, anger, greed, jealousy, ego, etc. predominates if not more than one.

What chance is there to have a quality life? Lust derails almost everyone. One assumes that sex is pleasure, and it has so many forms. The worst thing is it's possessing our minds. Ego is not far behind. Have you met anyone who does not feel his or her superiority vis-



à-vis others? Greed does not allow us to assess our needs sensibly. More is better is the desire and there is no satisfaction. Anger is always lurking near the surface. It surfaces at the drop of a hat, literally. Then, there are karmaphalas always ready to manifest. We know how bad ones hurt. What most people don't realise are the ill effects of good karmaphalas. This is when one gets the feeling of invincibility and makes big mistakes.

People look for rewards during success, and we know what these rewards do to us. The third big enemy is old age, when we become weak and are mostly written off. Are we stuck? Far from it. God would not have made such a sorry Creation. Guidance and help are available to all of us if we accept the role of God in our lives. Ignorance, false pride or laziness stops us from taking God's help, who is the owner, controller and everything. You seek guidance sincerely and see what happens. But we don't; we prefer to be in cyclic thinking short-circuiting our own lives. We condemn ourselves by our obstinate attitude. God is prepared to help all of us at any time, but there is a rider.

We must deserve such help. How to determine who should get or who shouldn't? Therefore, the question everyone should be asking is: how do we become deserving of God's 'kripa' (favour)? Simply, you recognise yourself as a soul – part of God. Then, all spiritual activities will make sense.

Shouldn't parts take shelter from God? Shouldn't we be very respectful to God and pay obeisance to Him? What about the 'dhyani' (meditation) of the entity, who is everything? How about thanking God for all that He does for everyone like providing air, water and sunlight free. In short, we should stop taking shelter of anyone or anything except God, and remain there.

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

Winter's tale in Northern India: A season of discontent

Northern India's winter is more than just a fleeting season; it is a relentless narrative of marrow-freezing cold, breath-choking pollution and a grim forecast for years to come



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR



Of freezing marrows and choking breaths William Shakespeare, emperor of narratives, master of metaphors, celebrated craftsman of sentences and acclaimed presenter of deep insights into human nature, had a way of coming up with expressions surviving the passage of time. One of them is "winter of our discontent." Richard, Duke of Gloucester, says in Richard III, "Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this sun of York;/ And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house/ In the deep bosom of the ocean buried." The expression, which adorns one of John Steinbeck's most famous novels as its title, should resonate particularly strongly with people in northern India still in the grip of a winter that is cold, damp and utterly polluted. The chances of things improving in the next few years, are, to put it mildly, bleak.

As the chilling flipside of global warming, the cold months will continue to be increasingly marrow-freezing, since, with Donald Trump taking over as the United States' president, the chances of a deceleration in the pace of climate change, have diminished significantly. This is not to look wistfully back over one's shoulder to a mythical place like the island valley of Avilion, where, pace Alfred Tennyson in a very different context, "falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, / Nor ever wind blows loudly." Climates and the weather have been notoriously fickle cousins throughout history. If any part of the past seems golden, it is because of the distance in time which lends it enchantment.

It had, when it was the present, its warts, some of them rather large and ugly. Floods and droughts took very heavy tolls when meteorological devices and skills for predicting their advent and coping with their aftermath, were far less advanced. In the absence of electrical heating devices, which we have, life could not have been terribly pleasant during the last ice age which had covered



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about 30 per cent of the earth's surface and ended 15, 000 to 20,000 years ago. On a more specific note, slavery was legal in most parts of the world—including the chest-thumping democracies of the West—as late as the second half of the 19th century. The weather, doubtless, has an impact on life and its moods, which influence thought, speech and feeling which, in turn, trigger action.

All of these, at a certain elevated level, power the wheels of history. These also affect inter-personal relations, causing friction and hostility arising from anger and discontent, or cordiality and warmth caused by harmony. The sum total of the interaction among these factors determines the quality of a community's social existence in terms of tensions between collective bodies like class and caste, and stress caused by individual actions like crime, which is often caused by alienation resulting from marginalisation, poverty and anonymity in impersonal societies. A crime can be a perverse act of self-assertion, a sub-conscious statement like, "I kill, therefore I exist"—a variant of Rene Descartes much-quoted assertion, "Cogito ergo sum (literally, "I think, therefore, I am")."

Another form of self-assertion can be participation—to say nothing of playing a leading role—in a mass movement. Eric Hoffer writes in The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, "There is in us a tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves. Success and failure are unavoidably related in our minds with the state of things around us. Hence it is that people with a sense of fulfilment think it a good

world and would like to conserve it as it is, while the frustrated favour radical change. The tendency to look for all causes outside ourselves persists even when it is clear that our state of being is the product of personal qualities such as ability, character, appearance, health and so on." What is the result? Hoffer quotes Thoreau as saying, "If anything ail a man, so that he does not perform his functions, if he has a pain in his bowels even ... he forthwith sets about reforming—the world." (Italics by Hoffer; Thoreau has used the plurals "ail" and "have" as it was done by many in his time in such contexts).

Attempts to reform the world invariably lead to struggles with status quoists. Besides, social tensions and conflicts will increase following rising ocean levels, caused by global warming, submerging coastal areas. Inward migration of people from these regions would trigger clashes over land and resources in the interior areas. The same factors will also be in operation in other areas to which people may escape from regions made uninhabitable by temperatures rising too high to support life.

One can, of course, argue that people would be kind to global warming refugees, realising that they may have to leave their homes someday for the same reason. But then, kindness is not what a person encounters frequently in life; it is the same with gratitude, the lack of which weighed heavily on the Bard of Avon. "Ingratitude," he lamented in King Lear, "thou marble-hearted fiend..." He bewailed in As You Like It, "Blow, blow, thou winter wind, / Thou art not so unkind/As man's ingratitude."

And he says in Twelfth Night, "I hate ingratitude more in a man/ Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness, / Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption/ Inhabits our frail blood." Character attributes like openness towards gratitude are rooted deep inside one's DNA and are modified by the environment as one grows up. Seasonal changes can impact their intensity, as discomfort caused by extreme heat or cold can put one's temper on a short leash.

On the other hand, as Anton Chekhov put it, "People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they're happy." This brings us back to our starting point—northern India's butt-freezing, breath-choking winter. Can one be happy in its midst? The answer will be in the affirmative, as the news of a progeny scaling new heights at work or being gifted with a baby, will warm the cockles of one's heart. This, however, is most likely to be a passing phase, overwhelmed, sooner than later, by the many worries and sadnesses that quotidian existence brings and that, again, are ephemeral.

The more relevant question will be whether one can survive northern India's winter and for how long. The transition to the hereafter caused by pollution stalks one silently but lethally. The final truth in life is mortality. All this has been said before, and will be said again, as one will hear the much-quoted proverb, "What can't be cured must be endured." It has joined the ranks of venerable clichés blessed with eternal life.

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

Cultural heritage tourism: A path to sustainable growth and mutual understanding

Respecting the balance between tourism and heritage enables a mutually beneficial relationship that supports communities, preserves cultural identity and promotes global harmony

Cultural tourism, as defined in the 22nd session of the UN Tourism General Assembly in 2017, is an activity where a visitor's primary motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and engage with the tangible and intangible cultural attractions and products of a destination. These motivations shape the agendas of both the visitor and the tour guide at cultural heritage destinations, bridging the gap between the historical and the contemporary.

