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INSIDE

**WORLD 8**  
TARIFF THREAT SWAYS  
COLOMBIA, BUT RISKS RISE  
WITH CANADA, MEXICO

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## TRUMP THREATENS INDIA WITH TARIFFS



PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The United States will impose tariffs on the countries that "harm" America, President Donald Trump has said, as he named China, India and Brazil as high-tariff countries. "We're going to put tariffs on outside countries and outside people that really mean harm to us. Well, they mean us harm, but they basically want to make their country good," Trump told House Republicans at a Florida retreat on Monday, the first after he became the president for the second term last week. "Look at what others do. China is a tremendous tariff maker, and India and Brazil and so many other countries. So we're not going to let that happen any longer because we're going to put America first," he said.

He said that the US will establish a "very fair system where money is going to come into our coffers and America is going to be very rich again," adding that it will happen "very quickly". Trump underscored that it was time for the US to return to the system that made it "richer and more powerful than ever before." Referring to his inaugural speech last week, Trump said: "Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich foreign nations, we should be tariffing and taxing foreign nations to enrich our citizens." "Under the American first economic model, as tariffs on other countries go up, taxes on American workers and businesses will come down and massive numbers of jobs and factories will come home," he said. Earlier, Trump has already

talked about slapping "100 per cent tariffs" on the BRICS grouping, a bloc that includes India as well. During his address, Trump asked companies to come and set up manufacturing units in the US if they wished to avoid tariffs. "If you want to stop paying the taxes or the tariffs, you have to build your plant right here in America. That's what's going to happen at record levels. We're going to have more plants built in the next short period of time than anybody ever envisioned before because the incentive is going to be there because they have no tariff whatsoever," he said. The president said that the US will support companies building plants in America, particularly in industries like pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, and steel. Trump added that his administration would also be placing tariffs on steel, aluminium, copper and other materials required by the US military. "We have to bring production back to our country. There was a time when we made one ship a day, and now we can't build a ship. We don't know what the hell we're doing. It's all gone to other locations and other lands," he said. "To further return production to the United States, we're going to environmentally free up our rare earth minerals. We have some of the best rare earth anywhere in the world, but we're not allowed to use it because the environmentalists got there first," said the president in his address.

## Politics in Delhi goes digital

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

In the intense race to wrest power from Aam Admi Party (AAP), the Congress which ruled 15 years and BJP which has not been in Delhi politics for about three decades now and incumbent AAP looking forward to retain itself have gone for an aggressive campaign by making optimum use of the available social media platforms. Digital platform has become the primary battleground for political messaging, overshadowing traditional forms of campaigning for the February 5 Delhi assembly poll. An analysis conducted by The Pioneer highlights the increasing reliance on digital reach by these political parties, with the BJP leading the charge in terms of spending on platforms like Facebook,



In the last 30 days: BJP spent ₹2.5Cr, followed by the AAP (₹77 Lakhs) and the Congress (₹23 Lakh)

Google, and YouTube. Sources aid BJP has allocated substantial funds to advertise their messages, using a combination of videos and images to creatively reach the targeted electorates. On Facebook, the BJP has spent a

whopping Rs 2,58,34,976 over 30 days, from December 26 to January 24, according to Google Transparency Report. This expenditure covers around 863 advertisements, which includes a diverse mix of content ranging from short, impactful videos to visually compelling image posts.

Trailing behind in Facebook advertising, AAP spent Rs 77,80,887 on 625 advertisements, while Congress followed suit with a more modest expenditure of Rs 23,22,372 across 49 ads. The competition doesn't stop at Facebook. On YouTube, a platform widely used in India, political ads have become ubiquitous ahead of the state elections, which are scheduled to take place on February 5. The BJP once again took the lead in terms of spending, shelling out Rs 4,34,15,250 between December 1 and January 27 for 505 YouTube ads. On January 25 alone, the BJP spent Rs 27,40,000, followed by Rs 24,60,000 on January 12, and Rs 23,30,000 on January 11. Through these ads, the BJP is deploying a variety of creative approaches to capture the attention of voters.

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## Amit Shah paves the road for BJP in Capital

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a jibe at his political rivals ahead of the high-octane Delhi assembly elections, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday slammed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge for his remark on BJP leaders taking a holy dip at the Sangam and said the Congress under Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi had always insulted Sanatan Dharma. He accused AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal of falsely alleging that the Haryana government mixed poison in the Yamuna, daring him to make public the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) report that he cited to level the charge. Addressing a public meeting in the Kalkaji assembly constituency, he took a swipe at Kharge and said, "I took a



Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah with party MP Bansuri Swaraj during a roadshow in support of party candidate Neeraj Basoya ahead of Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi. Photo: The Pioneer

dip (at Triveni Sangam) and Kharge ji caught a cold." At the Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan rally in the Mhow town of Madhya Pradesh on

Monday, Kharge had alleged that BJP leaders were competing with each other to take a dip at the Sangam for the cameras, and asked if their

act would help eradicate poverty in the country. "If anyone was hurt, I seek an apology," the Congress chief had also said. Reacting to the remark, Shah urged Kharge not to poke fun at the reverence of crores of people visiting the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to take a holy dip at the Sangam. "Kharge ji, if you do not have any reverence (for Maha Kumbh), there is no compulsion. But don't make fun of the reverence of more than 48 crore people visiting the Kumbh to take a holy dip," he said. "The Congress under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi has always insulted Sanatan Dharma," he charged.

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## Jan 31-Apr 4: Budget Session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will take up discussion on President Droupadi Murmu's address to Parliament on Monday as the Budget Session begins on January 31. The President will address both the Houses of Parliament assembled together in the Lok Sabha chamber on Friday and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the General Budget on Saturday. The Finance Minister will table the Economic Survey on Friday when both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will convene briefly after the President's address. Lok Sabha has provisionally allotted two days (February 3-4) for discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, while Rajya Sabha has earmarked three days for the debate. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to reply to the debate in Rajya Sabha on February 6. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has convened a meeting of floor leaders of political parties in Parliament on January 30 to ensure smooth functioning of the Budget Session. The first part of the Budget Session will have nine sittings from January 31 to February 13. Parliament will then break for recess to examine the budget proposals on February 13 and meet again from March 10 to discuss the demands for grants of various ministries and complete the budgetary process. The session will conclude on April 4. The entire Budget Session will have 27 sittings.

## MARKETS



## WEATHER

AQI 276  
MAX 25.4°C(+3)  
MIN 5.6°C(-3.8)

## Politics boil over 'water terrorism'



Union Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Bhupender Yadav, Haryana CM Nayab Saini and other BJP leaders after meeting the Election Commission of India. PTI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday asked AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal to substantiate with facts his allegations of poisoning of Yamuna River and mass genocide. The poll body has sought a response, a proof from the AAP national convener by 8 pm on 29 January. The Commission has asked the AAP led Delhi government to provide evidence of Haryana government 'poisoning' Delhi water supply. This comes after both the BJP and Congress had complained to the poll panel against Kejriwal for levelling allegations of poisoning of

Yamuna river. A BJP delegation, comprising Union ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Bhupender Yadav and Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh met all three members of the EC, and requested them to ask the AAP leader to retract his charge and apologise for creating "panic" among people. BJP leaders also urged the Commission to bar him from campaigning for his allegation that Haryana was poisoning the water of Yamuna. Meanwhile, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit raised the issue with Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, demanding action against Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi over the issue.

In a letter to Kejriwal, the EC said the matter is being examined by the Commission in the light of provisions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and relevant provisions of law. "Therefore, you are called upon to furnish your response on the complaints especially on the factual and legal matrix along with evidentiary support thereof by 8 pm hours on 29 January, 2025 so as to enable the Commission to examine the matter and take action as appropriate." "However, as regards the allegations of poisoning, it is expected that there must be a factual foundation to the allegations especially when the veracity of the statements made by you is contested, then you must be able to back your statements on a factual basis," the EC said. The Commission noted that such allegations have serious ramifications of creating enmity between the regional groups, and residents of the neighbouring states, threat of a law-and-order situation due to actual or perceived shortage or non-availability of water, during this time of the year.

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## Rahul Gandhi attacks INDIA bloc ally

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Heating up the election fervour ahead of the Delhi assembly elections, Senior Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday launched a scathing attack at his political rivals including AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal and Prime Minister Narendra Modi while hitting out at the ruling party for 'sheeshmahal' and alleged money laundering linked excise policy scam. He also took a dig at the media for not highlighting the real issues, instead focusing on 'Ambani wedding' and cricket matches. Addressing a public gathering in Patparganj, Gandhi claimed that while former Chief Minister came with the promise of bringing 'clean politics', he is now known for the biggest liquor scam and sheeshmahal. "On one side there is BJP and on the other there is Kejriwal who says whatever he wishes. He said we will do a new kind of politics. He said we will change Delhi. And when poor needed him, he was nowhere to be seen. When there was violence in Delhi, he was nowhere to be seen," he said, while campaigning for



LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with party candidate Anil Choudhary during a rally for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, at Patparganj in New Delhi. PTI

Congress' candidate Anil Choudhary. Hitting out the ruling party, Gandhi asserted, "He said that the AAP will bring clean politics. Despite this, he is now known for the biggest liquor scam and resides in sheeshmahal." He added that when PM Modi threw him out of his home, he gave him the keys, stating that he doesn't need their house. Calling the sitting MLA and former Chief Minister Manish Sisodia the 'architect' of liquor scam, he said, "Manish Sisodia was a candidate before, who is the architect of liquor scam along with Kejriwal. Now he has run away from the seat out of fear." With Gandhi addressing his

second public meeting in the national Capital for the upcoming state polls, scores of party supporters gathered to hear him with the atmosphere palpable with enthusiasm. Resident of the area claimed that roads are filled with potholes and the schools, that the AAP claims to have built, were built in former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's rule and are merely renovated by the incumbent government. Taking a jibe at the media, he said, "I am saying that they are our friends but they are not. While the nation is grappling with poor infrastructure, unemployment and hunger, they show Ambani wedding and Modi attending it."

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## Banks of Sangam ready for 10 crore devotees

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Prayagraj is abuzz with spiritual fervor as preparations for Mauni Amavasya Amrit Snaan, the most auspicious bathing festival of the Maha Kumbh 2025, reach their final stages. With an anticipated turnout of over 10 crore devotees at the sacred Triveni Sangam, the city is witnessing a historic confluence of faith, tradition, and meticulous planning. Though Mauni Amavasya falls on January 29, thousands of pilgrims have already begun arriving at the sprawling Mela grounds, eager to partake in the divine experience. The administration has left no stone unturned in ensuring that the event is both grand and safe, offering seamless facilities to the millions expected. A massive 12-kilometer-long stretch of bathing ghats has been constructed along the riverbanks to

accommodate the influx of devotees. To prevent overcrowding, the administration has encouraged pilgrims to bathe at the ghat nearest to their entry points. Devotees entering from different zones will be directed to designated ghats based on their location, ensuring a smooth flow of pilgrims. Special arrangements have been made for different groups of devotees. The Airavat Sangam Ghat will host pilgrims from eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and northeastern states. Devotees from Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and southern states will bathe at specially developed ghats in Aarail while pilgrims from Delhi, western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttarakhand will be accommodated at ghats extending from Sangam to Nagvasuki. Separate ghats have been reserved for saints, seers, and their disciples from various Akharas, ensuring



Devotees gather at the Sangam on the eve of 'Mauni Amavasya' during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. PTI

that traditional rituals are conducted without interruption. Common devotees will have access to exclusive ghats near the Sangam coast. Deputy Commissioner Ashok Tiwari described the management efforts as "unprecedented." "We

have deployed over 5,000 personnel across the Mela area, including SDMs, tehsildars, and IAS officers, to ensure smooth operations. Evacuation teams, watchtowers, and flying squads are on high alert to handle any emergency," he said. District Magistrate Ravindra

Kumar Mandhad appealed to Prayagraj residents to avoid using four-wheelers during the festival to prevent traffic snarls. "Your cooperation will allow lakhs of pilgrims to experience the Sangam without hurdles," he urged. Mela Grounds: A Glimpse into Spiritual Magnificence The Mela grounds have transformed into a vibrant hub of spirituality. Rows of temporary tents housing Kalpvasis (pilgrims who spend the entire month by the river) and saints are adorned with flags and banners. The aroma of freshly prepared khichdi wafts through the air as thousands gather for communal meals. Volunteers serve simple yet hearty meals, a testament to the hospitality associated with the Kumbh. Kavita Devi, a pilgrim from Odisha, shared her excitement: "The arrangements are remarkable. From clean ghats to free food, everything is well-organized. Taking a dip at

the Sangam is a blessing I've waited my whole life for." Local vendors have set up stalls selling religious items, including rudraksha beads, holy books, and brass pots for carrying sacred water. The chants of "Har Har Gange" reverberate through the air, adding to the divine atmosphere. Mauni Amavasya, a day of silence and introspection, is regarded as one of the most sacred days for taking a dip at the Sangam. Devotees believe the ritual purifies the soul and washes away sins. For many, the festival represents hope, renewal, and a deep connection with the divine. As preparations near completion, Prayagraj stands ready to welcome the world to this monumental celebration of faith and culture. With its meticulous planning and unwavering devotion, the Mauni Amavasya Amrit Snaan promises to be an unforgettable chapter in the legacy of the Maha Kumbh.

# 5 killed in Burari, rescue teams active



Rescue work underway after a four-storey building collapsed at Burari

Ranjan Dimri

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

Five people, including two girls, were killed in the four-storey building collapse in north Delhi's Burari area, police said on Tuesday. The newly-constructed building near Oscar Public School collapsed late on Monday. So far, 12 people have been rescued and five bodies retrieved from the debris, they said.

The victims have been identified as Saadhna (17) and seven-year-old Radhika. The other three persons -- all men -- are yet to be identified, they added.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Raja Banthia said a rescue operation was underway and more people could be trapped under the debris.

In a statement issued on Monday, the Delhi Police said it received information about the collapse around seven pm. The building was a new construction spread over 200 square yards.

Soon after the incident was reported to the Delhi Police

and the Delhi Fire Services, a rescue operation was launched.

"The rescue operation is still underway. Personnel from agencies such as police, fire services and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are on the spot. The police have cordoned off the area and are collecting more details from locals to ascertain how many people could still be trapped," Banthia said.

"We launched an investigation into the matter and multiple teams have been formed. Legal action is being taken against the building owner," he added. The officer further said the police would be able to comment on the situation only after the rescue operation concluded.

"During incidents of this nature, the administration appoints an incident commander who issues directions to officials. The area's subdivisional magistrate is currently acting as incident commander and has ordered the evacuation of nearby buildings for structural safety and fitness checks. The entire

area has been cordoned off and no one is allowed to cross the restricted zone," the senior officer said.

He also mentioned that the rescue operation might continue till early on Wednesday to ensure the area was thoroughly checked and those still trapped under the rubble rescued.

"Those who were rescued suspect that more people are still trapped inside. The police, Delhi Fire Services, NDRF and other agencies are working round-the-clock to complete the rescue operation as quickly as possible," Banthia said.

He also said those rescued were being referred to higher medical facilities based on the severity of their health conditions. "Initially, we shifted some patients to Burari Hospital but they were referred to LNJP Hospital," he added.

AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha said this was not the time for political disputes and demanded adequate compensation for the families affected.

He announced compensations of Rs 10 lakh for each adult victim and Rs 5 lakh for the families of minor victims. "We hope that the central government also announces compensation for the families at the earliest," Jha said.

At the spot, many people were seen anxiously waiting for news about their family members who were working in the collapsed building as labourers.

Md Bariq said his 22-year-old brother Md Sarfaraz was one of the many labourers trapped under the debris. "I also work as a labourer at another site. I received a call about the building collapse around 8:30 pm on Monday. The caller informed me that my brother was trapped in the rubble. When I arrived here, the police directed us to the hospital to check if my brother was among the first five people rescued. He wasn't there," Bariq said.

"Later, three or four more people were rescued but he wasn't among them. We have been here since last night, without food or water, waiting

for news about my brother," he added.

Md Arif said they were hoping their relatives were safe. "My elder brother Md Qadir was working on the third floor of the building when it collapsed. We are praying he is safe," Arif said.

Some locals who were nearby when the incident occurred described the entire episode as "horrible". "We heard a very loud noise and a bubble of dust emanated from the area. It took more than five minutes to realise what had happened. We rushed to the site, informed the police and fire officials," a witness said.

Shortly after the incident, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi said in a social media post all possible help would be provided to the people affected.

"The incident of building collapse in Burari is extremely sad. I have spoken to the local administration to ensure speedy relief and rescue operations. All possible help will be provided to the affected people," she said in Hindi.



# WAVES 2025 will position India as global media leader: PM Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESHWAR**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that the forthcoming WAVES (World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit) will provide a new global identity to India's creative prowess. Addressing the audience at Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave in Bhubaneswar, the PM highlighted how major events like WAVES not only generate significant revenue but also build perceptions and push the economy.

Modi underscored the immense potential of such initiatives to harness India's vast pool of creative talent and position the nation as a global leader in the media and entertainment sector.

Bridging India's timeless traditions with contemporary creativity WAVES 2025 presents a unique confluence

of India's rich cultural legacy and modern creativity, offering platforms for everyone—from creators of classical and semi-classical music to creators of modern music of EDM and innovative advertising professionals, designers and creators for Khadi. This dynamic blend of past and present is exemplified in challenges like Wah Ustad, celebrating India's traditional musical heritage, Resonate: The EDM Challenge, embracing modern global music trends, and Make the World Wear Khadi, which seeks to reimagine India's iconic fabric as a global symbol of sustainable fashion. These three challenges were launched by Union Information Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw along with WAVES Bazaar and WAVES Awards, on Monday where he urged the creators to help India become the global capital of content creation.