The Evolution of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Cultural heritage has undergone a significant shift in perception, moving from an archaeological focus to the concept of "living heritage" and its reuse. Similarly, tourism has evolved from being largely

centered on pilgrimage to a multifaceted industry encompassing learning, entertainment, experiences, and relaxation. This transformation has elevated tourism as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and job creation across diverse sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment. The industry's ripple effect benefits individuals and communities alike, engaging local businesses, transport operators, craftspeople, tourist guides, and the hospitality industry in a symbiotic relationship.

For these benefits to be fully realised, collaboration among stakeholders is essential. They must work collectively to offer authentic and meaningful experiences that resonate with travelers while preserving the



SUKHDEV SINGH

integrity of cultural sites. **Cultural Heritage as a Driver of Tourism**

A rapidly growing segment within the tourism industry is cultural heritage, which encompasses natural and architectural sites, traditional crafts, cultural events, performances, and intangible knowledge. Recognised as both a commodity and an experience, cultural heritage attracts mar-

ket players, planners, and governments aiming to expand the scope of tourism. It promotes inclusive growth, intercultural exchange and mutual understanding.

The relationship between tourism and cultural heritage is built on mutuality. While cultural heritage serves as a key attraction for tourism, the latter provides the financial and structural support required for its preservation and promotion.

Navigating Contradictions

Tourism operates on the principle of profit and economic growth, while cultural heritage centers on identity and inheritance. These differing foundations can create contradictions. For the tourism industry, cultural heritage is often commodified, whereas for her-



itage conservation, tourism acts as a feeder for sustainability. While these sectors can support one another to an extent, unchecked tourism practices can lead to significant challenges, including overcrowding, environmental and degradation.

To mitigate these issues, regulated practices in cultural heritage tourism must prioritise the symbiotic relationship

between factors influencing tourist experiences and those fostering cultural understanding. Tour operators and tourists must respect the sanctity and protocols of cultural heritage sites. Travelers should be encouraged to appreciate local customs without overstepping boundaries, ensuring a balance between immersion and respect. Sustainable cultural heritage tourism, thus, becomes a pathway to fostering "culture for peace."

Economic and Cultural Benefits of Heritage Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism creates opportunities for income generation and employment. This is achieved by maintaining and showcasing heritage structures, sites, and products. Preservation and management efforts, such as cata-

logging and storytelling, directly benefit from tourism revenue. Simultaneously, the broader economic ecosystem, including hospitality, transportation, and entertainment, flourishes through increased visitor engagement.

However, cultural heritage is far more than a revenue-generating commodity. It serves as a repository of customs, values, and artifacts, connecting communities to their past and reinforcing their identities. Tourism, when responsibly managed, can amplify the significance of heritage sites by fostering research, introducing new narratives, and raising awareness. Reinvestment of economic returns into preservation ensures the longevity and authenticity of cultural heritage.

Challenges of Cultural Heritage Tourism

While tourism can elevate the value of cultural heritage, it also introduces challenges. Overcrowding, environmental degradation, and disruptions to the local population's way of life are common issues.

Sustainable and Responsible Tourism

To maintain a harmonious balance between tourism and cultural heritage, sustainable practices are essential. These include regulating visitor numbers, promoting eco-friendly initiatives, and ensuring that tourism revenue is reinvested into preservation efforts.

(The writer is retired professor of Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar and Vice-Chairman, INTACH; views are personal)

Taliban reject arrest order for officials persecuting Af women

The Taliban Friday rejected a court move to arrest two of their top officials for persecuting women, accusing the court of baseless accusations and misbehaviour.



Awareness celebrated the ICC decision and called it a "great historical achievement".

ful they have provoked the collective opposition of global powers," Mohammad Halim Fidai said on the X platform. Fidai was a governor of four provinces before the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and now lives outside Afghanistan.

Af refugees urge Pak to ease visa rules after US resettlement pause

Afghan refugees on Friday appealed to Pakistan's premier to ease a visa regime on humanitarian grounds after President Donald Trump paused the US refugee programmes.

In the country were supposed to be relocated by September 2025. The refugee programme was set up to help Afghans at risk under the Taliban because of their work with the US government, media, aid agencies and rights groups.

to Pakistan from Afghanistan when the Taliban seized power, said Friday he had been expecting to receive a call confirming his travel plans, but the suspension of the refugee program by Trump changed everything.

Philippines launches comic book to counter China's SCS 'disinformation'

The Philippines launched a comic book on Friday to counter what the country says is China's disinformation campaign to push its expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Philippines will do everything to "fight misinformation, disinformation and false narratives to put forward the truth," Anjo told reporters.

our is outrageous," Chinese officials, along with state-sponsored media and individuals, continue to spread distorted and twisted narratives to malign our efforts and justify their unilateral claims.

PUBLIC NOTICE: General public is hereby informed that Mrs. Ramrati Wo M1, Ramesh Chandra...

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given to all concerned and the general public is hereby informed that the Environmental Clearance bearing File No. SEA/HR/2024/057 & EC Identification No. EC24C3801HR580685N dated 27/05/2024...

PUBLIC NOTICE: My client Smt. Prem Lata W/o Sh. Vinod Kumar Owner of House No. 411, Ground Floor and First Floor...

PUBLIC NOTICE: Reg: Entire Third Floor with roof/terrace rights "said floor" built up on Property Bearing Plot No. 22, area measuring 232 sq. yds (193.98 sq. mtrs) out of Khassa No. 4343, situated in the abadi of Krishan Nagar Extension...

PUBLIC NOTICE: General public is hereby informed that I Amit Banerjee son of late Sri Birendra Kumar Banerjee am filing application in L&DO for substitution of the property No. C-541, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi-110019 in the name of Amit Banerjee...

PUBLIC NOTICE: General public is hereby informed that We (1) Sudha Bala Prabhakar wife of late Sri Vinod Kumar Prabhakar, (2) Reena Prabhakar daughter of late Sri Vinod Kumar Prabhakar are filing application in L&DO for substitution of the property No. A-285, Shivalki Colony, Malviya Nagar...

Table with columns: Company Name, Folio No., No. of Securities held, Security Certificate No., Distinctive No.

PUBLIC NOTICE: This is to inform you that Mr. Jitendra Malhotra, intends to purchase Entire First Floor of the property bearing No. 23 admeasuring 27.26 Sq. Meters, Block H, known as H-28, out of Khassa No. 3/27 situated at abadi of Radehy Puri, Village Khureji Khari, Ilaga Shadhara Delhi...

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Pak Parl holds joint session to pass four bills

Islamabad: Pakistan Parliament on Friday briefly held its joint session to hurriedly pass four bills amidst protest by the opposition lawmakers from Imran Khan's party.

State Bank of India NOTICE FOR LOCKER BREAK OPEN

Table with columns: SN, CABINET NO., LOCKER NO., NAME, ADDRESS

PUBLIC NOTICE: A notice of intended marriage has been received from Mr. Vinal Villiam S/o Mr. William Varughese R/o E-103, Pawitra Apartments 12, Vasundhara Enclave, Delhi-110096 and Ms. Abhila Shaabam Kotwal D/o Mrs. Shabnam Maitra R/o 2122, Overseas Apartments, Sector-50, Noida, Gautambudh Nagar (U.P.) in the office of the undersigned, any person interested therein, may file objections to it on any day upto 14-02-2025 in the office of the undersigned.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS: I, Saumya Tiwari D/o Sh. Rajesh Kumar R/o Rohini Hostel, Room No-311, International Management Institute, Qutab Inst. Area New Delhi have lost my B.Sc certificate year 2016-19, Roll No-504126, Allahabad University. If found contact saumya.p23@imi.edu

CHANGING OF NAME: I, hitherto known as Aditi D/o-roo Tanwar, R/o- RZ - 18/2, Street No. 1, Main Sagar Pur, Delhi - 110046, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Aditi Tanwar for all purposes.

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot: Vacancies for M.B.B.S., B.N.M., B.P.S., B.D.S., B.Ph., B.S.P.D., B.Sc. (Nursing), B.Pharm., B.Tec, etc.

E-AUCTION NOTICE: APPROX. 8.907 KG OF TRANSIT DAMAGED ALUMINIUM FOIL

ASSOCIATE SIGNALING WORK FOR REMOVAL OF LC GATES: E-Tender No. SNT-46-LMG-2024-25

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ASSOCIATE SIGNALING WORK FOR REMOVAL OF LC GATES: E-Tender No. SNT-46-LMG-2024-25

Office of Nagar Palika Parishad Pithampur Distt. Dhar (M.P.) Notice Inviting Tender: Online Item Rate bids are invited from registered contractors/firms of reputed for Sewerage Project of Pithampur town under AMRUT 2.0 NIT No. 2025_UAD_397964_1

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BALASORE "e" Procurement Notice for Bridge Work: Identification No.- Online Tender- Bridge NCB No. 21 of 2024-25

CHANGING OF NAME: I, hitherto known as Aditi D/o-roo Tanwar, R/o- RZ - 18/2, Street No. 1, Main Sagar Pur, Delhi - 110046, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Aditi Tanwar for all purposes.

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WANTED OFFICE PREMISES: Can Fin Homes Ltd. a Housing Finance Company requires space of 800-1000 sq. ft. in Ground / First / Second Floor in a good locality on lease for 5 to 10 years at the following location:

HARYANA SHEHRIVIKAS PRADHIKARAN PUBLIC NOTICE: HSVP invites Online Applications from the land owners whose land has been acquired for Sector-15, Sonapat.

Declaration about Criminal Cases: (As per the judgment dated 25th September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court of WP (Civil) No. 536 of 2011)

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Table with columns: Particulars, Previous Bank Accounts, New Bank Accounts

Government approves ₹500 Crore capital infusion in IFCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Domestic financial institution IFCI on Friday said the government has approved ₹500 crore capital infusion in the company through the preferential issue of shares. The Department of Financial Services has conveyed sanction of the President of India to release funds of ₹500 crore to IFCI Ltd towards subscription to the share capital during FY 2024-25, the state-owned entity said in a regulatory filing. Following this, the meeting of the board of directors of the company is called on January 29, 2025, to consider the Preferential Issue of equity shares to the central government, subject to the approval of shareholders, stock exchanges and such other regulatory authorities



As may be required. With the infusion, the government's holding in the company is expected to further increase from the existing 71.72 per cent as of September 2024. The capital infusion plan for IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha in December. The Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up by the government on July 1, 1948, as the first development financial institution in the country. The Finance Ministry, in November 2024, in principle approved the 'Consolidation of IFCI Group', which entails the merger/amalgamation of

IFCI Limited and Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited and other group companies. As per the proposal, Stock Holding Corporation of India Ltd, IFCI Factors Ltd, IFCI Infrastructure Development Ltd and IIDL Realtors Ltd will merge with IFCI Ltd. Further, Stock Holding Services Ltd, IFCI Financial Services Ltd, IFIN Commodities Ltd and IFIN Credit Ltd will be merged into a single entity, which will be a direct subsidiary of the consolidated listed entity. Additionally, Stock Holding Management Services Ltd, Stock Holding Securities IFSC Ltd, IFIN Securities Finance Ltd, IFCI Venture Capital Funds Ltd and MPCON Ltd shall be direct subsidiaries of the consolidated listed entity that is IFCI.

FM Sitharaman takes part in customary halwa ceremony

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday participated in a traditional 'halwa' ceremony, marking the final stage for the preparation of Union Budget 2025-26 to be unveiled on February 1 in the Lok Sabha. The ceremony is a customary ritual in which traditional dessert 'halwa' is prepared and served to officials and staff members of the finance ministry who are involved in the preparation of the budget. It is organised in the basement of North Block, which houses the ministry in the national capital and is attended by the finance minister and other high-ranking officials. According to sources, the Finance Minister participated in the ceremony and also took a round of the Budget Press and reviewed the preparations besides extending her best wishes to



the officials concerned. Sitharaman is going to present Budget 2025-26, the eighth straight budget in a row, on the backdrop of GDP growth moderating to 6.4 per cent in the financial year as against 8.2 per cent recorded in the previous fiscal. Like the previous four full Union Budgets and one Interim, the full Union Budget 2025-26 will also be delivered in paperless form. All the Union Budget documents, including the Annual Financial Statement

(commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill etc. As prescribed by the Constitution, will be available on the 'Union Budget Mobile App' for hassle-free access to Budget. Besides Sitharaman, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and other senior officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth and other senior officials were present at the ceremony.



RBI penalises J and K Bank, Bank of India, Canara Bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday said it has penalised Jammu and Kashmir Bank, Bank of India, and Canara Bank for deficiencies in regulatory compliance. Jammu and Kashmir Bank has been penalised Rs 3.31 crore for contravention of certain norms related to financial inclusion - access to banking Services - Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA), 'Know Your Customer' and 'Loans and Advances - Statutory and Other Restrictions'. In another release, the RBI said Rs 1 crore penalty has been imposed on the Bank of India for non-compliance with certain provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

A penalty of Rs 1.63 crore has been imposed on public sector Canara Bank for non-compliance with certain directions on priority sector lending, the interest rate on deposits and financial inclusion - access to banking services - BSBDA, the RBI said. Also, a penalty of Rs 1 lakh has been imposed on Datson Exports, West Bengal for non-compliance with certain directions issued by the RBI on 'Managing Risks and Code of Conduct in Outsourcing of Financial Services by NBFCs'. In each case, the RBI said penalties were based on deficiencies in statutory and regulatory compliance and were not intended to pronounce upon the validity of any transaction or agreement entered into by the entities with their customers.

Insurers expect tax benefits, concessions for healthcare sector in Union Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurers are hopeful of a host of tax benefits, including concessions for the insurance and healthcare sectors, from the Union Budget 2025-26 to be unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1. SBI General Insurance MD and CEO Naveen Chandra Jha said that as India advances toward financial inclusivity and universal healthcare, the upcoming Budget is expected to further strengthen the health insurance sector. Initiatives like Bima Sugam, designed to achieve the goal of 'Insurance for All' by 2047, are expected to receive regulatory and fiscal support to address the protection gap, he noted. "Additionally, the budget is likely to focus on expanding access in underserved regions through government-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and advancements in digital infrastructure," Jha added.