Together, these initiatives provide content creators with unparalleled opportunities to showcase their talent, bridge tradition and innovation, and gain recognition while contributing to India's cultural and creative renaissance. These challenges join a diverse lineup of total 31 Create in India Challenges, offering a stage for content creators across various genres to showcase their talent.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Doodardshan, has launched Wah Ustad, an extraordinary classical and semi-classical music talent hunt, under the Create in India Challenges, a flagship initiative of WAVES 2025. It aims to nurture exceptional talent in Hindustani, Carnatic, and soulful Sufi music while preserving and promoting India's rich musical legacy.

# Politics in Delhi goes digital

**From page 1**

AAP, ranking second in YouTube spending, invested Rs 78,53,000 on 90 advertisements during this period. The party's videos have been focused on promoting key promises, including the 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana' and 'Sanjeevni Yojana', both aimed at garnering public support while criticizing the BJP for allegedly planning to end public welfare schemes. The maximum AAP spent on

YouTube was on December 31, with Rs 4,01,000, followed by Rs 3,90,000 on January 6. The Congress party, though trailing in terms of expenditure, spent Rs 68,25,500 on 41 ads during this period, with peak spending on January 24, when the party spent Rs 10,30,000. Congress's campaign videos include promises such as the 'Yuva Udaan Yojana', which pledges stipends for unemployed youth if elected to power. Meanwhile, Google has

emerged as another key platform for election advertising. The BJP, once again the frontrunner, spent Rs 73,439,750 on 5,764 Google ads between December 1, 2024, and January 27, 2025. Of this total, videos accounted for approximately 60 per cent of the ads, highlighting the growing importance of video content in political advertising. One of the BJP's more creative ads featured a metaphorical breakup with AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal,

encouraging voters to abandon their support for him in the upcoming elections. Congress, while more conservative in its digital advertising budget, spent Rs 10,917,250 on 117 Google ads, with 66 per cent of that expenditure directed towards video content. AAP, though third in Google ad spending, allocated Rs 8,421,250 to 208 ads, with a significant 93.7 per cent of that budget going toward video advertising.

# Police defend arrest in Saif attack case

**T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:**

Amid news reports raising doubts about the identity of the accused in the Saif Ali Khan attack case, the Mumbai police said on Tuesday that Bangladeshi national Shariful Islam Shehzad Mohammad Rohilla Amin Fakir, arrested in the case, "is the correct accused". Addressing a news conference, Additional Commissioner of Police (West Region) Paramjit Dahiya said, "The arrested accused is the same person who committed the crime. We have oral, physical and technical evidence against him," Dahiya said.

# Security crackdown in Jammu

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**

Lauching a major crackdown against the Pakistani terrorists, believed to be holed up inside their safe hideouts in the upper reaches of the Jammu region, a joint team of security forces Tuesday conducted massive combing and search operations across seven districts to track down their footprints.

Meanwhile, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) also conducted extensive searches in three districts of Srinagar Budgam and Baramulla in a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) linked case of the killing of non-locals.

In the Jammu division, the search operations were launched across 23 locations spread across the Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Reasi, Udhampur, Rajouri, and Poonch districts.

According to official sources, at least 10 search operations were launched across three districts of Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban, seven across the frontier districts of Rajouri and

Poonch, and three each in Reasi and Udhampur districts. Searches were also conducted in areas close to the line of control in the frontier Poonch and Rajouri districts following reports about the presence of terrorist hideouts in the area.

The local intelligence officials in these district headquarters had shared their field assessment reports with the higher authorities during the recent round of review meetings in the run-up to the Republic Day celebrations following which a decision was taken to launch these searches in the upper reaches of Jammu region to dislodge these foreign terrorists from their hideouts.

According to official sources, Pakistani terrorists had launched several deadly attacks targeting army convoys during 2024 following which additional troops were rushed to the Jammu region to plug the gaps and improve area domination in the upper reaches of Kathua and Doda districts. BSF personnel were also deployed along the

International border with Pakistan to plug the gaps and prevent fresh infiltration bids. In the majority of cases, the Pakistani terrorists ran away from the spot after carrying out attacks on security personnel, without facing any resistance.

According to Jammu and Kashmir Police, a total number of 14 foreign terrorists were neutralized during several anti-terrorist operations across the Jammu region while 18 security personnel sacrificed their lives in the line of duty and 14 civilians were killed in these terrorist attacks.

According to official data, Doda, Kathua and Reasi districts recorded nine killings each followed by Kishtwar (five), Udhampur (four), Jammu and Rajouri (three each) and Poonch (two) last year.

In addition, 13 terror modules were busted across the region. Modules were busted all across the Jammu zone, including Rajouri (1), Poonch (2), Udhampur (3), Reasi (1), Doda (4), and Kathua (2).

# Amit Shah paves the road for BJP in Capital

**From page 1**

On the Congress president's question if taking a dip in the Ganga would eradicate poverty, Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a dip in 2019 and gave cooking gas, five kilogrammes of free foodgrains, toilets, provided free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh and "other facilities" to 60 crore people. "Kharage sahab, you have turned 80. In your entire life, you have never taken a dip. Tell us what you have done for the welfare of the poor," Shah asked the Congress president.

"My party BJP, our leader Modi ji, and we all have faith in the country's traditions and faith. That is why the Kartarpur Sahib corridor was built and such a magnificent Kumbh mela is being organised," he added.

Raising the poll pitch, he stated that neither of the parties can develop Delhi. Responding to the allegations levelled by AAP on the Haryana government about mixing "poison in Yamuna", Shah said he has never seen anyone stooping to such low levels to win an election.

"Kejriwal ji, victory and defeat are part of every election but you have accused the Haryana government of mixing poison in Yamuna and you have scared the people of Delhi. This is cheap politics," Shah said.

He asked Kejriwal to answer three questions and said, "Arvind Kejriwal says he has a report. If so, make that report public, and we will address it. He alleged that Haryana poisoned the water. What is the name of that poison? Reveal its name and provide proof. He claimed to have

stopped the polluted water, saving Delhi's residents. Then show the order you issued to block that water."

"Arvind Kejriwal will have to answer these three questions. He is unparalleled when it comes to lying. He did not fulfill promises made to Anna Hazare and even vowed not to seek Congress's support, but broke those promises," he added.

Shah began the election campaign by participating in a lengthy roadshow from Mool Chand Metro Station to Garhi Chowk in the Kasturba Nagar constituency, where the party has put Neeraj Basoya in opposition to AAP's Ramesh Pehalwan, who joined the ruling party a month ago with his wife and two-time MCD councillor Kusum Lata.

As BJP candidate Neeraj Basoya and New Delhi MP

Bansuri Swaraj stood next to him, Shah, dressed in a saffron shirt and a black sleeveless jacket, waved to his supporters and showered them with rose petals throughout the entire trip.

As Shah's car sped through the congested streets of Kasturba Nagar constituency, with a sea of supporters pounding drums and trumpets and people curiously bending over from their balconies to get a glimpse of the BJP's star campaigner, the slogans were loud and clear: Bharat Mata ki Jai, Jai Shri Ram, Vote for BJP. Shah later made it to the Kalkaji constituency, where he spoke to a sizable contingent of BJP supporters and urged them to support Ramesh Bidhuri, whom he described as his "dear friend" and a public-serving politician.

# Rahul Gandhi attacks INDIA bloc ally

**From page 1**

"This is the game and this game is being played by media. They will show face of Modi, Amitabh Bachan, Ambani wedding, cricket match," he added.

Gandhi claimed that while there will be 'Mann ki ba', the media will never show the real problems of the country. He also said that only the public suffers from this. "The entire system is to steal from you and distract you," he added.

The senior Congress leader also said that there is an ideological fight between his party and the RSS and BJP.

"Our fight is for Ambedkar's constitution. They said they will change the constitution. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said that the true independence didn't happen on 15 August, 1947 but when Modi came. This means they insulted our independence," Gandhi asserted.

Over the statement of Bhagwat on Ram mandir consecration ceremony, the Congress MP said, "You wouldn't have seen a poor person in Ram Mandir's inauguration neither was President Murmu seen, who belongs to the tribal community. She wasn't even

invited for the new parliament building inauguration. They want an India of rich people when the constitution says that India is of all. Where is it written that all the ports and airports will be of billionaires?"

The Congress leader asserted that while the companies are of Gautam Adani, the control is in PM Modi's hand. "Who profits from Demonetisation and GST? The billionaires. Their policies are for the billionaires. Have you asked that with privatisation that is happening, who is getting benefits? Who do you think the money goes to? They do

not come in your hand. Only 5 to 7 per cent people run this country," he alleged.

"They tell you that you should send your kids to colleges. They sell you big dreams. You spend a lot of money and think that your child will get employed if they become something. The truth of this country right now is that despite you doing anything, they will not get employment," he claimed.

He also promised to carry out a caste census in Delhi if voted to power.

"We will break the wall that does not increase reservation beyond 50 per cent," he added.

# Politics boil over water terrorism

**From page 1**

Accusing Kejriwal of making a dangerous statement with implications for India's federal structure, the Centre urged the Election Commission to bar him from campaigning for his allegation that Haryana was poisoning the water of Yamuna. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini asked the AAP convener to apologise or face defamation suit on his statement.

"We came to protest and submit our petition to the EC on the very unfair, irresponsible, and the violative of the MCC

statement made by the former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal. It is a very dangerous statement. This statement was dangerous for everyone except him, who is a self-proclaimed anarchist. The statement that he made has actually brought fear into the minds of people in Delhi. This has very serious implications for the way in which elections are conducted in this country. Is this good for our democracy? We raised these issues before the EC as How could a CM or former CM accuse another

CM of an act which somewhere relatable to genocide?... It is an insult to all the people of Haryana who have elected him. We have requested the EC to take action which prevents Arvind Kejriwal from campaigning in Delhi anymore..."

Sitharaman said after meeting the officials of poll watchdog. Meanwhile, AAP convener said he was not afraid of legal action and asserted he would not let people die in Delhi because of the "dirty, poisonous water". Kejriwal

claimed in a press conference that the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) CEO, in a letter on Monday, confirmed that a "poison" called ammonia had been mixed with the water supplied from the neighbouring state.

In a fiery social media post, AAP alleged, "Poison is being mixed into the Yamuna to make its water untreatable. If people in Delhi consume this water, many will die. This is nothing short of a mass murder."

Hitting back at Saini, Kejriwal

said he should not do politics over the issue. "It's sinful, you will face the curse of the people," Kejriwal said referring to Saini. "They are threatening to file a case against me. I was sent to jail by them, will they now hang me," he stated.

Delhi CM Atishi and her Punjab counterpart, Bhagwant Mann, also met EC officials, alleging that the BJP-led Haryana government is deliberately releasing alarming levels of ammonia into the Yamuna river,

endangering Delhi's water supply. Atishi had written two letters to the EC seeking an immediate meeting with the officials of the poll panel — one on Monday and another on Tuesday morning.

Earlier, War of words over Yamuna water has escalated with the BJP and Congress attacking AAP over Kejriwal's 'poison in Yamuna' or 'water terrorism' remark.

Addressing a press conference, 10 BJP MPs from Haryana said it was a clear case of "criminal conspiracy"

by Kejriwal who was trying to create panic among the residents of Delhi. The BJP MPs challenged the Aam Aadmi Party government to test the quality of water released from Haryana before it is supplied to households in Delhi.

The BJP leader asserted that the AAP is going to be ousted from power in the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls. In Haryana-mixed Hindi, Saini took a dig at the former Delhi chief minister, saying that he has been running a "jhoot ki

dukan" in the national capital for the last 10 years.

"He (Kejriwal) told a lie on Monday that surprised me. I had to issue a statement at 12 night. He claimed that poison is being mixed in the (Yamuna) water from Haryana and that (Delhi Jal Board) engineers found out about it and stopped the water," he said.

"I want to tell Kejriwal that it is our holy Yamuna, in which Kalia Naag (a mythical serpent) used to spread poison and Lord Krishna finished him off," he said, accusing the AAP national convener of blemishing Haryana, where he was born.

# Delhi, Punjab CMs meet EC, accuse Haryana of poisoning Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and her Punjab counterpart, Bhagwant Mann, met Election Commission (EC) officials on Tuesday, alleging that the BJP-led Haryana government is deliberately releasing alarming levels of ammonia into the Yamuna river, endangering Delhi's water supply. Raising concerns over the rising ammonia levels in the Yamuna, Atishi urged the EC to form a joint team of engineers from both states and EC representatives to investigate the matter as the water is no longer treatable. The Delhi Chief Minister emphasized that water is a critical and sensitive issue, and the Election Commission has assured action in the interest of Delhiites. Meanwhile, CM Bhagwant Mann condemned attempts to politicise water, calling it unacceptable to link such a basic necessity to electoral gains. Following the meeting, Atishi told a press conference, "We presented our concerns to the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners. The ammonia levels in the Yamuna have risen to 7 ppm (parts per million), which exceeds the filtration capacity of Delhi's water treatment plants. The EC has told us that it will listen to Haryana's version before taking a decision that benefits the people of Delhi."



We trust the EC for free-and-fair elections." Mann called for immediate action, saying, "We have demanded additional water from the Munak canal to compensate for the toxic inflow into the Yamuna. The EC will also review last year's ammonia-level data. We are confident that it will rule in Delhi's favour." Atishi had written two letters to the EC seeking an immediate meeting with the officials of the poll panel - one on Monday and another on Tuesday morning. Atishi said in her letter that the water treatment plants belonging to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) can treat ammonia up to 1 ppm level

but ammonia levels in the water coming from Haryana to Delhi are 700 per cent above the treatable limit. This has curtailed the water supply in the city by 15-20 per cent, she said, warning that high levels of ammonia in drinking water can lead to a public health crisis and cause kidney damage. Hitting back at the charges, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has demanded that Kejriwal apologise or they will sue him. "For these blatantly false and disgusting statements, Kejriwal should immediately apologise to the people of Haryana and Delhi for this statement, otherwise, we will file a defamation suit against

him," he said. The issue of Yamuna's water quality has emerged as a key topic of contention as Delhi faces water shortages in some areas due to reduced treatment capacity at DJB plants. With elections nearing, the political blame game between the AAP and BJP is intensifying. In a fresh letter to the Election Commission, Atishi highlighted that ammonia levels were "six times above normal," warning that such water could not be treated or supplied to residents of the city without risking their health. Tating to X, she wrote, "Ammonia levels continue to be six times above normal in Yamuna waters at the point it is entering Delhi from Haryana. Such levels are extremely toxic for the human body. Have once again written to the Election Commission asking for their intervention to prevent this toxic water from coming to Delhi." He accused the BJP of planning "mass murder" but vowed that the AAP would not allow it to happen. However, DJB CEO Shilpa Shinde dismissed Kejriwal's claims as "factually incorrect" and "misleading." In a letter to Delhi Chief Secretary Dharmendra, Shinde emphasised the need to avoid making statements that could harm interstate relations and public confidence.

## Congress leader accuses Kejriwal of 'treason'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Ajay Maken on Tuesday attacked Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal over allegations regarding Delhi's water supply, saying that if the former Delhi chief minister 'is lying, it is "treason." The former union minister also demanded the statements made by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Haryana and Kejriwal to be investigated. "If Arvind Kejriwal is lying about mixing poison in the water, it is treason. If the Haryana government is wrong, action should be taken. If Arvind Kejriwal is spreading rumours, action should be taken against him," Maken said in a press conference. His remarks in a news conference came in response to Kejriwal's statement on Monday, in which he alleged that Delhi's water supply had been "poisoned." He also accused the Haryana government of planning a "genocide" against Delhi residents. The remarks have ignited a storm in the national capital and in neighbouring Haryana, whose Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini threatened to sue the AAP chief. On the other hand, the Delhi Jal Board CEO wrote a letter to the chief secretary saying



that Arvind Kejriwal's remarks were "factually incorrect" and "without any basis." Maken also spoke out on the matter of support extended by Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav and other INDIA bloc parties to AAP and Arvind Kejriwal ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections. He called on the INDIA bloc allies to recognise that only Congress could effectively fight the BJP and urged that they should not weaken the party. The Congress, which held power in Delhi for 15 consecutive years, has faced major setbacks in the last two assembly elections, failing to win any seats. In contrast, AAP dominated the 2015 and 2020 assembly elections, securing 67 and 62 seats, respectively, out of 70, while BJP won only three and eight seats in these elections.

Maken also alleged that a total of 3.20 lakh beneficiaries have not been paid Rs 618 crore by the Delhi government under the "Ladli Yojana," launched by former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit in 2008. He said Dikshit had launched the Ladli Yojana scheme on January 1, 2008 to stop female foeticide and save the girl child in the national capital. "This was Delhi's flagship scheme, which was praised across the world," he added. In its response, the Aam Aadmi Party said, "It's unfortunate how the Congress is parroting BJP-manufactured lies -- using forged documents cooked up in BJP offices -- to hurl baseless accusations at the AAP. The Congress must publicly declare its alliance with the BJP now." The Ladli Yojana provides

financial assistance in the form of term deposits: Rs 11,000 for hospital births, Rs 10,000 for home births, and Rs 5,000 at key milestones -- enrollment in classes one, two, six, nine, and 10. As soon as the girl turns 18, Rs 1 lakh is deposited in her account. "According to the CAG report, a total of 20,242 people registered in 2008-09 when the scheme was launched. This was done under registration at birth. The numbers increased to 23,871 in 2009-10. However, the registration has reduced to 3,153 in 2020-21," Maken said, adding that there was a decline of 700 per cent. When it began, the scheme had two parts. First, the money was to be given after registration at the time of birth of the girl child. Second, if registration was not done at birth, it could be done later. "The government has not done any publicity, and no action has been taken for the scheme," he alleged. The total registration in 2013-14 was 1,39,346, but it reduced to 43,415 in 2020-21, amounting to a reduction of 300 per cent. The population is increasing in Delhi, but the registration has decreased, he said. "The government is promising to give Rs 2,100 to women but is not implementing the scheme meant for the girls," Maken alleged.

# Kejriwal made a low-level claim to hide his failures: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP leaders on Tuesday slammed the AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal of making a dangerous statement and asked him to prove that there is poison in the water or else apologise immediately. Lambasting the AAP chief, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said even Pakistan did not make such an allegation against India during wars, claiming that Kejriwal has

made a low-level claim to hide his failures, and sensing his party's impending defeat in the Delhi Assembly polls. BJP manifesto committee chairman Ramvir Singh Bidhuri slammed the AAP chief saying poison is not in the water of Yamuna but in the mind of him. "Seeing the defeat in the elections, he is now losing his senses and is making baseless allegations," Bidhuri said. He said that Kejriwal has pol-

luted the Yamuna in Delhi so much in ten years that he cannot even take its water in a handful, while he used to talk about bathing in it. The silt of Delhi's water treatment plants has not been removed, due to which their capacity is being badly affected. Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly and BJP candidate from Rohini Assembly constituency, Vijender Gupta, on Tuesday described Arvind Kejriwal's accusation of



Haryana sending toxic water to Delhi as a result of his desperation. Making this assertion, Gupta also claimed that Kejriwal and other senior AAP leaders are frustrated by the prospect of their defeat and, losing mental balance and are making baseless statements. Addressing people during a padyatra in sector-13 of Rohini Assembly constituency, Gupta said Kejriwal has done nothing for the people of

Delhi in the last ten years, leading to widespread public dissatisfaction. He stated that the people have decided to uproot AAP's government this time, and as a result, Kejriwal and his party leaders have already realised their defeat. The BJP leader remarked that old slogans like shining Delhi's roads and free electricity and water will not work anymore as the public has seen through their motives.

He appealed to the people of Delhi to replace Kejriwal's corrupt government and hand over the reins to the BJP. Gupta assured them that with a "double-engine government," BJP would understand and quickly resolve their problems. He promised that as soon as the BJP comes to power, all Central Government schemes would be implemented for the people of Delhi from day one.

## Kejriwal's remarks amount to endangering national security: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena wrote to Chief Minister Atishi on Tuesday, alleging that AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal's accusations that "poison" is being mixed in the Yamuna water and there was an "attempt of genocide" in the national capital are highly objectionable and unfortunate, and amount to endangering national security. Citing media reports, Saxena said the former Delhi chief minister's allegations against the BJP-led Haryana government of poisoning the Yamuna river and attempting a "genocide" in Delhi are "highly objectionable, unfortunate and undesirable." "Making false, misleading, non-factual accusations of poisoning and genocide over a sensitive issue like drinking water and attempting to incite the public against another state government is not only a threat to the states involved but also to national peace and security," he said in the letter to the chief minister. He claimed that while this is not a new thing that the AAP supremo has done, the state-



ment will mislead people and also create animosity between the neighbouring states. The LG also pointed out that instead of condemning Kejriwal's statements, Atishi strengthened the "confusion and fear" among people by writing a letter to the Election Commission (EC) over the matter. Saxena said he expects the Delhi chief minister to rise above "narrow interests" and refrain from making "misleading, dangerous, and baseless statements, and advise the AAP convenor to do the same for the sake of public welfare and peace." "As a responsible citizen of India, you will agree that a government saying wrong, baseless, irresponsible and inflammatory statements against another state government is not accept-

able in a democracy," he wrote, adding that such things can create a law-and-order problem between the two states. In his letter, Saxena added that it is shameful that following their statements, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), which falls under the AAP government, refuted them. He claimed that according to the report, it is clear that the level of ammonia rises in Yamuna during the seasons when there is no rain. "The data of the report clear the fact that while the ammonia level was 7.5-10 mg/l on December 31, it was reduced on January 27 when it was 6.8-7.2 mg/l. It is beyond comprehension that you stayed quiet when the levels were high and have levelled allegations on the Haryana government when it has reduced," the letter read. He also asserted that when the AAP was ruling for the past decade it didn't do anything for the same while it is now putting the blame on other states. "Levelling charges of mixing poison and mass genocide on other state governments on a sensitive matter like water is not just false, misleading and baseless, it is a threat on national security," the letter added.

## AAP's 'jhadu' election symbol should be forfeited: Yogi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a blistering attack on the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said its 'jhadu' election symbol should be forfeited for pushing the national Capital into a civic mess. Addressing public meetings in support of BJP candidates at Mangolpuri, Vikaspuri and Rajender Nagar, Adityanath accused AAP of making the people of Delhi thirst for water and said he sometimes wondered if the party was possessed by the spirit of Aurangzeb. The firebrand BJP leader also charged AAP of sheltering Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators in Delhi. The BJP government in Uttar Pradesh connected three crore households with piped water supply but by sheltering the tanker mafia, AAP forced the people of Delhi to thirst for every drop, he alleged. "I sometimes wonder, has Aurangzeb's spirit possessed them that they are forcing the people of Delhi to thirst for water?" Adityanath charged. "It's the right time to make AAP yearn for every vote as it has made you thirst for every drop of water," the Uttar Pradesh chief minister said



during his Rajender Nagar rally. In Vikaspuri, he said the Yamuna was considered a holy river and people chanted "Har Har Gange, Har Har Yamune" after taking a dip in Mathura-Vridavan, alleging that the AAP government had turned it into a "stinking" drain of filth. Citing "civic mess" in Delhi, Adityanath said every road was potholed and littered with garbage, sewers overflowed onto the streets, and people

hankered for drinking water. AAP and Kejriwal came to power holding the 'jhadu (broom)' but fooled the people and made the party symbol a synonym for "filth and mess", he claimed. "AAP's 'jhadu' symbol should be forfeited because it has become a synonym for filth, insanitation and mismanagement," he said. AAP is the first political party in independent India to be accused in a corruption case and more than a

dozen of its leaders went to jail, he added. Dubbing AAP a "symbol of corruption and anarchy", Adityanath urged the voters to bring a "double-engine government" of the BJP in the February 5 assembly polls. Addressing a public meeting in support of BJP candidate Raj Kumar Chauhan in Mangolpuri, he also slammed Kejriwal over the "stinking Yamuna" in Delhi. "If you had moral courage, you would have

taken a dip in the Yamuna, along with ministers of the AAP government," Adityanath said, referring to a recent dip he had taken at the Sangam in Prayagraj along with his Cabinet, during the ongoing Maha Kumbh. He also charged that the party spread "anarchy" by "sheltering" Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators in Delhi. "AAP's public representatives and office-bearers forcefully occupied hundreds of acres of land of the Uttar Pradesh government's irrigation department near Jamia Nagar and settled Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators," he charged. When the land was not vacated despite repeated warnings, Adityanath said he sent the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and bulldozers and, with the Delhi Police's help, cleared the land. If Delhi needs the land for any medical facility, academic or convention centre, it will be provided but not a single inch of it will be given to infiltrators, he asserted. Adityanath alleged that civic amenities and infrastructure had collapsed in Delhi and people from the city were settling in Noida and Ghaziabad -- both in Uttar Pradesh -- for better facilities.

# AAP eyes hat-trick in Okhla; BJP, Congress keeps their fingers crossed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Known as a stronghold of KAAP, the Okhla Assembly constituency will see a fierce electoral battle between the sitting two-term AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, Congress' candidate Ariba Khan and BJP's candidate Manish Chaudhary. Moreover with the entry of Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) declaring Shifa-ur-Rehman as its candidate, who is currently in jail as an accused in the Delhi riots case, the elections are expected to be polarising. The seat, located in the East Delhi Lok Sabha seat, is an urban area near the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border and is

one of Delhi's oldest inhabited regions along the Yamuna river. It saw a long dominance of the Congress before it went to the ruling party for the consecutive Assembly elections of 2015 and 2020. In the 2020 Delhi Assembly election, Khan of the AAP secured a landslide victory, receiving 1,30,367 votes while BJP's Brahm Singh finished second with 58,540 votes, accounting for 29.65 per cent of the vote share. Congress' Parvez Hashmi managed only 5,123 votes. Khan also dominated the 2015 polls, winning the polls with 1,04,271 votes claiming a vote share of 62.57 per cent while BJP's Brahm Singh garnered only 39,739 votes. Congress' Asif Muhammad



Khan managed to secure only 20,135 votes. The seat encompasses several

areas, including Madanpur Khadar, Khizrabad, Jasola, Aali, and Taimur Nagar. It

holds significant political and social importance, with a diverse demographic and

voter base including a significant presence of Muslims. The Muslims consists 43 per cent of the seat along with 15 per cent of Gujjars, 10 per cent of Other Backward Castes (OBC), 10 per cent of Scheduled Castes (SC), 6 per cent Punjabis, 3 per cent Pandits, 2 per cent of Sikhs. The seat also has 11 per cent Middle class voters. According to the Election Commission, Okhla has 3,79,509 voters comprising of 2,19,300 males, 1,60,205 females and 4 third gender voters. While the BJP relied on Manish Chaudhary and the AAP showed faith in its two-term MLA Amanatullah Khan, the Congress fielded Ariba Khan this time. Some voters think Khan has

the advantage because of his prior work, but others think he hasn't really improved the constituency. Owaisi's AIMIM, however, has announced Shifa-ur-Rehman as its nominee. Rehman submitted his nomination on January 16 and is currently incarcerated as an accused in the Delhi riots case. Noor Fatima, his wife, is pushing for him and is still optimistic that he will win. There are fourteen Okhla candidates in the race. Concerns regarding the dearth of employment prospects and poor infrastructure have been voiced by Okhla residents, emphasising the necessity to widen roads leading to the neighbourhood, as traffic jams are a

daily picture. Sanitation remains a major concern, with garbage and drains often left unaddressed. "The region has not seen much development in the last few years. Neither schools nor hospitals have been constructed," Rizwan said. "It's not that this party or that party wasn't working, but it's the political mindset of leaders. Political parties use minorities as a vote bank in places where they account for a sizable portion of the vote. They don't care about our way of life. In addition to the inner lanes' narrowness, there is overflowing drainage. They arrive, make promises, and then proudly walk around. However, what does that provide us?" he asked.

# Government school enrolment back to pre pandemic levels

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) released on Tuesday has indicated an increase in government school enrolment seen during the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have reversed, with the proportion of children aged 6-14 years enrolled in government schools nearly back to the 2018 levels.

The report also noted that not only there has been a full recovery from the pandemic-induced learning loss, the learning levels in the primary grades are higher than past levels in some cases. The crucial report found that more than 82 per cent children in the 14-16 age group know how to use a smartphone but only 57 per cent of them use it for educational purposes.

"The increase in government school enrolment seen during the COVID-19 years seems to have reversed. Private school enrolment has been steadily rising since 2006 in rural India. The proportion of 6-14-year-olds enrolled in private schools rose from 18.7 per cent in 2006 to 30.8 per cent in 2014 and stayed at that level in 2018. "During the pandemic years, there was a big jump in gov-



ernment school enrolment with the proportion of 6-14-year-old children enrolled in government schools rising from 65.6 per cent in 2018 to 72.9 per cent in 2022. This number is back to 66.8 per cent in 2024. This almost complete reversal back to 2018 levels is seen across grades as well as gender, and is not particularly surprising given that the economy has recovered in other sectors as well," the report noted. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024

is a nationwide rural household survey that reached 6,49,491 children in 17,997 villages across 605 rural districts in India. Facilitated by an NGO, "Pratham", in each surveyed district, a local organisation or institution conducted the survey. "At the all-India level, the proportion of children in Class 3, who are able to read at Class 2 level, rose slowly from 23.6 per cent in 2014 to 27.3 per cent in 2018 and then fell drastically to 20.5 per cent in 2022. Two

years later, we have a full recovery with the proportion of Class-3 children reading fully at 27.1 per cent. "We see a similar picture in Class 4, with the proportion of Class-5 children who can read a Class-2 level text rising from 48 per cent in 2014 to 50.5 per cent in 2018, then falling to 42.8 per cent in 2022 and finally recovering to 48.8 per cent in 2024," the report said. Some states have done very well and surpassed their pre-pandemic learning levels, while

others are yet to recover fully. Nevertheless, almost all states have shown improvements as compared to 2022. "In fact, the low-performing states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have made a remarkable recovery," the report noted.

For the first time, the nationwide household survey had a section on digital literacy, which applied to older children in the 14-16 age group. It included self-reported questions on access, ownership and use of smartphones, as well as a one-on-one assessment of some basic digital skills.

The report said "82.2 per cent of all children in the 14-16 age group reported knowing how to use a smartphone. Of these, 57 per cent reported using it for an educational activity in the preceding week, while 76 per cent said that they had used it for social media during the same period".

The report found that the proportion of "underage" children (aged five years or below) in Class 1 is decreasing over time. "In 2018, this figure was 25.6 per cent, in 2022 it stood at 22.7 per cent and in 2024, nationally, the percentage of underage children in Class-1 was at its lowest ever at 16.7," it said.

# Five Indian fishermen injured by Sri Lankan Navy in firing incident



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Five Indian fishermen sustained injuries, including two seriously, in an incident of firing by the Sri Lankan Navy in the proximity of Delft Island early Tuesday, triggering a strong reaction by India.

The acting high commissioner of the island nation in New Delhi was summoned to Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and a strong protest was lodged with the top diplomat.

In its reaction, India said use of force is not "acceptable" under any circumstances whatsoever. "An incident of firing by the Sri Lankan Navy during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen

in the proximity of Delft Island was reported in the early hours of this morning," it said.

"Out of the 13 fishermen who were on board the fishing vessel, two have sustained serious injuries and are currently receiving treatment at the Jaffna Teaching hospital," it said. Three other fishermen received minor injuries and have been treated for the same, it added.

Indian Consulate officials in Jaffna have visited the injured fishermen at the hospital to seek their welfare and are extending all possible assistance to the fishermen and their families.

"The Sri Lankan acting high commissioner in New Delhi was called in today morning to

the Ministry of External Affairs and a strong protest was lodged over the incident," the MEA said.

The Indian high commission in Colombo has also raised the matter with the Sri Lankan foreign ministry.

"The government of India has always emphasised the need to treat issues pertaining to fishermen in a humane and humanitarian manner, keeping in mind livelihood concerns," the Indian readout noted.

"The use of force is not acceptable under any circumstances whatsoever. Existing understandings between the two governments in this regard must be strictly observed," the MEA said.

# SC asks Centre's stand after woman wants to be governed by succession law

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court (SC) on Tuesday asked for the Centre's stand on a Muslim woman's plea seeking to be governed by the Indian succession law instead of Shariat. The plea of Safiya P M, general secretary of "Ex-Muslims of Kerala", and hailing from Alappuzha, came up before a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan.



Safiya's plea, filed through advocate Prashant Padmnabhan, said Muslim women were entitled to one-third share in the property under the Shariat laws. The lawyer said the declaration that the petitioner was not governed by the Muslim personal law had to come from the court, or else her father would not be able to give more than one-third of the property. The top court had permitted Safiya to amend the petition suitably to challenge the Indian succession law and other provisions for excluding Muslims. "Fundamental right to religion under Article 25 of the Constitution must include the right to believe or not to believe, as per the judgment of this in Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (Sabarimala case)... To have meaning for that right, the person who leaves her faith should not incur any disability or a disqualification in matters of inheritance or other important civil rights," the plea said. Pointing out wide ramifications across the country, the plea urged the bench for an intervention. It said the pending case in the Supreme Court was for all Muslim women but the present plea was for those who were born Muslim and wanted to

leave the religion. "As per Sharia law, the person who leaves her faith in Islam, will be ousted from her community and thereafter she is not entitled for any inheritance right in her parental property," the plea argued.

The petitioner expressed apprehension over the application of the law in the case of her lineal descendant, her only daughter, if she officially left her religion. Seeking a declaration that the Muslim personal law shouldn't govern her for any of the matters listed in Section 2 or 3 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, she said, "But there is no provision either in the Act or in the rules wherein she can obtain such a certificate."

The plea said there was a "clear vacuum" in the statute which could be plugged by judicial interpretation. "As of now, the petitioner will not be governed by the secular laws of the country, viz, the Indian Succession Act even if she officially gets a no-religion, no-caste certificate from any authority," said the plea. The precious fundamental rights under Article 25 to practice or not to practice religion were made meaningless by the absence of such a protection from the state, it added.

# BJP is richest party with ₹7,113.80 crore in funds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP, which claims itself as the biggest political party in the world, has a whopping cash and bank balance of ₹7,113.80 crore against the principal opposition Congress party's ₹857.15 crore as on March 31, 2024.

According to figures provided to the Election Commission, the BJP spent as much as ₹1,754.06 crore during 2023-24 when Lok Sabha elections were announced, a whopping 60 per cent rise than ₹1,092 crore spent in 2022-23.