Bajaj Allianz Life MD and CEO Tarun Chugh said India's economic growth presents immense opportunities for the insurance sector to enhance financial resilience. "Aligning tax deduction of life insurance annuity products with the National Pension Scheme (NPS) and addressing the issue of tax on principal component on annuity products can evolve retirement needs effectively," he added. Chugh also made a case for the introduction of a separate tax deduction for term insurance and extending the tax deduction on life insurance premiums under the new tax regime. According to the Annual Report of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai), the country's insurance penetration in 2023-24 was 3.7 per cent compared to 4 per cent in 2022-23. The penetration for life insurance industry marginally declined from 3 per cent in 2022-23 to 2.8 per cent during 2023-24. The penetration with respect



to the non-life insurance industry remained the same at 1 per cent during 2023-24. Subrata Mondal, MD and CEO of IFFCO Tokio General Insurance said the Union Budget provides an essential opportunity for the government to implement reforms that can address industry challenges and encourage the broader adoption of insurance products. One key expectation is the enhancement of tax incentives for policyholders to promote wider uptake of insurance, he added. Another priority is increasing budgetary support for government-backed insurance schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Ayushman Bharat, he added. "They would significantly improve access to insurance for underserved populations, particularly in rural and economically weaker regions," Mondal said. Sameer Bansal, MD & CEO, PNB MetLife, said that while India is a fast-growing economy fuelled by its rising middle-class population of 25-45-year-olds, the proportion of people above the age of 60 is equally increasing at a rapid pace. Financial stability is a cornerstone of a secure future. One of our hopes for the upcoming budget is to see support for pension and annuity plans, which are key financial instruments for the retirement planning needed to create that stability, he added. "Tax support for pension plans offered by life insurers on par with the National

Pension Scheme will provide both greater choice and allow diversification of assets into multiple pension plans," he said. Bansal also urged the government to consider removing GST on premiums for annuity plans to support pensioners and make annuities more affordable and accessible. Universal Sampo General Insurance Managing Director and CEO Sharad Mathur opined that strengthening the insurance sector is essential for driving financial resilience, economic stability, and inclusive growth. With targeted reforms and incentives like the reduction of GST on Health insurance, we can unlock the true potential of insurance, ensuring wider coverage, encouraging innovation, and building a secure future for every individual and business, Mathur said. Srikanth Kandikonda, Chief Financial Officer, ManipalCigna Health Insurance, said that given the rising healthcare costs and the need for higher sum insured cover, the government should reduce the tax burden by increasing the limits under Section 80D of income tax for premiums paid for health insurance to Rs 50,000 for all and Rs 1 lakh for senior citizens. "This is crucial for achieving the government's vision 'Insurance for all by 2047' and would substantially reduce the financial burden on families investing in their health and financial wellbeing," Kandikonda added. During 2023-24, the non-life

Rupee rises 22 paise to close at 86.22 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rupee appreciated 22 paise to close at 86.22 against the US dollar on Friday, as a decline in the US dollar index supported investor sentiments. Forex traders said weak crude oil prices also boosted the local unit, while sustained foreign fund outflows weighed on the local unit. Traders further noted that the upcoming Union Budget will play a crucial role in shaping market sentiment and the rupee's trajectory. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a strong note at 86.31 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.16 and a low of 86.36. It finally closed at 86.22, rising 22 paise against the US dollar from previous close. On Thursday, the rupee declined 9 paise to settle at 86.44 against the US dollar. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said the rupee strengthened this week as the dollar index saw a



significant decline. He said the drop in the dollar came after US President Donald Trump's oath taking on January 20, while concerns over heavy tariffs on China were alleviated after no such drastic measures were announced. This brought relief to global markets and supported emerging market currencies like the rupee. "Adding to the rupee's strength was a softer trend in crude prices, which reduced import pressure and supported the domestic currency. The rupee is likely to remain in a range of 85.80-86.50, with further movement depending on global cues, crude price trends,

and any fresh policy signals from the Indian government," Trivedi said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading down 0.56 per cent to 107.44. The Dollar Index has recently surged, reaching a high of 110, fuelled by escalating uncertainty surrounding the "Trump factor". However, this rally in the Dollar Index is unlikely to be sustained as global uncertainties subside and Trump-related risks diminish, CR Forex Advisors - MD Amit Pabari said. Moreover, at the World Economic Forum in Davos,

Switzerland, US President Donald Trump called for an immediate interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve, a move that will generate a negative sentiment for the DXY, Pabari added. Meanwhile, Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.47 per cent to USD 78.66 per barrel in futures trade. Brent oil was trading at USD 78.03 per barrel as Trump asked Saudi to lower prices so that he could make Russia stop the war. He has also threatened sanctions against Russia if they do not get out of the war, Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 329.92 points, or 0.43 per cent, to settle at 76,190.46 points, while the Nifty declined 113.15 points, or 0.49 per cent, to 23,092.20 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,758.49 crore, according to exchange data.

CBIC notifies rules for entities to get TIN

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Entities that are not required to get a GST registration but are required to make a tax payment under the GST Act provision can now obtain a Temporary Identification Number (TIN). The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has notified an amendment to GST rules to issue TIN to entities that are not required to register under the GST Act but need to make payments under some specific provision. Under Goods and Services Tax (GST) rules, registration is mandatory for businesses with an annual turnover of ₹40 lakh and ₹20 lakh in the manufacturing and services sectors, respectively. "Where a person is not liable to registration under the Act



but is required to make any payment under the provision of the Act, the proper officer may grant the said person a temporary identification number," CBIC said while introducing Rule 16A in Central GST Rules. The decision to issue TIN to entities that are otherwise not required a GST registration was taken by the GST council in its meeting last month. This would ensure smooth tax payments while reducing the compliance burden on those who do not regularly engage in taxable activities.

AIMTC urges government to address challenges faced by transport sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) national president Harish Sabharwal on Friday asked the government to address issues like exorbitant increase in toll tax rates and misuse of the e-challan system. The charge handover and oath taking ceremony of the newly elected officer bearers of AIMTC was held on Friday, where Amritlal Madan, the outgoing President of AIMTC, officially passed on his responsibilities to the newly elected president Sabharwal and his team. AIMTC in a statement said some of the key issues that will be high on Sabharwal's agenda include abolition of border checkpoints in the states especially in



Maharashtra, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh. The truckers body said exorbitant increase in toll tax rates, checking misuse of E-challan system and impractical ban on 10-year old diesel vehicles in Delhi-NCR are also on

agenda of the newly-elected president of AIMTC. AIMTC also demanded that the government should constitute 'Drivers Samajik Suraksha Welfare Board' with representatives from AIMTC. It also demanded that drivers

should be covered in the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Ayushman Bharat Yojana. According to the statement, the transportation sector is a key contributor to India's economy, accounting for approximately 7.7 per cent of India's GDP (PPP adjusted). AIMTC also announced that every year the 24th Day of January will be celebrated as 'National Drivers Day'. In 1936, AIMTC was established as a non-political, not-for-profit apex body representing India's road transport sector in both cargo and passenger segments. It encompasses over 95 lakh truckers, 50 lakh passenger vehicle operators, and 3,500 associations nationwide, impacting over 20 crore people directly or indirectly.