In comparison, the Congress spent as much as ₹619.67 crore during 2023-24, against ₹192.56 crore in 2022-23. The Lok Sabha elections were announced on March 16, 2024. According to the figures provided to the EC in their annu-



al audit reports, the BJP has received voluntary contributions through the now banned electoral bonds of ₹1,685.69 crore during 2023-24, against ₹1294.15 crore in the previous year. The ruling party has also shown having received other contributions to the tune of

₹2,042.75 crore during the year, against ₹648.42 crore in the previous year 2022-23. In its audit report to the EC, the Congress has shown having received total contributions of ₹1,225.11 crore during 2023-24, including ₹1129.67 crore through grants, dona-

tions and contributions. This also includes ₹828.36 crore received through electronic bonds during the year ended March 31, 2024, which have now been banned by the Supreme Court.

During the year, the BJP spent ₹591 crore in advertisements, including ₹434.84 crore in the electronic media and ₹115.62 crore in printed material. The ruling party also spent ₹174 crore during 2023-24 on aircraft/helicopters, against ₹78.23 crore in 2022-23 and gave financial assistance of ₹191.06 crore to its candidates during the year in question, against ₹75.05 crore in the previous year.

The BJP spent ₹84.32 crore in meeting expenses during 2024 and ₹75.14 crore in organising morchas, rallies, andolan and call centre expenses during

2023-24. The Congress, on the other hand, spent as much as ₹207.94 crore on the electronic media and ₹43.73 crore on printed material during 2023-24.

The opposition party also spent ₹62.65 crore on aircraft/helicopters during 2023-24 and gave financial aid of ₹238.55 crore to its candidates. It also spent ₹28.03 crore on publicity expenses and ₹79.78 crore on social media expenses during the year ended March 31, 2024.

The party also stated in its audit report that it spent ₹49.63 crore on the Bharat Jodo Yatra 2, led by former party chief Rahul Gandhi during 2023-24, against ₹71.84 crore spent on Bharat Jodo Yatra undertaken by him from Kanyakumari to Kashmir during 2022-23.

# India, Indonesia Coast Guards sign MoU to boost maritime relations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant step towards furthering India-Indonesia comprehensive bilateral relations, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Indonesia Coast Guard (Badan Keamanan Laut Republik Indonesia - BAKAMLA) renewed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation for a period of three years, defence ministry said here on Tuesday.

Giving details, officials said the MoU was signed between both the organisation in July 2020 which marked a significant milestone underscoring the vision of Indian government towards a safer, secure and resilient Indo-pacific region.



Under the umbrella of the MoU provisions, eight member BAKAMLA delegation led by Vice Admiral Irvansyah, S.H, Chief of Indonesia Coast Guard is visiting India from January 24-28 which also included conduct of the second high level meeting between ICG and BAKAMLA on Monday, it said.

The high level meeting was led by Director General Paramesh Sivamani from the Indian

Coast Guard side. The meeting focused on augmenting operational level interaction and capacity building in areas of Maritime Search and Rescue, Pollution Response and Maritime Law Enforcement. The meeting was significant in providing added impetus to the existing professional relationship between the two Coast Guards.

Relations between the two Coast Guards go back a long way ICG ships first visited Indonesia on December 2002 towards professional interaction and exchanges. This meeting and visit is in continuation of the efforts by the Governments of the two countries to enhance cooperation between the Coast Guards in the field of maritime safety and security.

# Police can't serve accused notice via electronic means: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said police cannot serve notices to accused persons through WhatsApp or other electronic modes under the Criminal Procedure Code or Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. A bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal directed all states and union territories (UT) to issue appropriate directions to police for issuing notices under Section 41A of CrPC, 1973 or Section 35 of BNS, 2023 only through the mode of service permitted under the law.

"All the States/UTs must issue a standing order to their respective police machinery to issue notices under Section 41-A of

CrPC, 1973/Section 35 of BNS, 2023 only through the mode of service as prescribed under the CrPC, 1973/BNS, 2023," the bench said on January 21.

The top court went on, "It is made amply clear that service of notice through WhatsApp or other electronic modes cannot be considered or recognised as an alternative or substitute to the mode of service recognised and prescribed under the CrPC, 1973/BNS, 2023."

The direction came when the court accepted a suggestion by senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, appointed amicus curiae in the matter. Luthra flagged instances where a notice under Section 41-A of CrPC, 1973 was sent through WhatsApp, but the accused did not appear before the investigating officer.

# Our suggestions accepted by Waqf committee: JD(U)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Janata Dal (United) said on Tuesday that the changes suggested by it have been accepted by the Joint Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the Waqf (Amendment) Bill and accused the opposition of politicising the issue.

The BJP's allies like the Telugu Desam Party, JD(U) and the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) had come around to endorsing the bill with some amendments in the committee's meeting on Monday. All the three parties had refrained from wholeheartedly endorsing the bill when it was introduced in Parliament during the Monsoon Session last year and had pushed for a wider consultation to allay concerns of the Muslim community.

JD(U) spokesperson Rajeev Ranjan Prasad said, "Whatever the JD(U) suggested in the bill, it was all accepted. The amendments will have our suggestions. We don't have any complaints regarding the



functioning of the JPC. The opposition has a habit to politicise every issue." JD(U) MP Dileshwar Kamait had moved the amendment to the bill's clause which had made it mandatory for Waqf properties to be listed with details on the portal within six months of the new law coming into force.

Kamait's proposal that 'mutawalli' (caretaker) of the property be allowed to seek an extension if the reasons cited by him satisfies the Waqf tribunal. He had co-sponsored the amendment with BJP's Aparajita Sarangi, and it was endorsed by the panel with a majority vote, sources said. Four amendments moved by

TDP MP Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu along BJP's Brij Lal were also accepted. These amendments do away with vesting any inquiry into disputes over a government property with the district collector concerned as mentioned in the bill, the sources said. These amendments allow the state government to des-

ignate an officer above the rank of collector to carry out an inquiry. Several Muslim bodies had objected to the authority given to the collector, noting that he was also the head of revenue records, and any inquiry by him might not be impartial as he would go by his own office's claim.

The sources said the BJP had been nudging its allies to put up a united face over the proposed law, which has been decried by opposition parties as "unconstitutional" due to its alleged interference into the religious affairs of Muslims. The ruling BJP has insisted that the proposed law will make the functioning of Waqf boards more transparent and efficient, arguing that an elite group running the boards had benefitted at the expense of the community's interests under the existing framework. The committee headed by BJP MP Jagdambika Pal, is set to meet on Wednesday to adopt its draft report, which is expected to be tabled in Parliament in the Budget Session beginning Friday.

# Kejriwal writes to PM highlighting disparity in allocation of public funds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Delhi Assembly Apolls, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal launched an attack on the BJP-led Central government on Tuesday for waiving loans of its "billionaire friends" and demanded a halt to the practice, adding that such a move could transform the country's economic landscape. Instead, he has urged the government to redirect these resources toward easing the financial burden on common citizens, farmers and middle-class families.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, AAP chief highlights a stark disparity in the allocation of public funds, cornering the BJP led Central government of prioritising the financial interests of a select few billionaires over the needs of ordinary taxpayers. Showing a letter at a press conference, Kejriwal said, "Today I wrote a letter to the prime minister on a very important issue. In the letter, I have told the prime minister that the BJP-led



Central government is spending money from the government treasury on the country's billionaires. Whichever billionaire friend they want to be kind to, they give him money from the government and waive off that loan in two or three years. In the last five years, the central government has waived loans of 400-500 such billion-aires worth ₹10 lakh crore." Presenting an alternative vision, the AAP chief outlined how stopping these corporate loan waivers could transform the country's economic landscape. He proposed halving income tax and GST rates, doubling the taxable income limit, and abol-

ishing GST on essential food items—steps that would directly benefit millions of households.

"Common people are paying half their salaries in taxes, while the loans of the rich are being waived. Why doesn't the Central government waive home loans, car loans, or other financial burdens of ordinary citizens?" Kejriwal asked.

Having earlier served as a joint commissioner in the Income Tax Department, Kejriwal went to closely examine the tax burden on the common man. He said, "A middle-class individual who earns ₹12 lakh annually is burdened with so many taxes imposed by the central government. They pay income tax, GST, service tax, property tax, education cess, capital gains tax, road tax, and more. When all these taxes are combined, a person earning ₹12 lakh ends up paying at least ₹6 lakh in taxes—half of their income—to the government. And what do they get in return? Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

# Prayagraj residents facing unwanted guest

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ**

As millions flock to the Maha Kumbh 2025, the residents of Prayagraj find themselves grappling with the influx of relatives suddenly eager to reconnect—some after years of silence. While hosting family for the spiritual event is considered a blessing, the strain on personal spaces, relationships, and resources is beginning to show.

Kusum Srinet, a resident of Tellianganj, has been at the center of this chaotic hospitality. “We are hosting 15 people in our two-bedroom house,” she said with a weary smile. “The kitchen has not had a break in days, and I have been answering questions like, ‘Is there hot water?’ and ‘Do you have room for my cousin’s neighbor’s friend?’ I have stopped saying no because it does not work.”

In addition to managing the logistics of hosting, Kusum is also dealing with a sudden surge in phone calls from long-lost relatives. “I got a call from my aunt in Gorakhpur whom I have not spoken to in a decade,” she said. “She wanted to know if I could ‘arrange something’ for her son and his in-laws. I did not even know her son was married!”

The phenomenon is not limited to Kusum. Alpona Sen, originally from Kolkata but now a resident of Daraganj, said she is suddenly popular with



Devotees arrive for a holy dip at Sangam, on the eve of the 'Mauni Amavasya' or new moon day during the Mahakumbh festival in Prayagraj, UP

relatives who never cared to stay in touch. “People who forgot I existed are now calling,” she quipped. “One cousin rang up from Kolkata and started with, ‘Didi, how is your health?’—as if they were planning to visit me in the hospital! But of course, they just wanted to know if I could host their son-in-law’s family.”

She shared a humorous yet exasperating incident. “My relatives initially said they were ready to move to a hotel,” she said, rolling her eyes. “But then they added, ‘When we have a great sister-in-law like you, why should we stay there?’ Now, I am stuck hosting a mini-family reunion in my house!”

Even the humor does not fully mask the challenges. Rajendra Tiwari, a retired schoolteacher in Allapur, said, “I have relatives showing up with bags and a plan to ‘stay for a few days.’ A few days have now turned into a week, and they are making full use of the free Wi-Fi. One even asked me if we had Netflix!”

For some, the stay is brief and pleasant. “There are considerate relatives who come, stay for a day, and leave,” said Anita Mishra. “They take their holy dip, share a meal, and are off. I do not even get stressed with them.”

But others are not so easy. “Then there are the ones who arrived a day before Mauni Amavasya,” said Rajendra Tiwari of Allapur, “and they will only leave after taking their last dip on Basant Panchami. That’s more than a week! We are running out of beds, food, and patience.”

Amidst the chaos, residents are also finding ways to keep the mood light. Renuka Sharma from Govindpuri shared, “I told my sister-in-law, who has not spoken to me since her son’s wedding, ‘Why don’t you just shift here permanently since you have already taken over my bedroom?’ We both laughed, but I think she’s considering it.”

For now, Prayagraj residents like Kusum and Alpona are navigating a mix of familial bonding and unexpected stress, all while keeping their sense of humor intact. As Kusum put it, “At least the Kumbh is teaching us one thing: how to handle chaos with a smile.”



# Free meals for millions at community kitchens

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

At the heart of the Mahakumbh lies a unique tradition of selfless service—community kitchens, or bhandaras, feeding millions of pilgrims daily. These kitchens, run by religious organizations, ashrams, and private groups, ensure no visitor goes hungry, offering everything from tea at dawn to wholesome meals at night—all free of cost. The hospitality is unmatched. Volunteers lovingly invite passersby to sit and eat, creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and devotion. In every corner of Kumbh City, at least one bhandara is always open, ensuring constant access to food.

“I came here with just enough money for travel, but these kitchens made sure I did not have to worry about food,” said Gopal Das, a pilgrim from Madhya Pradesh. “The meals are simple but so tasty, and the love with which they’re served makes it even more special.”

Organizations like Anand Bhawan Seva Samiti from Gujarat serve up to 10,000 people on regular days and over 15,000 on special occasions like the Amrit Snan. “Feeding pilgrims is part of our devotion. It feels like we are serving God Himself through them,” said Rajendra Thakur, a volunteer with the Samiti. The meals, which typically include lentils, rice, vegetables, and khichdi, are prepared in spotless kitchens where hygiene is paramount. “We ensure all ingredients are stored securely, and even the dough is kneaded by machines to maintain cleanliness,” added Thakur.

For many pilgrims, these meals are more than sustenance—they are a moment of joy and gratitude. “I never imagined eating sweets like barfi and jalebi at a free kitchen,” said Rukmini Devi, a first-time visitor from Bihar. “It is like a blessing.”

To ensure environmental responsibility, many kitchens use disposable plates made from biodegradable materials like leaves, while others rely on reusable steel or plastic plates. At large kitchens like Anand Bhawan, diners themselves wash their plates as a gesture of devotion. “It feels like being part of a family,” said Prakash Mishra, a pilgrim from Uttar Pradesh.

# Pari Akhara’s fight for separate Amrit Snan for women saints reaches Allahabad High Court

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ**

The long-standing demand for a separate Amrit Snan (royal bath) for women saints at the Maha Kumbh has taken a legal turn, with Pari Akhara filing a petition in the Allahabad High Court. The petition challenges the lack of representation for women in the traditional system of akharas (religious orders), questioning why there are 13 recognized akharas exclusively for men but none dedicated to women.

Pari Akhara, which was founded in 2013 by female saint Trikal Bhavta, has been advocating for gender-specific arrangements in the Kumbh Mela. Despite receiving government support in previous Kumbhs in Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain, they were not granted permission for a separate Amrit Snan. This year, the Pari Akhara has renewed its efforts for inclusion in Prayagraj Maha Kumbh.

In the ongoing Maha Kumbh, women saints associated with Pari



Akhara have been vocal about their demand. Recently, they held discussions with senior figures, including the head of Niranjani Akhara, Acharya Mahamandaleswar Swami Kailashanand Giri, and the Chief Patron of Juna Akhara, Swami Hari Giri. However, these talks failed to yield a resolution.

Faced with opposition from the established 13 akharas, Pari Akhara turned to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, but their plea resulted in mere assurances. Left with no other option, the group filed a petition in the Allahabad High Court on January 2, urging the court to mandate separate royal bathing arrangements for women saints. The petition has created ripples within the religious community, sparking debates about gender inclusivity in the age-old tradition of Kumbh Mela.

The 13 recognized akharas in India are divided into three sects: Shaiv Sanyasi (seven akharas), Vairagi (three akharas), and Udasi (three akharas). These akharas hold immense sway over Kumbh Mela rituals and receive special government facilities. Pari Akhara, despite its efforts, has not been officially recognized by the Akhara Parishad, the apex council formed in 1954 to oversee the functioning of these orders.

Speaking on the issue, Akhara Parishad President Ravindra Puri reiterated that only the 13 established akharas are recognized. He stated, “Women saints are respected in all akharas, and many of them, including Mahamandaleshwars, are part of the existing akharas. No new akhara can be granted recognition.”

Saint Trikal Bhavta, founder of Pari Akhara, emphasized that the fight for separate Amrit Snan is symbolic of the struggle for gender equality within religious traditions. “Thousands of women saints from India and abroad are associated with Pari Akhara and aspire to participate in a separate royal bath during the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh. We have faith in the court to deliver justice,” she said.

Acharya Mahamandaleswar Jagriti Chetna Giri of Pari Akhara added, “This is a fight for the very existence of women saints in religious traditions. We are raising our voices at every level and have received assurances of support from several senior saints. We hope for an expedited hearing so women saints can achieve their rightful place in the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh.”

The issue has ignited a larger debate about inclusivity and equality in religious practices. As the Allahabad High Court deliberates on the petition, the demand for a separate Amrit Snan for women saints has already stirred the traditional structures of the Kumbh Mela.

The court’s decision could mark a significant shift in the centuries-old customs of the world’s largest spiritual gathering.



# Devotees express discontent over limited darshan time

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ VARANASI**

The Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple witnessed an unprecedented footfall of over 1.1 million devotees on Monday, as the Maha Kumbh reverse flow drove massive crowds to seek blessings.

While the temple administration celebrated the record-breaking turnout, many pilgrims expressed disappointment over being rushed during their darshan. Devotees who had waited for up to eight hours in serpentine queues were granted only a fleeting glimpse of Lord Shiva. “I stood in line for nearly eight hours, but when my turn came, I was pushed forward within seconds. I couldn’t even complete my prayers,” said 65-year-old Ram Bhajan Singh, who had traveled from Prayagraj.

Another devotee, Suman Devi from Kanpur, echoed similar frustrations. “We come with so much devotion, but we barely get a moment to pray or offer our puja properly. It felt rushed,” she said.

In response to the massive

# UP government deploys over 1,000 medical personnel for devotees’ safety



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

For the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya to be held on Wednesday, the Uttar Pradesh

government has deployed over 1,000 medical personnel at the Mahakumbh Mela to ensure devotees’ safety and health. Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s direction, modern medical facilities, including provisions for minor to major surgeries, have been established in every sector of the fair, ranging from minor surgeries to major operations. In addition, 300 specialist doctors have been stationed at a super-specialty hospital in Mahakumbh Nagar, ready to handle any emergency situations. Over 2 lakh patients have already benefited from the OPD services at central and other hospitals, and more than 2.5 lakh pathology tests have been conducted so far.

Dr. Gaurav Dubey, the Nodal Medical Officer for the Mahakumbh Mela, highlighted that devotees from across the country and abroad are availing health services in Mahakumbh Nagar. The state government, supported by the state-of-the-art medical facilities, has taken all necessary steps to ensure the safety and well-being of those attending the fair.

In addition to the official medical setups, saints from various temples, monasteries, and akharas are also assisting the devotees with medicines and health checks. These saints are organizing camps offering a variety of health services, including Ayurvedic, homeopathic, and other medical consultations and treatments.

# People pelt stones at special train for Prayagraj



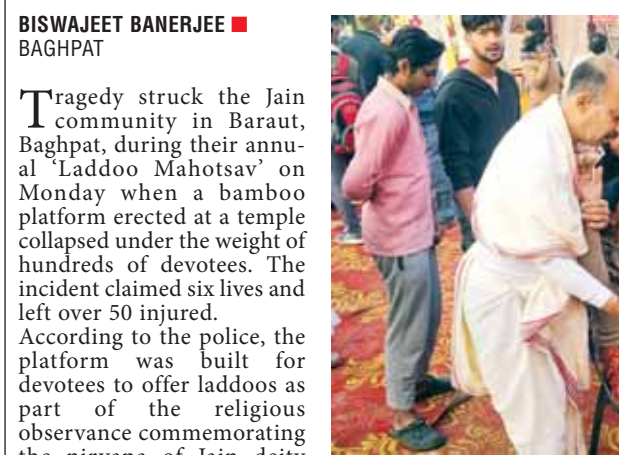
**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW**

Harpalpur, Uttar Pradesh: A special train traveling from Jhansi to Prayagraj for the Mahakumbh came under attack when agitated passengers at Harpalpur station pelted it with stones. The incident caused widespread panic among passengers as windows were shattered, and the train was damaged.

Videos circulating on social media show passengers screaming in fear as stones were thrown at the train. In one video, a passenger recounts, “The train left Jhansi for Prayagraj around 8 pm. When it reached Harpalpur, it was attacked. The windows were broken, and stones were hurled inside, endangering the lives of passengers, including women and children.”

The train, part of a special service organized to ferry devotees to the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, drew large crowds. Many passengers at Harpalpur, about two hours from Jhansi, were waiting to board the train but found the compartment doors locked. Their frustration reportedly escalated into violence, with the crowd throwing stones and shattering

# Seven dead and over 50 injured as platform collapses during religious event



**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ BAGHPAT**

Tragedy struck the Jain community in Baraut, Baghpat, during their annual ‘Laddoo Mahotsav’ on Monday when a bamboo platform erected at a temple collapsed under the weight of hundreds of devotees. The incident claimed six lives and left over 50 injured.

According to the police, the platform was built for devotees to offer laddoos as part of the religious observance commemorating the nirvana of Jain deity Adinatha. As the priests and devotees gathered on the structure, it gave way, leading to chaos.

Baghpat police chief Arpit

Vijayvargiya stated that police and ambulances reached the spot promptly after the collapse. “The injured were rushed to nearby hospitals. Those with minor wounds received first aid and were discharged, while those with serious injuries are undergoing treatment,” he said.

District Magistrate Asmita Lal confirmed the annual nature of the festival, which has been observed by the local Jain community for three decades. “The wooden structure collapsed, leaving about 40 people injured. Twenty have already been treated and sent home, and others remain under medical care,” she said.

Eyewitness Rakesh Jain, a devotee present at the event, described the harrowing scene. “The platform is set up every year for the priests and devotees to offer laddoos. This time, it couldn’t bear the weight of the crowd, and it collapsed suddenly,” he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Recalibrating US-India ties

India-US relations face a shift as India tackles trade, immigration, amid Trump's 'America First' policy

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump engage in dialogue to strengthen bilateral relations, the future of US-India ties appears poised at a critical juncture. Modi's commitment to global peace, prosperity and security, paired with Trump's vision of 'America First,' highlights a partnership that must balance shared strategic goals with diverging domestic priorities. India and the US have cultivated a robust Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership over the years, encompassing key areas like defence, technology, energy and counterterrorism. President Trump's emphasis on India increasing its procurement of American-made security equipment underscores Washington's aim to deepen defence collaboration. With Modi's planned visit to the White House and continued diplomatic exchanges, both nations are set to expand their cooperation in these critical domains. However, this partnership extends beyond bilateral gains. Modi and Trump's discussions on global challenges, including tensions in West Asia and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, highlight their shared interest in playing pivotal roles on the global stage.



Trade remains a contentious issue, with Trump's protectionist policies, including potential tariff hikes, posing a challenge to India. The US President's focus on achieving a 'fair bilateral trading relationship' reflects his administration's concerns about trade imbalances. India, on the other hand, seeks to protect its economic interests while fostering a mutually beneficial partnership. Negotiating these trade tensions will require careful diplomacy, as both nations aim to preserve the benefits of their economic ties. The potential for increased investment, innovation and job creation through collaboration in sectors like renewable energy and space exploration offers a promising path forward. Immigration has emerged as yet another critical point of discussion. Trump's crackdown on illegal migrants and emphasis on tighter border controls have direct implications for India, one of the largest sources of irregular immigration outside Latin America. The US has identified approximately 18,000 Indian nationals for deportation, a figure India has cautiously addressed while advocating for a systematic verification process. Moreover, visa delays for Indian nationals have raised concerns, particularly as India is a significant contributor to the US tech workforce. Balancing Trump's domestic priorities with the need for a skilled global workforce will be essential to sustaining the mutually beneficial flow of talent and innovation. The relationship between India and the US is at once ripe with potential and fraught with challenges. While Trump's 'Make America Great Again' agenda and Modi's vision for a self-reliant India may occasionally clash, their shared goals of security, economic growth, and technological advancement offer ample ground for collaboration. As the world's largest democracies, India and the U.S. have a unique opportunity to lead by example in addressing global challenges.

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### PICTALK



Folk artists take part in a procession on the eve of the unveiling of 'Bhuvaneshwari Devi' statue, in Bengaluru

## Simulation-based learning: Transforming emergency medical training

By replicating real-world medical emergencies, this innovative training method bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical expertise

Simulation refers to the imitation of real-world processes or systems for training, education, or evaluation purposes. In emergency medical learning, simulation creates realistic scenarios that replicate medical emergencies, allowing healthcare providers to practice and refine their skills in a safe, controlled environment. The implementation of Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) by the National Medical Council (NMC) has shown that simulation significantly enhances clinical competence for both undergraduate and postgraduate medical students. One of the most significant advantages of simulation is that it enables learners to practice handling critical and high-stakes situations without risking patient safety. This is particularly important in emergencies, where errors can have severe consequences. By engaging in simulated scenarios, participants can repeatedly practice emergency protocols, improve technical skills such as intubation and defibrillation, and gain confidence in their abilities.



Simulations replicate the high-pressure environment of real emergencies, helping individuals develop the ability to make rapid, informed decisions under stress. They also provide a risk-free setting to identify and correct mistakes, enabling participants to learn how to prevent such errors in real-life situations. Additionally, exposure to diverse scenarios prepares learners to adapt to unexpected complications effectively. Teamwork plays a critical role in emergency medical training, and simulation emphasises the importance of collaboration and communication. Learners develop skills in articulating observations, providing updates, and conveying instructions clearly, which are essential in high-pressure situations. Simulation allows team members to define roles, such as team leader or airway manager and practice seamless coordination. Through repeated practice, team-based simulations foster trust, cohesion, and an understanding of each member's strengths, weaknesses and working styles. Structured debriefing sessions after simulations promote a culture of continuous learning by encouraging open discussions about successes and areas for improvement. These sessions help build leadership and follow-ership skills, enabling team

# Trump's America: A reality check for the Desis



BHOPINDER SINGH

In Trump's transactional world no group, not even the perceived 'model minority,' is immune from the fallout of his unpredictable policies

It's not Elon Musk's early frustrations with President Donald Trump handing over the crucial project to build America's AI (Artificial Intelligence) infrastructure to rival Sam Altman-led 'Stargate', that ought to worry us, but the fate of fellow Trumpeteer, Vivek Ramaswamy, that rings closer home. During the campaign trail, the racist Trump was busy mocking minority ethnicities and religions, the Indian-American Desis, seemed smug in assuming that somehow, they were a cut above the other minorities. The purported personal equation between Trump and the Indian Prime Minister was bandied as proof of the special treatment, that awaited India and Indians.



Names of a few Indian-Americans in the new Trump administration (especially of Vivek Ramaswamy in the Department of Government Efficiency or DOGE) were showcased as proofs of Trump's affection for the world's largest democracy. The lazy and simplistic assumption was that he'd be tough on the likes of China and Pakistan, hence pro-India. But the cold reality of dealing with the unpredictable politics of Trump hit much earlier than even anticipated by commentators who had been warning of Trump's ascendancy, despite many shortcomings of the Democrats under Joe Biden. For starters, Chinese President Xi Jinping got an invite to attend the swearing-in of President Trump, but the Indian Prime Minister didn't. Soon thereafter Trump kept peppering his Make-America-Great-Again (MAGA) spiel with threats of tariff spikes against traditional allies like Canada, Denmark, Mexico etc., (including naming India) but recently suggested that he'd 'rather not' impose tariffs against China - this after promising up to 60% tariffs against China during the campaign! He flipped. Soon thereafter, the Indian-American community was hit the hardest of all immigrant communities by the direct implications of the executive order ending birthright citizenship. Chances for many Indians working under H-1B (work), H-4

(dependent), L (intra-company transfer) and F (student) got jeopardized, as amongst the largest and fastest-growing immigrant groups in the US. With all assumed equations besetting Washington DC and Delhi, it seems fait accompli with little scope for Delhi to counter-influence a policy measure, that impacts it, more than anyone else. Such radical disruptions were certainly not the norm in the Biden era. The supposed leverage of a voluble Vivek Ramaswamy with a Trump also seems to have come a cropper, given the mystery surrounding Vivek's sudden decision to leave DOGE. Having invested a lot of personal stake, content, and pride, in supporting the Trump ascendancy to power (clearly prematurely?), Vivek is at pains to deny that his ouster has anything to do with him having defended the immigration position after calling some, 'lazy Americans'. To add insult to injury of being forced into grandstanding, a journalist has just released a video of Vivek's text confirming his departure from Trump, due to the same. The ostensible bid for Ohio Governorship (if true?) is an afterthought and wasn't the intention, even a week earlier. That for a Trump, anyone is completely dispensable once a purpose has been served, be it



IT IS A LESSON THAT VIVEK RAMASWAMY OR EVEN ELON MUSK WILL WAKE UP TO, AS IN THE INDIFFERENT AND TRANSACTIONAL WORLDVIEW OF A TRUMP, TOPICAL RELEVANCE IS ALL THAT MATTERS TO THE AUTHOR OF THE 'ART OF DEAL'

an individual, cause, country, or even a supportive Indian-American like Vivek, seems true. Anyone can be thrown under the bus, irrespective of their ethnicity or personal chemistry. A telling tweet by Vivek on 26th Dec 2024 captures his nuanced position on the contentious immigration issue (as wishfully believed by many Indian-Americans to be the first amongst the equals within minorities, owing to our unique culture and work ethics). He had commented, "The reason top tech companies often hire foreign-born & first-generation engineers over 'native' Americans isn't because of an innate American IQ deficit (a lazy & wrong explanation). A key part of it comes down to the c-word: culture". The underlying suggestion is that Indians do not suffer from the supposed 'Wokeism' of the Democrats as Indians do not have "a culture that celebrates the prom queen over the math olympiad champ, or the jock over the valedictorian", hence would escape the prying eyes of a Trump targeting immigrants. While it is true that Trump has spoken about the logic of 'meritocracy' in extending citizenship - it is equally true that in applying his power of potential misuse, he hasn't spared or protected the interests of the Indian-American community which did tick most of the qualifying boxes defined by Trump. The hard truth is that Trump has no special affinity or even intention of any preferential treatment to Indian Americans or India if his conduct in the initial few days of his Presidency is anything to go by. The fact is, the one-time star of the TV series 'Apprentice' is more famous for his heartless line "You're fired" than for any historical demonstration of empathetic leadership. Ultimately, it is a lesson that Vivek Ramaswamy or even Elon Musk will wake up to, as in the indifferent and transactional worldview of a Trump, topical relevance is all that matters to the author of the 'Art of Deal' (that too, ghostwritten). Those eagerly waiting for a decisive and assertive POTUSA in Trump who would do wonders for India, need to brace for some discomforting reality check. Biden had limitations and undeniable failings, but he wasn't a bull in a China shop or necessarily anti-India, ever. With Trump, you never know, as Indians or India don't seem anything special, at least for now. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**CHINA TAKES ON AI**  
Madam — Less than a week after his swearing-in ceremony, US President Trump said that the private sector would invest \$500 billion in AI technology, making the US the most advanced country in the world and creating jobs for millions. Just a week after this statement, the US stock market crashed on Monday, January 27. The reason behind this was the DeepSeek app launched by China last week, which became the most downloaded free app in the US, beating rivals including ChatGPT. DeepSeek was reportedly developed at a fraction of the cost of its competitors, raising questions about the future of America's AI dominance and the scale of investment planned by US firms. AI leader Nvidia's share price sank 17 per cent, and it lost about \$593 billion in stock market value, according to market experts, the biggest one-day loss ever for a company on Wall Street. I was wondering if Mr. Trump, who has just given a 75-day extension to China's app TikTok, will be able to show his displeasure with China and announce a 100 percent import duty on it instead of 60 percent. But it doesn't seem that Trump will be able to deal with China the way he deals with Mexico and Colombia. That's why he has refrained from imposing the previously announced 60 percent import duty. On the contrary, he is advising his American tech companies that 'this is a wake-up call for you guys'. Despite limited access to advanced hardware, DeepSeek's ability to compete with American models shows that software simplicity and data efficiency can compensate for hardware constraints, and underestimating China in any field can be a cause of embarrassment for anyone.  
Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

### India-China border talks



The visit to Beijing by the foreign secretary, Vikram Misri and a series of high-level meetings between the officials of India and China meant to bring some normalcy back to their ties after years of heightened tensions. While these hectic parleys demonstrate intent on both sides to try to build on the momentum from the border pullback, the recent crises in their relationship have deepened mutu-

al distrust that will not go away with a few meetings. The past few months have seen India raise concerns about a new Chinese plan to build the world's largest dam in Tibet on the upstream part of what India calls the Brahmaputra. New Delhi fears that the dam could allow Beijing to weaponise water, either by denying India adequate water or by unleashing floods. The Quad grouping, which met in Washington on the margins of the swearing-in ceremony of Donald Trump, issued a statement that was more overtly critical of China and its territorial ambitions in the Indo-Pacific than has been the norm. No one expects New Delhi and Beijing to be best friends. But they do not need to be enemies either.  
N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

the field of digital security. The Department of Telecommunications has developed an innovative and indigenous system that identifies and blocks the misuse of Indian mobile numbers. The primary aim of this initiative is to free users from cyber fraud and safeguard their financial interests. This new system has achieved the remarkable feat of reducing fraudulent international calls by 90 per cent within just 24 hours. Additionally, by blocking more than 20 foreign service providers, the government has sent a clear message that there is no place for such activities. This effort is not only a stringent step toward preventing fraudsters but also a symbol of securing the digital lives of Indian citizens. It is a critical move toward realising the vision of Digital India. The initiative not only curbs cybercrimes but also enhances the sense of trust and security among citizens. It brings greater transparency to the telecom sector and helps users feel safer in their digital activities. This initiative truly marks a new chapter in the realm of digital security.  
R K Jain | Barwani

**SMRITI MANDHANA WINS ICC AWARD**  
Madam — India's star batter Smriti Mandhana was adjudged as the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2024, the global body announcement. Mandhana had a memorable outing with the bat in 2024. She smashed 747 runs this year with the help of four centuries and three fifties in 13 games. She set new batting standards in ODIs, scoring more runs than she ever had before in a calendar year. She also tested herself with the ball in hand and ended up taking a wicket as well. The 28-year-old now has equalled New Zealand batter Suzie Bates' record of winning the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year on multiple occasions. Mandhana won her ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award in 2018.  
Jayanthi Subramanian | Mumbai



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE PATH TO BEING TRULY SPECIAL

We all want to feel special, but often our desires and decisions lead us astray



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We all want to be special. There is nothing wrong with such thinking, but most of us do not desire properly or decide sensibly. In this article, I will shed some light on how to do both of these wisely. What should we desire? This must be in sync with our circumstances and capabilities. Imagine desiring to become very rich while doing a small business. Similarly, desiring to become famous anytime soon while being a club-level sportsman is not wise.

We will be disappointed only. Persons not blessed with good looks should accept their limitations and focus on what capabilities they have been blessed with. There was a dark and not-so-good-looking actress in the USA; she only got small roles. But she acted so well that she became a household name. A social worker in India decided to help tribals. He moved in with them. He became very famous and very special. However, something awaits all of us; which is not so difficult either. This is simply to become a devotee of God, and He will make us special.

I will write more about it in this article. The same wisdom should



be used in decision-making. When there is a choice between being good and not so good, what should we choose? The same logic applies to following dharma and staying within 'maryada' (limits). We know what these are, but are very causal about controlling ourselves. Succumbing to negative emotions like anger, lust, greed, hate, etc. is so easy. What it does is to make us very ordinary. We have been taught to be disciplined in eating, sleeping, entertainment and what we do and how much. Are we prepared to do that? If we are keen on becoming special, we have to.

A similar yardstick is required in choosing goals. Are they good in the long term? Or, the short-term is easy? What will you choose? Regarding usefulness to others, we should be very sincere. If we wish to be special in the eyes of others, this is the 'mantra'. Lastly, if we really and truly wish to be special, be dutiful; do all duties as best as possible. This will be the starting point in pleasing God, who is everything. After the efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus as everything is very rare. (The Bhagavad-Geeta verse #7.19) What will happen then? You will be rewarded like you cannot imagine. Because God is the controller of what happens to us. Begin doing some easy spiritual practices, which suit your nature.