Used-car sales in India to cross one crore annual mark by 2030: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian used-car market is expected to cross 1 crore sales mark annually by 2030 with offtakes increasing across both urban and smaller towns, according to a report by CARS24. As per the 'Gear of Growth: The 2024 Indian Used-Car Market Report', Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi are driving the country's used-car boom. "The market is projected to grow from 4.6 million sales in CY23 to a whopping 10.8 million by CY30, cruising ahead with an impressive CAGR of 13 per cent," CARS24 Co-Founder Gajendra Jangid said. As the customer preferences change for more affordable and dependable options, the



used-car market is witnessing an uptick vis-a-vis the new car market, he added. As per the report, SUVs continue to dominate the used car market with a share of 16.7 per cent in 2024. Their spacious design, versatility, and premium appeal make them a favourite across both urban and rural markets, it noted. The report highlighted that the post-COVID era has seen a significant shift in consumer preferences, with 12 per cent

of car buyers prioritising personal mobility for convenience and safety over shared transportation. Maruti Suzuki Swift has become the most sought-after model across both metro and non-metro cities, the report said. Additionally, models like the Hyundai Santro, Tata Tiago NRG, and Maruti Wagon R have consistently delivered exceptional resale value, solidifying their popularity among budget-conscious and value-driven buyers, the report said. As per the report, financing for new cars has seen significant growth, climbing from 60 per cent in 2010 to 84 per cent in 2024, highlighting the increasing consumer reliance on loans for vehicle ownership.

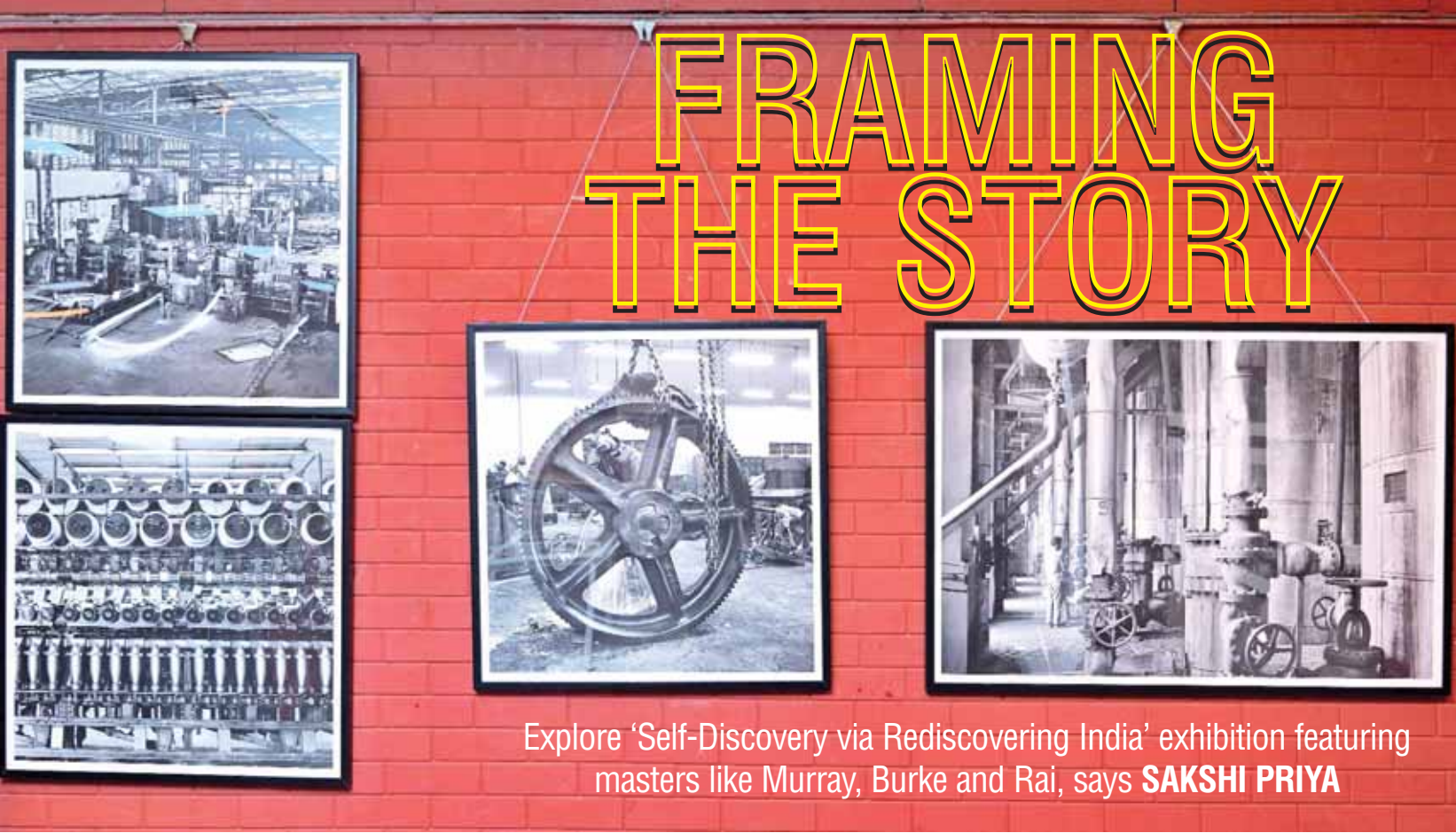
INBRIEF

AMPHENOL LAUNCHES TWO MADE-IN-INDIA TECH SOLUTIONS

Amphenol, a world leader in interconnect solutions for Communications, Mobile Consumer Products, RF, Optical, Broadband and Commercial electronics markets, today ushered into the next era of sustainable technology solutions with the launch of DuraSwap Concentric Connectors and Type 6 Charging Gun solution designed and manufactured in India at the country's premier battery technology showcase, the Bharat Battery Show 2025 organised under the aegis of Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

WORKSHOP ON BEAUTY FOR BETTER LIFE

AMRITSAR: Directorate of Placement and Career Enhancement of Guru Nanak Dev University in coordination Life Long Learning Department organised a workshop on the topic of "Beauty for Better Life" under the CSR of Loreal implemented by Naandi Foundation - Mahindra Pride classroom. Workshop offered 40 hours of free training for Cosmetology and Beauty culture to the students of Life Long Learning Department. The students were trained on the said domain and life skills. More than 50 students have undergone the skill training from an Industry expert.



Explore 'Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India' exhibition featuring masters like Murray, Burke and Rai, says SAKSHI PRIYA

becomes evident how photography has documented India's evolution. Early works by pioneers like *Linnaeus Tripe* and *Samuel Bourne* provide a visual history of India's landscape and architecture. Their photographs are windows into a bygone era, evoking a sense of nostalgia for a time that is both familiar and distant. The collection doesn't just stop at capturing landscapes or monuments, it explores the lives of people, the complex relationships between humans, animals and nature and the political shifts that have shaped the country. Works by contemporary masters like *Raghu Rai* and *Jyoti Bhatt* add a modern perspective, demonstrating how photography has continued to evolve as an art form while remaining true to its roots as a medium for storytelling. The exhibition's focus on India's cinematic and political history further enhances its significance. Photographs from the sets of iconic films, as well as snapshots from key political



Photography has a way of preserving moments, not just in images but in emotions, in stories and in history. Stepping into the *Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India* exhibition, curated by *Neville Tuli*, feels like embarking on a personal journey through time. Hosted by the *Tuli Research Centre for India Studies (T.R.I.S.)*, the collection showcases photographs that capture the essence of India, spanning over a century. This third installment of the series presents a stunning collection of photographs that bring together India's rich cultural heritage, its landscapes, and the people who have shaped its story. The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to experience not only the visual beauty of India but the depth of its historical and emotional connections. The collection highlights some of the earliest photographs from the mid-1800s, including *Dr. John Murray's Bishessur Nath Temple, Benares (1858)*. The albumen print, preserved in its pristine form, speaks to the timeless spirituality of Varanasi. Similarly, *Colin Roderick Murray's Jagmandar Water-Palace at Udaypur (1873)* captures the reflective beauty of Rajasthan, where the delicate interplay of water and architecture tells its own story. As one moves through the exhibition, it



moments, provide an intimate look into the country's cultural and social landscape. These images not only reflect history but also shape the way we remember it. With access to an extensive digital archive containing over 22,000 photographs, the exhibition offers a deeper dive into India's history, allowing visitors to explore beyond the gallery walls. This combination of physical and digital resources provides a comprehensive view of India's rich visual heritage. The *Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India Part III* exhibition is a reflection of India itself. It is an invitation to reconnect with the nation's history, to see it through the eyes of those who have captured its most defining moments. For anyone interested in understanding the soul of India, this exhibition is a rare and valuable opportunity to experience the country's past, present and future through the lens of some of the greatest photographers.

PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

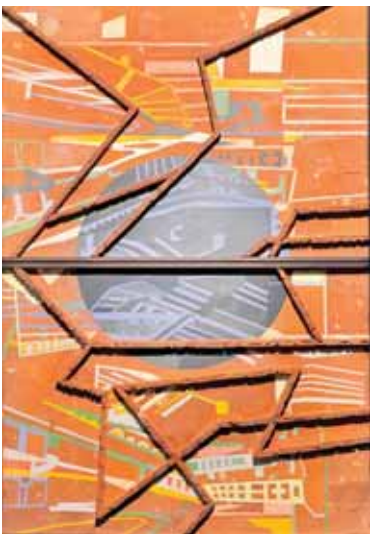


ART BEYOND THE CITY

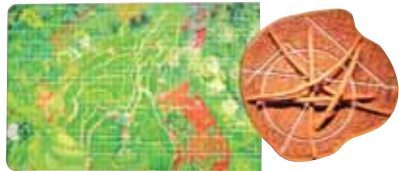


By SAKSHI PRIYA

In *Terraform*, *M. Pravat* invites us to walk through a world that feels both familiar and unsettlingly fragmented. This solo exhibition, hosted at STIR Gallery, Delhi, is an ambitious exploration of how our built environments intersect, clash and coexist with nature. By using materials like bricks, pigment, dust and LED lights, *Pravat* creates pieces that feel like echoes of urban landscapes, half-built, half-ruined and wholly captivating. Walking into the gallery feels like stepping into a suspended reality. The sculptures and installations seem to hold secrets, each fragment whispering stories of cities in transition. *Pravat's* work doesn't just replicate the urban environment; it deconstructs it, laying bare the tensions between construction and destruction, between human ambition and nature's quiet defiance. As I moved through the space, I found myself reflecting on my own relationship with the city, its noise, its chaos and its beauty.



What struck me most was how each piece felt alive, as if caught mid-metamorphosis. There's a raw, unpolished energy to the work that mirrors the constant flux of modern life. *Pravat* has a remarkable ability to take the ordinary, bricks, stone, dust



land elevate it into something profound. The interplay of light and shadow adds another layer, creating moments that feel almost cinematic, as though you're watching the city breathe. But beneath the aesthetic appeal lies a deeper message. *Terraform* is a powerful commentary on the relentless pace of urbanisation and its cost to the natural world. *Pravat's* art is not preachy; instead, it nudges you gently, encouraging introspection. It's a reminder that we are living in a delicate balance, one that we often take for granted. For me, the most thought-provoking aspect of the exhibition was its sense of incompleteness. These aren't polished, finished works, they're intentionally raw, mirroring the way cities are always in a state of becoming. It's both unsettling and oddly hopeful, a

expression to human resilience and the possibility of change. *Pravat's* ability to turn complex themes into visceral experiences is what makes this exhibition so memorable. *Pravat's Terraform* goes beyond being a traditional art exhibition. It's an immersive experience that urges us to pause and reflect on the way we shape and inhabit the world around us. It encourages a deeper look at the delicate balance between creation and destruction, challenging us to rethink our relationship with the spaces we build and the nature we often overlook. As the artist explained, "This landscape is actually magical lands, a digital landscape. I'm inspired by the digital format and I started rendering a digital feeling. When you see it from a distance, it looks consciously faded, like it's mathematically exercised in certain ways, cutting your land and developing your shape. The challenge is how I mixed everything together, where contrast exists between the elements, and people should think about why this context has changed."



Steps of Serenity

By TEAM VIVA

In moments where words cannot express the depth of emotion, dance becomes a powerful form of communication. *Samaya Chauhan's Rangapravesham* performance in New Delhi was a beautiful example of this truth. At just sixteen, *Samaya's* talent shone brightly, captivating the audience and bringing to life the rich tradition of Kuchipudi. The evening marked her transition from a student to a full-fledged performer, celebrating her growth as an artist. The recital opened with the graceful *Ganpati Vandana*, a prayer to Lord Ganesha, followed by *Dashavtar*, in which *Samaya* depicted the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. Through her precise footwork and expressive movements, she brought each avatar's story to life. A particularly emotional part of the performance was *Saanson Ki Maala pe Simrun Main Pii Ka Naam*, choreographed by *Padma Bhushan Shri Raja Reddy*, where *Samaya* beautifully expressed the spiritual

connection between two souls. The performance concluded with *Tarangam*, in which *Samaya* danced on the rim of a brass plate, telling stories of *Lord Krishna's* childhood. The complexity of the rhythmic patterns and *Samaya's* graceful footwork demonstrated her technical skill and deep understanding of the dance form. *Dr. Aseem Chauhan*, Chancellor of Amity University, presented a Vote of Thanks, saying, "The essence of today's incredible performance by my daughter *Samaya* is the notion of Guru Shishya Parampara, the sacred bond between the Guru and his disciple." This connection was evident in the performance, with *Samaya* drawing on the teachings and guidance of her esteemed gurus, *Padma Bhushan Shri Raja Reddy*, *Smt. Radha Reddy* and *Smt. Kaushalya Reddy*. The evening was a celebration of culture, tradition and the bond between mentor and disciple. *Samaya's* performance highlighted the beauty of Kuchipudi, reminding the audience of the timeless connection between dance, history and emotion.



BRM 2025: UNITING CULTURES THROUGH THEATRE



By TEAM VIVA

The *National School of Drama (NSD)* is set to host the 25th edition of *Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM)* from 28 January to 16 February 2025, marking a significant milestone in its history as the world's largest theatre festival. For the first time, the festival will expand beyond India, with performances in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Kathmandu, Nepal, alongside 11 Indian cities including Bengaluru, Jaipur and Ranchi. Themed *One Expression, Supreme Creation*, BRM 2025 will feature over 200 productions from nine countries, including Russia, Germany and Taiwan, creating a

global platform for collaboration and cultural exchange. Renowned actor and NSD alumnus *Rajpal Yadav* has been named the *Rang Doot* (Festival Ambassador) of this year's event. The festival will also emphasise inclusivity by featuring productions involving marginalised communities such as *Santhal tribes*, *sex workers*, *transgender persons* and *children*. Virtual performances under the initiative *Vishwa Jan Rang* will include NRIs and youth from all seven continents. NSD Director *Shri Chittaranjan Tripathy* said, "Bharat Rang Mahotsav has evolved into a global celebration of theatre, providing a platform to share and celebrate

diverse creative expressions. With its expanded reach, this year's festival sets a new benchmark." BRM 2025 will also include director-audience dialogues, masterclasses, seminar and cultural experiences like folk and traditional performances, Rang Haat exhibitions and a vibrant food bazaar. The Opening Ceremony at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi, will feature Rang Sangeet, a musical performance by the NSD Repertory Company, as part of celebrations marking NSD's 65th anniversary and the Repertory's 60th year. With its unique blend of global outreach, inclusivity, and cultural immersion, BRM 2025 promises to be a landmark event in the world of theatre.