I have a large photo of Lord Krishna, which I have hung on the right side of my bed. I spend a lot of time looking at the Lord, while I gently chant Krishna, Krishna, Krishna.....What has happened? I have become special. God guides me when I pray for His guidance and help. Isn't God omniscient? He knows what will work. God helps us as only He can, being the controller. I am beginning to feel secure. Fears and anxieties are reducing.

There is more peace. I can tolerate better what I must. Physical health is improving. There is steady progress, which is very satisfying. I feel that I have become special. This is possible for one and all. Nothing mentioned in this article is very difficult. One just has to be determined. Then, one can enjoy the status of being special.

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

## Budget 2025: Prioritise health education for a stronger India



RAHUL MEHRA

With over 40 per cent of India's population under 25, empowering youth with physical and mental is a vital investment in the nation's future



As the Union Budget for 2025 approaches, expectations run high across various sectors. Among these, education - specifically health education - deserves special attention. To ensure the holistic development of our youth, the government must consider allocating funds for the integration of health education into school curricula. Such an initiative will not only address immediate concerns but also align with the aspirational vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, where a healthy population becomes the cornerstone of a developed nation. With the Union Budget 2025 at the stage of finalisation, it is time to prioritise health education.

Allocating funds to this cause is not merely an educational reform; it is an investment in India's future. It is stated time and again, including in the National Education Policy, that it is critical to allocate public investment in education from the current over 4.5 per cent to about 6 per cent of total budgetary allocation. Besides this, the Government must consider designing schemes that ensure health education is imparted to children at an early stage to be able to build a healthy society. Development is not merely economic or technological - it is also social, cultural and, above all, human.

A nation's progress depends on the health of its people, and with over 40 per cent of India's population under 25, ensuring the health and wellbeing of its youth is critical. This cannot be achieved without systematically integrating health education into our school curricula. Our goal is to improve student's health knowledge and more importantly, their health behavior. The urgency for such an intervention is rooted in troubling realities. Studies indicate that 30-40 per cent of Indian students face serious mental health challenges. A Global School



A NATION'S PROGRESS DEPENDS ON THE HEALTH OF ITS PEOPLE, AND WITH OVER 40 PER CENT OF INDIA'S POPULATION UNDER 25, ENSURING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF ITS YOUTH IS CRITICAL

Health Survey (GSHS) conducted as far back as 2007 revealed that more than 25 per cent of students aged 13-17 experienced periods of deep sadness or hopelessness, often disrupting their daily activities. These numbers have only worsened in the years since, as highlighted by small-scale studies and the alarming rise in student suicides. Ignoring the mental and physical health of students today will lead to grave consequences for the nation tomorrow.

The contrast between India and nations that give primacy to health education is stark. In the United States, the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) collects data every two years on the health behaviours of high school students. This data informs evidence-based interventions and policies that address mental health, substance abuse, nutrition, and other critical issues. Many US states mandate health education, covering mental, physical, and social health literacy. Similarly, countries like the United Kingdom and Canada have integrated health education into their school curricula, starting at the primary level.

India, however, lacks a comprehensive approach. While physical education is emphasised in schools, the broader concept of health education, encompassing mental and social wellbeing, is largely absent. The much-lauded National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 only touches upon physical health, failing to address the critical need for a holistic health education framework. Why does this matter? Because healthy individuals contribute to a healthier economy. Poor health not only

reduces productivity but also pushes families into financial crises due to high medical expenses.

India's average life expectancy in 'full health' is a mere 60 years, significantly lower than that of many Asian countries, including Japan (74 years) and China (69 years). A healthy lifestyle, ingrained early, can change this trajectory. Countries like Japan provide valuable lessons. Their emphasis on hygiene, nutrition and physical activity is embedded in their cultural fabric. Children grow up practising these habits, resulting in a population that enjoys a higher quality of life and longer years of productive health.

India, with its rich traditions of yoga and Ayurveda, has the cultural foundations to promote such a shift. However, without institutionalising health education, these remain underutilised. Introducing health education as a mandatory subject in schools can address this gap.

A comprehensive curriculum must include modules on physical fitness, mental health resilience, nutrition, social interaction and technology use. For instance, students could learn the importance of balanced diets, strategies to cope with academic pressure, and the benefits of physical activities and mindfulness practices.

The curriculum should also emphasise practical life skills, such as decision-making, interpersonal communication, and self-advocacy, to prepare students for real-world challenges. A structured approach is essential. First, the government must design a standardised health education curriculum with clear performance

benchmarks. Students' progress should be evaluated at key stages, such as the end of classes 6, 8, and 10. Second, teachers need specialised training to effectively deliver this curriculum. Public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in addressing resource gaps and providing innovative solutions.

Importantly, this initiative aligns seamlessly with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Viksit Bharat 2047. A healthy India is a productive India. By equipping the younger generation with the knowledge and skills to prioritise their wellbeing, we are not only improving individual lives but also strengthening the nation's human capital, driving economic growth, and enhancing societal happiness.

Beyond the classroom, the ripple effects of mandatory health education can be transformative. A population that understands the value of preventive care will reduce the burden on India's healthcare system. Families will adopt healthier lifestyles, and communities will benefit from reduced rates of lifestyle-related diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart ailments.

The road to Viksit Bharat 2047 is paved with initiatives that prioritise people over policies, and action over aspirations. Health education is not just a subject; it is a foundation for a stronger, healthier, and more prosperous India.

(The writer is UNESCO Chair for Global Health & Education and Chairman of, Tarang Health Alliance. Views expressed are personal)

## How restoring forests can combat climate change and empower communities

## Reforestation stands as both a climate action imperative and a cornerstone for building sustainable future

Amid escalating climate changes, reforestation has come to be one of the most effective, nature-driven methods to combat environmental degradation and enhance climate resilience. Beyond absorbing carbon dioxide, forests support livelihoods, stabilise ecosystems, and foster sustainable communities. Forests have a great role in countering global warming and providing essential resources that not only support communities but also manufacturing and trade.

However, as research indicates, India in the past two decades has lost nearly 414-kilo hectares of humid primary forest which made up 18 per cent of its total tree loss. This highlights an urgent need to prioritise reforestation, not



SHWETA RAWAT

just as a climate action tool but also as a cornerstone for community development.

**Reforestation's Dual Role:** Climate Action and Community Resilience Forests have an immense capacity to capture and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thus reducing the greenhouse effect.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established in 1988 estimates that reforestation and afforestation could account for up to 30 per cent of the carbon reduction required to limit global warming. Additionally, forests regulate microclimates, mitigating the urban heat island effect and stabilising local weather patterns crucial for agriculture. Reforestation plays a crucial role in combating desertification, which poses a significant threat to food security, water availability and livelihoods. Forests help anchor the soil, replenish organic matter, and improve water retention, thereby enhancing agricultural productivity and water access, particularly in ecologically fragile regions. According to

the India State of Forest Report 2021 (ISFR), tribal and rural communities living in these areas face high vulnerability but also exhibit remarkable climate resilience.

For these communities, reforestation is a game-changer as it can help prevent and even undo desertification by stabilising the soil using tree roots, which reduces wind and water erosion. Furthermore, forests help replenish organic material in the soil, leading to improved water retention and increased fertility which can lead to environmental regeneration and socio-economic stability.

**Community-driven Reforestation:** A Proven Model Even with rapid urbanisation, India's conservation ethos has a rich legacy of pro-



tecting nature. Be it the collective Chipko movement of the 1970s or the inspirational restoration of more than 1300 acres of Brahmaputra's Forest by Jadav Payeng, the Forest Man of India, the success of any reforestation effort hinges on community and local participation.

With the input of individuals and stakeholders from communities, any conservation project remains culturally relevant, ecologically sound and

economically beneficial. Take Aravalli Hills Afforestation Project as an example for instance. By involving Village Forest Protection Committees, the project rejuvenated over 151,390 hectares of degraded land and built nearly 200 water storage dams to support wildlife, boosting biodiversity and tiger populations in Sariska Sanctuary. With an impressive 87 per cent tree survival rate, the initiative balanced environmental restoration with tangible social benefits such as job creation and improved livelihoods.

This model demonstrates that sustainable reforestation thrives on collaboration, community empowerment, and measurable impact. Partnerships for a Greener Future To scale reforestation

efforts, collaboration is key. Governments, philanthropies, non-profits and businesses must unite to amplify impact. For instance, non-profits can mobilise grassroots participation and bring cultural insights. Corporations can leverage resources for large-scale projects while fulfilling sustainability commitments. Local governments can ensure policy alignment and provide regulatory support.

Together, these stakeholders can create integrated strategies that combine ecological restoration with community upliftment. Initiatives like the National Afforestation Programme and the Green India Mission lay a solid foundation, but partnerships can catalyse progress. Reforestation for Generations to Come

Reforestation offers a rare synergy—mitigating climate change while addressing critical challenges like water scarcity, food insecurity and rural poverty. It is not merely an environmental solution but a pathway to holistic development. By fostering meaningful partnerships with non-profits, businesses, and communities, and aligning efforts with governmental initiatives.

The time to act is now. With a shared vision and commitment, we can restore forests not just as carbon sinks but as vibrant ecosystems that sustain life and empower generations. A greener, more resilient future is within our reach—if we plant the seeds today.

(The writer is chairperson and founder, The Hans Foundation; views are personal)

# Trump signs order paving way for transgender troop ban

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Monday directing Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth to revise the Pentagon's policy on transgender troops, likely setting in motion a future ban on their military service. He also ordered troops to be reinstated who had left voluntarily or been booted for refusing COVID-19 vaccines, outlined new rollbacks in diversity programmes and provided for the deployment of a space-based missile defence shield for the US — all on Hegseth's first day. Trump and Hegseth had described parts of the anticipated orders throughout the day, but the exact language did not drop until late Monday. A transgender ban had been widely expected, and Trump's order largely sets the stage for a future ban — but directs Hegseth to come up with how that

would be implemented in policy. In his order, Trump claimed that service by troops who identify as a gender other than their biological one "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honourable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life" and is harmful to military readiness, requiring a revised policy to address the matter. Trump had tried to ban transgender troops during his first term, but it was tangled up in the courts for years before being overturned by then-President Joe Biden shortly after he took office. Two groups, Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign, which represent transgender troops the first time, vowed to fight again. "We have been here before and seven years ago were able to successfully block the earlier administration's effort," Lambda Legal attorney Sasha Buchert said. "Not only is such a move

cruel, it compromises the safety and security of our country and is particularly dangerous and wrong. As we promised then, so do we now: we will sue." During his first presidency, Trump established US Space Command and the US Space Force, which just marked its fifth birthday. Space continues to be a priority for the president, who has now directed the Pentagon to begin to develop the capability to shoot down missiles from space. For years, the US has cautioned that China, Russia and others were weaponising space. It has at times declassified information about both countries' efforts to create offensive weapons to disable critical US satellites, including the capability to move satellites from orbit, temporarily blind them or potentially even destroy them. The Space Force is building a low-orbit ring of redundant

satellites that can more quickly track and detect potential missile launches. But establishing a way to shoot missiles down from space is something the US has not pursued since President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defence Initiative — "Star Wars" as it was commonly known — in the 1980s. The system was never developed due to cost and technological limitations. In his order called "an Iron Dome for America", Trump called for a multilayer missile defence system capable of countering an array of threats to the US, to include development and deployment of space-based interceptors. At least 8,200 troops were forced out of the military in 2021 for refusing to obey a lawful order when they declined to get the vaccine. Notices advising them they could return were sent out in 2023, but just 113 have reenlisted.

# Tariff threat sways Colombia, but risks rise with Canada, Mexico

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Having already forced Colombia to accept deportees by threatening a 25 per cent tariff, President Donald Trump is readying the same move against Canada and Mexico as soon as Saturday. But this time, the stakes are higher and many economists surveying the possible damage doubt Trump would be comfortable with what they say would be self-inflicted wounds from the tariffs. "The potential for such sizable economic impacts ought to act as enough of a deterrent that Trump will not end up implementing these higher tariffs," said Matthew Martin, senior US economist at the consultancy Oxford Economics. Trump has repeatedly insisted that tariffs are coming on Canada and Mexico, despite both countries seeking to address his stated concerns about illegal border crossings and the smuggling of fentanyl. But the Republican president is also motivated by the idea that tariffs would force other countries to "respect" the United States. "We're going to immediately install massive tariffs," Trump said in a Monday speech, adding, "Colombia is traditionally a very, very strong-willed country," but it backed down rather than face import taxes. Multiple economic analyses show

that universal tariffs against Canada and Mexico risk more inflation and an economic slowdown. It's a much larger play than Trump's moves against Colombia, which accounts for roughly 0.5 per cent of US imports. By contrast, nearly 30 per cent of all US imports hail from Canada and Mexico, amplifying the risk that tariffs could fuel inflation and undermine Trump's campaign promises to get prices under control. Trump's director of the White House National Economic Council, Kevin Hassett, dismissed these concerns. He said the sceptical analyses of tariffs don't look at the totality of Trump's promises. "When the people who are trying to cause panic over President Trump's trade policy simulate what it's going to do, they don't account for all the other policies," Hassett said in a Monday interview on the Fox Business Network. "So President Trump is drill, baby, drill, and deregulate and tax cuts and reduce spending." After Trump's initial threat of 25 per cent tariffs in November, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum suggested Mexico could retaliate with tariffs of its own. Since then, she has been more measured, choosing to emphasize the strong bilateral relationship and willingness to engage in dialogue as the number of detentions at the US-Mexico border has plunged.

Sheinbaum pointed out in November that drugs were a US problem, but in December the Mexican military seized more than a ton of fentanyl pills in two raids, calling it the biggest catch of synthetic opioids in Mexico's history. On Monday, Sheinbaum applauded the agreement reached by the Trump administration and Colombia. "I believe the important thing, as I said on the first day, is to always act with a cool head, defending each country's sovereignty and the respect among nations and peoples," she said. Top Canadian ministers said last week that Canada was prepared to retaliate if Trump imposed import taxes, even as Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said they "will continue to work on preventing tariffs". The working theory in Canada appears to involve being ready for anything that the US president might do. On Monday, the economics division of the insurance company Nationwide estimated that Trump's proposed tariffs on Canada and Mexico would increase inflation by as much as 0.5 percentage points and pull down growth by 0.7 percentage points. The analysis noted it did not "account for potential retaliatory tariffs from Canada or Mexico, which could amplify the deleterious impact on inflation and GDP growth".

# Serbia's PM resigns as anti-corruption protests grow

PTI ■ BELGRADE

Serbia's populist Prime Minister Milos Vucovic resigned Tuesday in an attempt to calm political tensions and pressure roiled by weeks of massive anti-corruption protests over the deadly collapse of a concrete canopy. The canopy collapse in November, which killed 15 people in the northern city of Novi Sad, has become a flashpoint reflecting wider discontent with the increasingly autocratic rule of Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic. He has faced accusations of curbing democratic freedoms in Serbia despite formally seeking European Union membership for the troubled Balkan nation. "It is my appeal for everyone to calm down the passions and return to dialogue," Vucovic told a news conference announcing his resignation. Novi Sad Mayor Milan Djuric also stepped down on Tuesday. Vucovic's resignation could lead to an early parliamentary election. The resignation must be confirmed by Serbia's parliament, which has 30 days to choose a new government or



call a snap election. Pro-government media said President Vucic will attend a Cabinet session on Tuesday evening to decide whether a new prime minister-designate will be appointed or an early election called. Opposition parties have said they would insist on a transitional government that would create conditions for a free and fair election. Vucic's populists have faced accusations of irregularities during past elections. Vucovic became the prime minister in April 2024, after the Serbian Progressive Party won most votes in an election

marred by tensions. "They (ruling party) have been in a free fall since the Novi Sad tragedy," journalist Slobodan Georgiev said on N1 television, adding that Vucic was seeking a "buffer" with the prime minister's resignation. Vucic in the past had managed to cushion the impact of anti-government street protests, but the current student movement has garnered widespread support from all walks of life, including actors, farmers, lawyers and judges. The students' call for justice has resonated in a country where corruption is widespread and few feel that the state institutions work in the interests of citizens. Branimir Jovancevic, professor at the Faculty of Chemistry in Belgrade, expressed hope that Vucovic's resignation is a first step toward further political changes in Serbia, where power is concentrated in the hands of the president although his constitutional role is largely ceremonial. "If the president thinks that by replacing one, essentially, unimportant figure... will solve the problem... he is deeply mistaken," said Jovancevic. "This

must lead to total political changes because autocracy and dictatorship in Serbia, in the heart of Europe, must be stopped." On Monday, tens of thousands of people joined striking university students in a 24-hour blockade of a key traffic intersection in the Serbian capital. Serbia's students are demanding accountability for the canopy collapse that critics have blamed on rampant government corruption. Classes at Serbia's universities and dozens of schools have been blocked for two months with students camping inside their faculty buildings. In another attempt to defuse tensions, Vucic, Vucovic and Parliament Speaker Ana Brnabic on Monday evening urged dialogue with the students, who have so far rebuffed such invitations. They say Vucic shouldn't be the one holding talks with them but that government institutions such as police and the judiciary should do their job. Vucovic said the immediate cause for his quitting was an attack on a female student in Novi Sad early Tuesday by assailants allegedly from the

ruling Serbian Progressive Party. Vucovic said that "whenever it seems there is hope to return to social dialogue, to talk... it's like an invisible hand creates a new incident and tensions mount again." But the outgoing prime minister also said that the street protests "undoubtedly" have been organized from abroad "with an aim to directly jeopardize Serbia as a state." Vucovic offered no evidence for his claims that echoed earlier similar statements by Vucic. "I can never justify or understand any of these protests, blockades of lives, of roads and the freedom of movement of other citizens," he said. Students in Novi Sad said they were horrified by the assault they said was carried out by thugs with baseball bats. They attacked two groups of students and chased them in their car, the students said. Prosecutors later said that four people have been detained. "We are horrified over the state of our society where such a situation is possible," the students said in an Instagram post. "We have had enough of blood." The students called a big rally

in Novi Sad later Tuesday in response to the attack. Serbia's prosecutors have filed charges against 13 people, including a government minister and several state officials for the November canopy collapse. But the former Construction Minister Goran Vesic, who had resigned shortly after the canopy crash, has been released from detention, fuelling doubts over the investigation's independence. The main railway station in Novi Sad was renovated and inaugurated twice in recent years as part of a wider infrastructure deal with Chinese state companies and a fast railway link with neighbouring Hungary. Several incidents have marred the street demonstrations in the past weeks, including drivers ramming in to the crowds on two occasions, when two young women were injured. Students and others have been holding daily 15-minute traffic blockades throughout Serbia at 11:52 am, the exact same time the concrete canopy crashed down on Nov 1. The blockades honour the 15 victims, including two children. The blockades were also held on Tuesday.

# Russian govt delegation makes first official visit to Syria since Assad's fall

PTI ■ DAMASCUS

A delegation of Russian officials arrived in Damascus on Tuesday, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported. It is the first such delegation to visit Syria since the fall of former President Bashar Assad, an ally of Moscow, in December in a lightning rebel offensive. Assad took refuge in Russia after his ouster. The report said the delegation included Russian deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov and the Russian president's special envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentyev. RIA Novosti didn't offer any other details of the visit. There was no official comment from Syria's interim government, but the semi-official Al Watan newspaper reported that the Russian delegation would meet with the country's de facto leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, and with the its foreign minister.

Moscow's scorched-earth intervention in support of Assad once turned the tide of Syria's civil war. Syria's new authorities have not cut off relations with Moscow or forced a complete exit of Russian military forces from bases in Syria, but earlier this month, Al Watan reported that a contract with a Russian company to manage the port in Tartous had been cancelled. Following Assad's downfall, Russia relocated its troops and assets from all over Syria to its main hub at the Hmeimim air base near Latakia. There has been no indication that Moscow was preparing to evacuate the Hmeimim base or the naval facility in Tartous altogether. The termination of a contract for a Russian company to modernise the Tartus commercial port did not directly impact the Russian naval facility, which was leased under a separate deal.



A boy lights incense inside Dongyue Temple ahead of Lunar New Year in Beijing on Tuesday.

# Protesters attack embassies in Congo's capital

PTI ■ GOMA

Dozens of demonstrators attacked several foreign embassies, including those of Rwanda, France and Belgium, on Tuesday demanding that they oppose the advance of Rwanda-backed M23 rebels into a major city in the country's conflict-battered east. Police fired teargas at the protesters as they marched to the embassies in Kinshasa, looting and setting fires to parts of the buildings. The embassies of Kenya and Uganda were also attacked, according to Associated Press journalists at the scene. Congo's security forces were attempting to slow the rebels, who advanced into Goma, a key eastern city, in a major escalation of the decades-long conflict. The M23 rebels are one of about 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in the mineral-rich region in the conflict, one of Africa's

largest. The protesters demanded that the international community pressure Rwanda over the rebel advance. "We denounce the hypocrisy of the international community," said Timothée Tshishimbi, one of the protesters. "They must tell Rwanda to stop this adventure." Residents reported gunfire overnight in Goma, a city of 2 million people which the rebels claimed to have captured on Monday. Explosions and gunfire were heard near the now-shut Goma airport. Goma is a regional trade and humanitarian hub holding hundreds of thousands of the more than 6 million people displaced by eastern Congo's prolonged conflict over ethnic tensions that have resulted in one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. The M23 rebels temporarily took over Goma in 2012 before being forced to pull out under international pres-

sure, and resurfaced in late 2021 with increasing support from Rwanda, according to Congo's government and United Nations experts. Rwanda has denied such support. It was unclear how much of Goma is controlled by the rebels, who marched into the city early Monday to both fear and cheers among its residents. It was the culmination of weeks of fighting during which the rebels captured several towns in a shocking advance. "Since morning we have heard bomb explosions and crackling bullets," said Sam Luwawa, a resident of Goma. "So far we cannot say who really controls the city." Three South African peacekeepers were killed on Monday when the rebels launched a mortar bomb toward the Goma airport which landed on the nearby South African National Defense Force, while a fourth soldier succumbed to injuries

sustained in fighting days ago, the South African Department of Defence said Tuesday. That makes 17 peacekeepers and foreign soldiers who have been killed in the fighting, according to UN and army officials. The humanitarian situation in Goma "is extremely, extremely worrying, with a new threshold of violence and suffering reached today," Bruno Lemarquis, the United Nations humanitarian coordinator for Congo, told reporters in a video news conference on Monday. He said hundreds of thousands of people were attempting to flee the violence. There were active combat zones in all areas of the city, with civilians taking cover and heavy artillery fire directed at the city centre on Monday, Lemarquis said. He said several shells struck the Charité Maternelle Hospital in central Goma, "killing and injuring civilians, including newborns

and pregnant women." "What is unfolding in Goma is coming on top of what is already one of the most protracted, complex, serious humanitarian crises on Earth, with close to 6.5 million displaced people in the country, including close to 3 million displaced people in North Kivu," Lemarquis said. Aid groups are reporting they are unable to reach displaced people who rely on them for food and other necessities. "Key roads surrounding Goma are blocked, and the city's airport can no longer be used for evacuation and humanitarian efforts. Power and water have reportedly been cut to many areas of the city," said David Munkley, head of operations in eastern Congo for the Christian aid group World Vision. In addition to the UN, several countries including the United States, United Kingdom and France have condemned Rwanda for the rebel advance.

# 1975 was International Women's year; 50 years on, the fight continues

PTI ■ SYDNEY

In December 1972, the same month the Whitlam government was first elected, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY). This set in train a series of world-changing events, in which Australia was to play a significant part. The aim of IWY was to end discrimination against women and enable them to participate fully in economic, social and political life. Fifty years later, such participation has become an indicator of development and good governance. But the full promise of International Women's year has yet to be fulfilled, hampered by pushback

and the scourge of gender-based violence. "The greatest consciousness-raising event in history" Dubbed "the greatest consciousness-raising event in history", the UN's first World Conference on Women took place in Mexico City in June 1975. Consciousness-raising had been part of the repertoire of women's liberation. Now it was taken up by government and intergovernmental bodies. The Mexico City conference was agenda-setting in many ways. The Australian government delegation, led by Elizabeth Reid, helped introduce the world of multilateral diplomacy to the language of the women's movement. As Reid said: "We argued that, whenever the words "racism",

"colonialism" and "neo-colonialism" occurred in documents of the conference, so too should "sexism", a term that had not to that date appeared in United Nations documents or debates." Reid held the position of women's adviser to the prime minister. In this pioneering role, she had been able to obtain government commitment and funding for Australia's own national consciousness-raising exercise during IWY. A wide range of small grants promoted attitudinal change — "the revolution in our heads" — whether in traditional women's organisations, churches and unions, or through providing help such as Gestetner machines to the new women's centres.

grants explicitly did not include the new women's services, including refuges, women's health centres and rape crisis centres. Their funding was now regarded as an ongoing responsibility for government, rather than suitable for one-off grants. IWY began in Australia with a televised conversation on New Year's Day between Reid and Governor-General John Kerr on hopes and aspirations for the year. On International Women's Day (March 8), Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's speech emphasised the need for attitudinal change: Both men and women must be made aware of our habitual patterns of prejudice which we often do not see as such but whose existence manifests itself

in our language and our behaviour. The Australian postal service celebrated the day by releasing a stamp featuring the IWY symbol, showing the spirit of women breaking free of their traditional bonds. At Reid's suggestion, IWY materials, including the symbol, were printed in the purple, green and white first adopted by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1908 and now known as the suffragette colours. Inside government, Reid had introduced the idea that all Cabinet submissions needed to be analysed for gender impact. After the Mexico City conference, this idea became part of new international norms of governance. Following the adoption at the

conference of the World Plan of Action, the idea that governments needed specialised policy machinery to promote gender equality was disseminated around the world. Given the amount of ground to be covered, IWY was expanded to a UN Decade for Women (1976–85). By the end of it, 127 countries had established some form of government machinery to advance the status of women. Each of the successive UN world conferences (Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, Beijing 1995) generated new plans of action and strengthened systems of reporting by governments. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was a high point. Its "platform for action" provided further impe-

tus for what was now called "gender mainstreaming". By 2018, every country recognised by the UN except North Korea had established government machinery for this purpose. The global diffusion of this policy innovation was unprecedented in its rapidity. At the same time, Australia took the lead in another best-practice innovation. In 1984, the Commonwealth government pioneered what became known as "gender budgeting". This required departments to disaggregate the ways particular budgetary decisions affected men and women. As feminist economists pointed out, when the economic and social division of labour was taken into account, no bud-

getary decision could be assumed to be gender-neutral. Governments had emphasised special programs for women, a relatively small part of annual budgets, rather than the more substantial impact on women of macro-economic policy. Standard-setting bodies such as the OECD helped promote gender budgeting as the best way to ensure such decisions did not inadvertently increase rather than reduce gender gaps. By 2022, gender budgeting had been taken up around the world, including in 61 per cent of OECD countries. Now that it had become an international marker of good governance, Australian governments were also reintroducing it after a period of abeyance.





# Banking stocks rises after RBI's liquidity boost

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Banking stocks were in the limelight on Tuesday, with Axis Bank and HDFC Bank climbing three per cent after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced measures to inject liquidity of ₹1.5 lakh crore into the banking system. According to market experts, these measures are anticipated to ease liquidity conditions and increase the likelihood of an interest rate cut at the upcoming RBI policy meeting in February, offering relief to the banking sector amid concerns over high liquidity deficits. The scrip of Axis Bank rose 3.20 per cent to trade at ₹978.20 apiece, HDFC Bank shares advanced 3.09 per cent to ₹1,680, ICICI Bank by 2.15 per cent to ₹1,254.40 and IndusInd Bank went up 1.98 per cent to ₹944.25 per piece on the BSE. Bank of Baroda stock went up by 0.64 per cent to ₹221 apiece, State Bank of India appreciated by 0.28 per cent to ₹751.30 and Kotak Mahindra Bank increased 0.13 per cent to ₹1,883.05 apiece on the bourse. However, Federal Bank scrip plunged 4.97 per cent to ₹181.70 per piece, Yes Bank fell 1.51 per cent to ₹118.22 and Canara Bank decreased



1.20 per cent to ₹90.75 per piece. Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and IndusInd Bank were among the top gainers in the 30-share Sensex pack. Led by the gains in these stocks, the BSE

bankex index climbed 905.14 points or 1.65 per cent to 55,608.43. Meanwhile, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 595.57 points or 0.79 per cent to quote at 75,961.74 in the morning trade. On Monday, the Reserve Bank of India

said it will purchase government securities worth ₹60,000 crore in three tranches and announced several other steps to inject liquidity into the banking system. As part of measures to manage liquidity

conditions, the central bank also announced a USD/INR Buy/Sell Swap auction of USD five billion for a tenor of six months to be held on January 31, 2025. To inject liquidity, RBI said open market operations (OMO) purchase auctions of Government of India securities for an aggregate amount of ₹60,000 crore in three tranches of ₹20,000 crore each will be held on January 30, February 13, and February 20. Besides, a 56-day Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auction for a notified amount of ₹50,000 crore will be held on February 7. "The Reserve Bank will continue to monitor evolving liquidity and market conditions and take measures as appropriate to ensure orderly liquidity conditions," the RBI said on Monday. According to Geojit Financial Services' Chief Investment Strategist V K Vijayakumar, the RBI's announcement of measures to boost the liquidity in the banking system by around ₹1.5 trillion is positive for the market. This raises the prospects of an interest rate cut by the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in the February policy meeting, Vijayakumar said.

# Hyundai faces 19 per cent plunge in Q3 profits, amid geopolitical factors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyundai Motor India on Tuesday said its consolidated profit after tax declined 19 per cent to ₹1,161 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024, hit by subdued demand and geo-political factors. The auto major had reported a Profit After Tax (PAT) of ₹1,425 crore in the October-December period of last fiscal. Total revenue from operations declined to ₹16,648 crore in the third quarter as against ₹16,875 crore in the year-ago period. The decline in margins was mainly due to subdued demand and geo-political factors, the company said. "While the challenges persist in the overall market due to global factors, our business fundamentals remain strong, and we remain confident in our ability to leverage our strengths and actively explore the potential opportunities to improve our volumes and profitability," Hyundai Motor India Managing Director Unsoo Kim said. The company said it sold a total of 1,86,408 units of passenger vehicles during the third quarter, a dip of two per cent as compared with



1,90,979 units in the same period of last fiscal. The sales in the third quarter of this fiscal include 1,46,022 units in the domestic market with a strong contribution from the SUV segment, it added. Hyundai said it has achieved its highest-ever CNG penetration during the quarter, reaching 15 per cent which was 12 per cent in the third quarter of the previous year. During the quarter, the automaker said it has demonstrated robust growth in rural penetration reaching 21.2 per cent compared to 19.7 per cent in the same

period last year. The export volume stood at 40,386 units, it added. The automaker said it is confident about its growth trajectory and is committed to drive long-term value for its stakeholders. The company has a positive outlook on growing EV penetration in India and is headed towards electrification with a holistic approach, it added. Hyundai believes that the newly launched Creta Electric will drive phenomenal success, build strong momentum and will be a game-changer in the EV landscape, it said.

# SEBI cracks down on Front Running: Bans two from securities trading



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Tuesday restrained two persons from the securities market for six months and directed them to disgorge ₹34.26 lakh "wrongful gains" made by them through their involvement in front-running activities. Additionally, the regulator has imposed a penalty of Rs

five lakh each on the two persons - Mandar Uhas Bhatkar and Vikrant Bhimrao Kadam. Front-running refers to an illegal practice in the stock market where an entity trades based on advanced information from a broker or analyst before the information has been made available to its clients. The findings came after the SEBI conducted an investigation into the trading activities of Bhatkar and

certain other entities related to him, during the period November 2020 to September 2021. The investigation was carried out in order to ascertain as to whether there was any possible violation of the provisions of the PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) rules. In its investigation, SEBI found suspected front running of trades of SVI Consolidated Pvt Ltd (Big Client) in the cash market

and equity derivatives segments of NSE by its dealer Kadam (Notice No 2) in the trading account of Bhatkar (Notice No 1) based on the impending order of the Big Client during the period of investigation. "It has already been brought out that the fraudulent and unfair trade practice in this case is the front running carried out by Noticee No.2, through the account of Noticee No 1," SEBI said in its order. Accordingly, SEBI has restrained the persons from "accessing the securities market and further prohibited from buying, selling or otherwise dealing in securities (including units of mutual funds), directly or indirectly, or being associated with the securities market in any manner, whatsoever, for a period of six months". The two persons have been "directed to disgorge, jointly and severally, a sum of ₹34.26 lakh within 45 days. And the same shall be credited into the Investor Protection and Education Fund".

# TVS Credit records 40 per cent rise in Q3 PAT

PTI ■ CHENNAI

TVS Credit Services Ltd, a leading non-banking financial company, has registered a 40 per cent growth in its profit after tax for the October-December 2024 period at ₹240 crore following healthy growth in consumer loans and vehicle financing segments, the company said on Tuesday. The company registered a profit after tax of ₹172 crore during the corresponding quarter of the last financial year. For the nine months ending December 31, 2024, the profit after tax grew by 28 per cent to ₹541 crore, from ₹424 crore registered in the same period, a year ago. "In Q3 FY25, credit demand increased, driven by festive fervour, increased consumption and attractive consumer offers. TVS Credit witnessed healthy growth during this period, particularly in consumer loans and vehicle finance with an improvement in market share," a company statement said here. The total income during the



quarter under review rose by 12 per cent to ₹1,710 crore, from ₹1,527 crore registered in the year-ago period. For the nine months ending December 31, 2024, the total income went up by 16 per cent to ₹4,956 crore when compared to ₹4,276 crore registered a year ago. "In Q3 FY25, TVS Credit witnessed its highest ever quarterly growth in customers, disbursing loan

products to a record 16 lakh new customers, taking its total base to nearly 1.8 crore customers," the company said. The total Assets Under Management (AUM) witnessed a seven per cent growth during the quarter under review to ₹27,190 crore from ₹25,315 crore registered in the same quarter of last year, the company said.

# Bosch reports 12 per cent decline in Q3 net profit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Auto components maker Bosch on Tuesday said its consolidated net profit declined by 12 per cent to ₹458 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024. The company had reported a net profit of ₹518 crore in the October-December period of the last fiscal. Its revenue from operations rose to ₹4,466 crore for the third quarter compared to ₹4,205 crore in the year-ago period, Bosch said in a regulatory filing. "This quarter, Bosch generated growth through the development of advanced automotive components and customer-focused solutions. Increased service income from major OEMs testifies to their continued trust in us and our expertise," Bosch Ltd MD Guruprasad Mudlrap said. The performance further reinstates the company's strategic ability to stay cognizant of market needs and deliver successfully, he added. As part of the realignment of its Building Technologies division globally, the company said it will be carving out and transferring the Video, Access and Intrusion, and Communication systems business to Keenfinity India, a subsidiary of Bosch Security Systems BV Nederland. The company's board, based on the recommendations of the audit committee, have approved the transfer of the business at a value of not less than ₹595 crore, it added. Shares of Bosch on Tuesday ended 0.13 per cent up at ₹29,753 apiece on BSE.