Bumrah, Jadeja and Jaiswal named in ICC Test Team of the Year

PTI ■ DUBAI
Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal deservedly found a place in the ICC's Test Team of the Year 2024 that featured four Englishmen with Australian Pat Cummins as its captain. The team also had two New Zealanders, including the redoubtable Kane Williamson. Cummins was the lone Australian to make the all-star XI. Bumrah was nothing short of magical in 2024, dominating every team and every batter he bowled to. He became the first bowler to average under 20 with a minimum of 200 wickets in Test cricket, solidifying his place in history. In total, Bumrah took 71 wickets in 2024 at an astonishing average of 14.92, finishing as the highest wicket-taker in Test cricket for the year. Thirty two of these scalps came in the

recent Border-Gavaskar series against Australia, which India lost 1-3. He began the year with a stellar performance against England, taking 19 wickets in four matches, including a remarkable nine-wicket haul in Visakhapatnam. At home against Bangladesh, he further extended his tally with 11 wickets in just two games. Although his outing against New Zealand was subdued, where he picked up three wickets, it was against Australia that Bumrah truly cemented his legacy as one of the greatest bowlers of all time. Jadeja, meanwhile, scored 527 runs in 2024 at an average of 29.27 and picked up 48 wickets at an impressive average of 24.29. Jaiswal established himself as a premier Test opener and a standout figure in Indian batting during 2024. After a challenging series in South Africa, he made an impressive comeback in the home series against England,



amassing a staggering 712 runs. This included two double centuries and three fifties, showcasing his dominance. The 23-year-old left-handed batter continued his fine form with three half-centuries in four innings as India thrashed Bangladesh at home. He was also one of the few bright spots in an otherwise disappointing series for India, as New Zealand achieved a historic whitewash on Indian soil. In the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Jaiswal demonstrated his class with a magnificent 161 in the second innings at Perth, bouncing back strongly after a first-innings duck. He finished as India's top scorer in the series, accumulating 391 runs. Over the calendar year, Jaiswal scored a remarkable 1,478 runs at an impressive average of 54.74, a tally second only to England's Joe Root (1,556 runs in 2024 at an average of 55.57), who was also named in the ICC

all-star team. Williamson was also one of the stand-out performers in 2024 as he accumulated 1,013 runs in 2024 at an outstanding average of 59.58, making him the sixth-highest run-scorer of the year. Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis also figured in the team after his 1,049 runs in 2024 at an extraordinary average of 74.92. Cummins led his team to series victories against the West Indies, New Zealand, and most notably India. He took 37 wickets in 2024 at an average of 24.02 and scored 306 runs, averaging 23.53. ICC Test Team of the Year 2024: Pat Cummins (c) (Australia), Yashasvi Jaiswal (India), Ben Duckett (England), Kane Williamson (New Zealand), Joe Root (England), Harry Brook (England), Kamindu Mendis (Sri Lanka), Jamie Smith (wk) (England), Ravindra Jadeja (India), Matt Henry (New Zealand), Jasprit Bumrah (India).

Zverev in Australian Open final as injured Djokovic left

PTI ■ MELBOURNE
Spectators booed an injured Novak Djokovic as he left the court in Rod Laver Arena after quitting one set into his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev on Friday. Dealing with a what he said was a torn muscle, Djokovic lost the opener 7-6 (5) when he put a forehand volley into the net, then began shaking his head and immediately walked over to shake Zverev's hand. The 37-year-old Djokovic packed up his equipment and walked off toward the locker room, pausing to respond to the jeers by giving two thumbs-up. At his news conference, Djokovic said the pain in his taped left leg was "getting worse and worse." He hurt it during his quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz on Tuesday night. "I knew," Djokovic said, "even if I won the first set, it was going to be a huge uphill battle for me." He was bidding for an 11th

championship at the Australian Open and record 25th Grand Slam title overall. But this is the second time in the past four major tournaments he was unable to finish because of an injury: He withdrew from last year's French Open before the quarterfinals because he tore the meniscus in his right knee during a match. Djokovic underwent surgery in Paris and, less than two months later, reached the final at Wimbledon, then won a gold medal for Serbia at the Paris Olympics. The number two-seeded

Zverev reached his first title match at Melbourne Park and on Sunday will face the winner of Friday's second semifinal between number one Jannik Sinner of Italy, the defending champion, and number 21 Ben Shelton of the United States. Zverev, a 27-year-old German, is a two-time runner-up at other major tournaments, losing finals in five sets at the 2020 U.S. Open and 2024 French Open. "My goal is still to compete with the big guys and to compete for these kind of tournaments and try to win them," Zverev said.

"For that, I need to get better. I need to improve on the court. I need to improve physically." During his on-court interview, Zverev pleaded with the fans not to give Djokovic a hard time. "I know that everybody paid for tickets and everybody wants to see hopefully a great five-set match," he said. "But you've got to understand - Novak Djokovic is somebody that has given this sport, for the past 20 years, absolutely everything of his life." The only set of Djokovic vs. Zverev lasted one hour, 21 minutes and included 19 points that lasted nine strokes or more apiece. The first four games alone lasted 31 minutes, slowed both by the lengthy baseline exchanges and Djokovic's deliberate pacing between points, taking the 25-second serve clock down to - and occasionally slightly beyond - the full allotment. The match was grueling - and would have been even without dealing with a leg problem that initially became an issue late in the first set against Alcaraz.



Smriti Mandhana, Deepti Sharma in ICC women's ODI Team of the Year

PTI ■ DUBAI
Star batter Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma were on Friday named in the ICC women's ODI Team of the Year 2024 but none of their male counterparts found a place in the men's side that was dominated by Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The women's all-star team

has three players from England, two Australians, two South Africans and one each from Sri Lanka and West Indies, besides the two Indians. South African batter Laura Wolvaardt, who scored 697 runs in 12 matches in 2024, was named captain of the ICC team. The men were, however, absent from the ICC XI and that can be attributed to lack

of ODI engagements for the country last year. India played only three ODIs -- an away series against Sri Lanka --, losing two of them while the third one ended in a tie. The 28-year-old Mandhana accumulated 747 runs in 13 matches to be the highest run-scorer in women's ODIs in 2024. She is also in the running for the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award. In the home series against South Africa, Mandhana was in sublime form, beginning with back-to-back centuries in the first two ODIs. She narrowly missed a third consecutive ton, falling for 90, though her remarkable tally of 343 runs in the series earned her the Player-of-the-Series award. Mandhana had a shaky start in the first two ODIs against New Zealand in October, but ended the series on a high note with a brilliant century in the final match. With this

hundred, Mandhana became the most prolific century-maker for India in the Women's 50-over format. Deepti scored 186 runs and took 24 wickets in 13 matches in a fine all-round show in 2024. Sub-continent shines in Men's all-star line-up The men's all-star ODI team announced by the ICC features four players from Sri Lanka, three each from Pakistan and Afghanistan and one from the West Indies. Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka was named skipper of the ICC team as well for his stupendous batting through the year. In his 16 ODI appearances in 2024, Asalanka scored 605 runs at an average of 50.2 including a century and four fifties. Sri Lanka played 18 ODIs in the year gone by, the highest among all teams, and won 12 of them.



U-19 Women's T20 World Cup: Pakistan, Nepal win fourth place play-off matches

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR
Pakistan and Nepal were hardly tested on way to winning their fourth-place play-off matches in the ICC Women's U-19 T20 World Cup here on Friday. Pakistan, riding on young pacer Haniah Ahmer's four-wicket haul, crushed Samoa by 52 runs while Nepal got the better of Malaysia by seven wickets in a low-scoring match. Put into bat, Pakistan scored 136/8 with Maham Anees and Fatima Khan scoring 28 and 25 respectively. Norah Salima was the most successful Samoa bowler taking three wickets for 20 runs. Right-arm pacer Haniah then unsettled the Samoan batters, returning with excellent figures of 4/20, while Quratulain Ahsen (2/13) and

Fatima Khan (2/19) were the other wicket-takers as Samoa were all out for 84 in 18.5 overs. Malaysia were off to an inauspicious start with Nepal striking off the very first ball to Haisrum Nur Aliya Binti Mohd Hairun for a duck. The team could not recover from the early loss and folded

up for 45 runs with skipper Puja Mahato (4/9) and Rachana Chaudhary (3/5) emerging as the most successful bowlers. In reply Nepal reached 47/3 in 11 overs to complete a seven-wicket victory with Mahato scoring 23 runs. Left-arm spinner Suabika Manivannan took all three wickets.



Indian GM P Iniyar wins title in Malaysia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Indian Grandmaster P Iniyar Panneerselvam clinched the ninth Johor International Open chess tournament title in Malaysia with a dominating performance. The 22-year-old from Erode in Tamil Nadu accumulated 8.5 points in nine games. He finished 1.5 points ahead of his nearest rival, winning against four International Masters and one Grandmaster. The nine-round tournament, which ended on Thursday, had 84 participants from eight countries, out of which 24 were titled players. In fact, at the end of the penultimate round where he beat Indonesian IM Nayaka Buddhidharma, Iniyar had already secured the title as he

was 1.5 points ahead in the points table. Iniyar beat Vietnamese GM Nguyen Van Huy in the final round in an impressive performance. Indian IM VS Raahul and Chinese IM Li Bo finished second and third respectively. Iniyar, who had won the Chennai Open earlier in January, secured 15 rating points from the title win.



Rohit Sharma shows some spark but falls for 28 on Ranji Trophy return

PTI ■ MUMBAI
He pulled Umar Nazir for a trademark six, effortlessly lofted Auqib Nabi and Yudhvir Singh for a couple of more hits over the ropes to give a glimpse of his absolute best. But eventually, a fifty on Ranji comeback was not meant to be for India captain Rohit Sharma who fell for 28 here on Friday. Playing his first game for Mumbai in domestic red-ball cricket in nearly a decade, Rohit's first day on the field was a disaster with the 37-year-old falling for a 19-ball 3 in the opening hour of the Ranji Trophy clash against Jammu Kashmir. But on Friday, Rohit gave a far better account of himself to notch up a fluent 28, his best in first-class cricket since a 52 in the second innings of the

Bengaluru Test against New Zealand last year. It indeed has been that long for Rohit, who has since scored 0, 8, 18, 11, 3, 6, 3 and 9 in subsequent outings against New Zealand and Australia. Back then in mid-October, India were cemented on top of the World Test Championship points table and the house was in complete order for the national side. But it all came crumbling down following defeats to New Zealand and Australia which forced Indian superstars to play domestic cricket. On Friday, he looked for a big one but it wasn't to happen. Rohit's knock of 28 was mixed with hits and misses in the initial stages, which all began with a tough dropped chance by Nazir in the fourth over

when he could not grab a return catch on his follow through. Rohit immediately responded with a pull shot for a six over the square leg. A thick outside edge then flew between the fielder at gully and second slip, and on the final ball Rohit flashed hard and wide to put the ball away for another four on the off-side. Dropped on one, Rohit had raced to 21 off 11 balls at one stage but he remained cautious mostly, even though there were a few times he was beaten. With comparatively no moisture on the second day wicket here at the BKC, J&K bowlers also had to work hard to keep it tight but could not stop Rohit from freeing up his arms for a total of three sixes and two fours.

India keeps eye on Shami's fitness, looks to extend lead against England

PTI ■ CHENNAI
Unruffled by the lingering fitness concerns surrounding Mohammed Shami, the well-oiled machine that is India's T20 team will be eyeing an encore of its opening game performance against a stunned England in the second game of a five-match series, here on Saturday. India led the rubber 1-0 after a facile seven-wicket victory at the Eden Gardens on Wednesday. The hosts would certainly want to see Shami in action but his inclusion in the eleven, as things stand now, will depend on further evaluation of his fitness. The 34-year-old was expected to feature in the first game and he was actively involved in the

nets too, but his comeback was postponed possibly because the management wanted to take a deeper look at his readiness. However, India did not miss Shami much in Kolkata where pacer Arshdeep Singh, with the new ball, and spinner Varun Chakravarthy, in the middle phase, wrecked England, producing impressive spells. The Chepauk spin The Eden pitch had enough help for both quicks and their slower colleagues but the corresponding 22-yard trampoline here could offer more assistance to the spinners, as it often has been the case in the past. India would not be complaining whatever be the nature of the track. The home side boasts of quality and



variety in a line-up consisting Varun, vice-captain Axar Patel and Ravi Bishnoi. From England's perspective, they would require much better contributions from experienced spinners Adil Rashid and Liam Livingstone to challenge the Indians. Apart from pacer Jofra Archer, none of the other English bowlers could survive the onslaught of Abhishek Sharma and the mini cameo of Sanju Samson in the first match. Sanju-Abhishek pair on a roll Since coming together in the T20s last year, Samson and Abhishek have had considerable success, often giving India a flying start. The desired double-barrel firing has been occasional, but at least one of them has

produced the goods rather consistently. In Kolkata, Abhishek hurt England with a brutal knock, striking at over 230. Samson has three hundreds in the last six innings, and it would not be unrealistic to imagine these two as the first-choice openers once India hit the road to next year's T20 World Cup at home. They also offer that rare right-hand-left-hand combination at the top. Here too, the Indian openers will have to give their side a solid start considering the tricky nature of the pitch. England too will hope for a fiery start from their openers to clinch early momentum, as Phil Salt and Ben Duckett jointly made just four runs off seven

balls. Time for Surya to shine It's not a matter of grave concern yet but skipper Suryakumar Yadav will be mindful of the fact that he has just two fifties in the previous 11 innings after the T20 World Cup final last year. Further distilled, the stats will show that he has made no significant contributions in the last three matches, including a three-ball duck at Kolkata. But such things often get papered over when the team is on a roll as the reigning T20 World Champions have steamrolled Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and South Africa in their last three assignments. But he would not want to miss the party for long and will be eyeing a fruitful outing here.