# Stock markets snap two-day falling streak

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Snapping the two-day decline, benchmark stock indices and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday following intense buying in banking and rate-sensitive stocks as the RBI decided to inject liquidity into the financial system. The 30-share Sensex climbed 535.24 points or 0.71 per cent to settle at 75,901.41. During the day, the benchmark surged 1,146.79 points or 1.52 per cent to hit a high of 76,512.96. The broader 50-share NSE Nifty appreciated by 128.10 points or 0.56 per cent to close at 22,957.25. In the intraday session, the 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 308.8 points or 1.35 per cent to 23,137.95. "The national benchmark indices demonstrated optimism today, primarily driven by gains in the banking sector following the RBI's announcement of open market interventions to address liquidity concerns. "Large-cap stocks outperformed, as their valuations have now reached fair levels and are further supported by expectations that the market correction is nearing its bottom," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, said. Among the Sensex shares, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, Tata Motors, Tata Steel, ICICI Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Zomato, IndusInd Bank, Maruti Suzuki India and Bharti Airtel were the major gainers. Sun Pharmaceutical, Larsen & Toubro, ITC, HCL Technologies, NTPC, Power Grid, Nestle India, Tata Consultancy Services, and



Asian Paints were among the laggards. "Markets witnessed a relief rally after the recent weakness, but undertone remained bearish as most of the sectors ended in red which pulled down benchmark indices from the day's high levels," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Investors remain cautious due to growing global uncertainty and disappointing domestic economic indicators. However, optimism in banking, auto and realty aided sentiment even as worries over Trump's trade policies and fading chances of any rate cut in next month's credit policy weighed, Tapse added. Among the sectoral indices, Bankex climbed the most by 1.49 per cent, Financial Services by 1.45 per cent, Realty by 1.27 per cent, Auto by 1.16 per cent, and Consumer Discretionary rose by 0.23 per cent. Healthcare, Industrials, Utilities, Capital Goods, Power, Oil and Gas, Energy,

IT and Focused IT were among the laggards. In the broader market, Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC shares declined 4.82 per cent to close at ₹612.30 apiece on BSE after the company's December quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Shares of Anant Raj depreciated by 20 per cent to close at ₹534.45 apiece -- also its lower circuit level -- on the bourse. The scrip plunged after China's disruptive low-cost AI-startup DeepSeek threatened the dominance of US artificial intelligence (AI) companies such as Nvidia and triggered a rout among global tech stocks. Real estate company Anant Raj, last year in July, has diversified into the data center and AI solutions space through its arm, Anant Raj Cloud after partnering with Google. Despite, the markets settled on a positive note, 2,666 shares declined, 1,308 advanced and 110 stocks remain unchanged.

# Cipla Q3 net profit rises 49 per cent to ₹1,571 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Drug major Cipla on Tuesday said its consolidated net profit increased by 48.73 per cent to Rs 1,570.51 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024, riding on the back of growth across markets. The company had reported a net profit of Rs 1,055.9 crore in the October-December period of last fiscal. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 7,072.97 crore as against Rs 6,603.81 crore in the year-ago period. "In Q3FY25, we delivered growth across all our various geographies, despite a supply challenge in the US," Cipla MD and Global CEO Umang Vohra said. The company recorded a revenue growth of 8 per cent



over last year with a highest-ever EBITDA margin of 28.1 per cent, driven by mix and other operational efficiencies, he added. "Our One-India business grew at a healthy 10 per cent year on year. Key therapies in

branded prescription business continued to outpace the market growth, trade generics business growth trajectory is back on track and anchor brands of consumer health business maintained leadership

position," Vohra said. With positive traction in our differentiated assets, the US business posted a revenue of USD 226 million, he stated. In South Africa, the drug maker recorded a solid growth of 21 per cent year on year in local currency terms, Vohra said. Emerging markets and Europe delivered a substantial revenue growth of 20 per cent year on year on the back of deep market focus strategy, he added. "Going ahead, the focus will be on growing our key markets, further building our flagship brands, investing in future pipeline as well as focusing on resolutions on the regulatory front," Vohra said. Shares of the company closed 2.16 per cent higher at Rs 1,426.10 apiece on BSE.

# Rupee falls 25 paise to close at 86.56 against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 25 paise to close at 86.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as global risk sentiments were dampened amid tariff threats by the US President Donald Trump. Forex traders said the rupee continued to face pressure due to sustained foreign fund outflows and the strength of the American currency in the overseas market amid unabated dollar demand from oil importers and weak risk appetite. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.53, and during the day touched a high of 86.50 and a low of 86.57 against the American

currency. The local unit settled for the day at 86.56 (provisional), registering a fall of 25 paise over its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated nine paise to close at 86.31 against the US dollar. "The Indian rupee declined as global risk sentiments were dampened amid tariff threats by the US President Donald Trump. This impacted the Chinese Yuan, which also led to strengthening of the US dollar," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. Choudhary further said a surge in US treasury yields and Foreign Institutional Investors (FI) outflows also

pressurised the rupee. However, a decline in crude oil prices cushioned the downside. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias on a strong US dollar and persistent foreign fund outflows. Importer demand for dollars and uncertainty over tariffs by the US administration may further weigh on the rupee," Choudhary said. The United States will impose tariffs on the countries that "harm" America, President Trump has said, as he named China, India and Brazil as high-tariff countries. "We're going to put tariffs on outside countries and outside people that really mean harm to us. Well, they mean us harm, but they basically want

to make their country good," Trump told House of Representatives at a Florida retreat on Monday, the first after he became the president for the second term last week. However, overall weakness in crude oil prices and central bank intervention may support the rupee. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting outcome this week. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) announcement of the Open Market Operations (OMO) may also support the rupee at lower levels. The RBI on Monday said it will purchase government securities worth ₹60,000 crore in three tranches and announced several other

steps to inject liquidity into the banking system. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.52 per cent higher at 107.89. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.52 per cent to USD 77.48 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 535.24 points, or 0.71 per cent, up at 75,901.41 points, while the Nifty rose 128.10 points, or 0.56 per cent, to close at 22,957.25 points. FIIs offloaded equities worth Rs 5,015.46 crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Monday, according to exchange data.

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# Saudi Arabia club Al-Hilal terminates contract with Neymar

PTI ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Saudi Arabia club Al-Hilal said it reached an agreement with striker Neymar to terminate his contract by mutual consent. Neither side confirmed details of the termination after the 32-year-old Brazilian, once hailed as one of the world's best players, played only seven matches for the club, with only one goal and two assists. Despite being sidelined since October 2023 due to an ACL injury, former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain star Neymar was part of the squad that won last season's Saudi league. Their deal was due to expire after Al-Hilal's participation in this year's FIFA Club World Cup, which will be played between June 15 and July 13 in the United States. The club said in a statement published on its social media channels on Monday that it "expresses its thanks and appreciation to Neymar for what he has provided throughout his career with Al-Hilal." The striker joined the Saudi club

from Paris Saint-Germain in August 2023 for 90 million euros (USD 94 million), in one of many transactions that placed the Arab country as one of the new big soccer markets in the world. But Neymar picked up his ACL injury, the most serious of his career, playing for Brazil only months after he joined Al-Hilal. Neymar returned in October and had his most recent appearance for the Saudi club in November. The Brazilian said in different interviews there were doubts on whether coach Jorge Jesus would count on him for the rest of the season. Day Crespo, a spokeswoman for Neymar in Brazil, told The Associated Press that the player will comment on his future at a later date. Local media reported that the footballer was still waiting for documents of the termination before he announces his departure. Brazilian media has also reported that Neymar and his father are interested in a six-month return to his boyhood club Santos, where he achieved national fame and his first caps for Brazil before he joined Barcelona in 2013.



Neymar's comeback is largely expected by Santos fans. Since last week, they featured a video of a man with the voice of legendary three-time World Cup winner Pelé, who died in 2022, asking

Neymar to return and wear his historic No. 10 shirt. Neymar won six titles at Santos, including the Brazilian Cup in 2010 and the prestigious Copa Libertadores in 2011. In June,

during a visit to one of his social projects in Brazil, the striker denied he was eyeing a return to the club. "No (chance to return to Santos). This is a total lie, there's no plans.

I have another year in my contract with Al-Hilal. I hope to play a great season there. I didn't play the last one. We need to live day to day, there's a long time ahead," Neymar told media then. "Obviously Santos is the club in my heart, one day I do want to come back. But there's no plan in my head." On January 17, Neymar said in a different interview he was once again considering playing in Brazil, as he denied he had any intention to play in the United States in the near future. Besides Santos, he also named Flamengo, the country's most popular club. "I always said I want to play for Flamengo because of everything that involves Flamengo. But Santos is my boyhood love, my home," he said. Santos executives have repeatedly said they would like Neymar to return, but denied media reports about he and his father allegedly trying to buy the club's soccer department, as is allowed in Brazilian law. Other big clubs of the South American nation, such as defending Copa Libertadores champion Botafogo, owned by American mogul John Textor,

have bid for titles after such a move. Brazil national team coach Dorival Júnior has said since the end of last year that Neymar is not fully recovered for international soccer either. In March, his team will play against leader Argentina in South American World Cup qualifying, and Neymar is once again unlikely to play. Earlier in January, Neymar made news for his comments about his former Paris Saint-Germain teammate Kylian Mbappé, now at Real Madrid. Speaking in a podcast hosted by World Cup winner Romário, Neymar said the Frenchman became "a little jealous" after superstar Lionel Messi joined the French club in August 2021 in a free transfer. He also added that big egos affected the performances of PSG in big matches. Neymar, Brazil's all-time top goal scorer with 79 goals in 125 matches, also said he is focused on getting more playing time so he can best prepare for the World Cup in North America next year, in what could be his last shot at winning the tournament.

## PM Modi in attendance as 38th National Games kick off

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

A modest but colourful opening ceremony showcasing Uttarakhand's religious heritage and biodiversity kicked off the 38th National Games here on Tuesday with guest of honour Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterating his commitment to bring the 2036 Olympics to India during his address. Around 10,000 athletes are gearing up to compete for podium finishes across 32 disciplines in the Games that will run till February 14. Events will be held across seven cities of the hill state with Dehradun being the main venue. Around 450 gold medals, and a similar number of silver and bronze medals are at stake. Modi declared the Games open after the teams marched in and he was presented the flame at the ceremony. "It is our endeavour to enhance your capabilities and we are focused on supporting you. We consider sports an



essential aspect in development of country," Modi told the gathered athletes at the ceremony. "It is a beautiful portrait of 'Ek Bharat, Sreshth Bharat'," Modi said referring to the Games. The Prime Minister also used the opportunity to pass some health tips, urging youngsters to fight the growing menace of obesity by cutting down the oil in their food and adding more walks and exercise to their daily routines. The ceremony started with a performance of 'Tandav', a

classical dance form that is an ode to Lord Shiva. The Games were declared open with blowing of 2025 conches to mark the year. Local favourite and popular Bollywood singer Jubin Nautiyal also performed during the ceremony. Earlier, Modi arrived at the stadium riding on a decked-up golf cart along with Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami. After taking a round of the stadium, he was presented a traditional cap, shawl and a

memento containing replicas of Games mascot 'Mauli' and the medals. An estimated 25,000 spectators have packed the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium despite the chilly weather to catch the ceremony live. The PM had also opened the last two editions of the Games in 2022 (Gujarat) and 2023 (Goa). Uttarakhand Governor Lieutenant General Gurmit Singh, Union Minister of State for Sports Raksha Khadse, and Uttarakhand Sports Minister Rekha Arya were the dignitaries present on the occasion. Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha and Commonwealth Games Federation chief Chris Jenkins were also in attendance at the ceremony. Uttarakhand's own Lakshya Sen, a world championships medal-winning shuttler, brought the Games torch and handed it over to Modi, who placed it in its designated place.

During the Athletes' Parade, Uttarakhand expectedly received the loudest cheer. Almora's Sen and distance runner Ankita Dhyani were Uttarakhand's flag-bearers in the parade. Sen later took oath on behalf of the participating athletes. Under IOA's objective of inclusivity, the National Games also following established norms of having a male and a female flag bearer leading each team. Hosting the National Game holds a special significance for Uttarakhand as the state is celebrating the 25th year of its creation. 'Mauli', inspired by Uttarakhand's state bird 'Monal', is the Games mascot, symbolising the region's unique natural beauty, diversity and cultural heritage. Most of the established sporting stars of the country such as javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, shuttler PV Sindhu, shooter Manu Bhaker are giving it a miss, leaving the stage for other athletes to make a mark.

## Virat declines captaincy; BCCI set to live stream

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Just like Rishabh Pant did in the last game against Saurashtra, legendary Virat Kohli has politely declined to captain Delhi in their last Ranji Trophy home game against Railways as he wanted Ayush Badoni to continue leading the side. "Virat was asked if he would like to captain but he has also said that he would like Ayush to continue leading the side," a DCCA official told PTI on conditions of anonymity. Meanwhile, the BCCI and domestic broadcasters JioCinema have decided to live-stream the match, given the immense fan interest sparked by Kohli's presence. The general norm is BCCI has one premier match which is aired both on TV and streaming app and for this round it is Karnataka versus Haryana as the star attraction of that game is KL



Rahul. The other two games that were supposed to be only live streamed were Punjab vs Bengal at the Eden Gardens and Baroda vs Jammu and Kashmir in Baroda. The roster was decided well in advance and had this match not involved Kohli, there was no chance of any deviation from it.

But there was a furore in social media about the most high profile match being ignored by the broadcasters. "A decision has been taken and JioCinema will live stream the game. So all the Virat Kohli fans who are not in Delhi, need not worry. They can watch their favourite player live," a BCCI official told.

## Mumbai Pickle Power wins 5-0 against Hyderabad Superstars

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Pickle Power continued their unbeaten run with a commanding 5-0 victory over Hyderabad Superstars, while Pune United edged past Bengaluru Jawans in a nail-biting 3-2 thriller to register their first win of the season in the World Pickleball League here. Mumbai's dominance began in the men's singles, where Brandon Lane displayed nerves of steel to overturn a 17-12 deficit and defeat Hyderabad's Max Freeman 19-17, maintaining his flawless record on Monday. The women's doubles saw Glauka Carvajal Lane and Katie Morris edge past Ava Cavataio and Madalina Grigoriu in a tightly fought match, clinching a 9-7 win to extend Mumbai's lead. The men's doubles was a

showcase of resilience as Hyderabad's Max Freeman and Ben Cawston raced to an 8-1 advantage. However, Mumbai's Eung Gwon Kim and Mayur Patil mounted a stunning comeback, displaying impeccable defense to win 15-14, securing the tie for Mumbai at 3-0. Mihae Kwon further asserted Mumbai's dominance in the women's singles with an 11-8 victory over Karolina Owczarek, capitalising on her composure in critical moments. Finally, Brandon Lane and Glauka Carvajal Lane's synergy in the mixed doubles sealed the 5-0 sweep with a decisive 14-8 win over Ava Cavataio and Ross Whittaker. Mumbai's flawless performance cemented their status as title contenders,

while Hyderabad Superstars showed flashes of brilliance and will seek to bounce back in the upcoming ties. In a more closely contested tie, Pune United delivered a gritty 3-2 victory over Bengaluru Jawans. Pune's 17-year-old Mateusz Matysik set the tone in the men's singles, demonstrating maturity beyond his years to overcome Bengaluru's Jack Foster 18-15. However, Bengaluru responded emphatically in the women's doubles as Trang Hyunh-McClain and Alexandra Borobia crushed Mollie Knaggs and Talia Saunders 28-6, levelling the tie at 1-1. Pune regained momentum in the men's doubles, where William Sobek and Vanshik Kapadia combined effectively to win 13-8. Bengaluru struck back in

the women's singles, with Katerina Stewart's precision overpowering Brooke Revuelta in a 22-13 victory, setting up a decisive mixed doubles clash. Pune's Molly O'Donoghue and Louis Laville rose to the occasion, dominating Bengaluru's Trang Hyunh-McClain and Jack Foster 20-8. Pickleball is a racket or paddle sport where two players (singles) or four players (doubles) use a smooth-faced paddle to hit a perforated, hollow plastic ball over a 34-inch-high (0.86 m) net until one side is unable to return the ball or commits a rule infraction. Pickleball is played indoors as well as outdoors. It was invented in 1965 as a children's backyard game in the United States on Bainbridge Island in Washington state.

## Bayern Munich signs goalkeeper Jonas Urbig

PTI ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich is building for the future by snapping up goalkeeper Jonas Urbig from Cologne. The Bavarian powerhouse announced the transfer late Monday, though it had been expected for some time. The 21-year-old Urbig is considered one of Germany's best young goalkeepers, and his move to Bayern suggests the club believes he could one day replace Manuel Neuer, who is still No. 1 but heading toward the end of his career at 38. "We're delighted that we've been able to complete another transfer with a view to the future," Bayern sport director Christoph Freund said, referring to Bayern also signing German youth international Tom Bischof last week. Freund said Urbig is "very ambitious and has huge potential," calling him "a modern goalkeeper who fits in very well with Bayern's style of play in terms of the



way he interprets goalkeeping." That suggests Urbig will be expected to follow Neuer's example of aggressive goalkeeping, emerging from his goal quickly to snuff out danger with clearances, limiting the occasions he'll be called upon to make a save. Neuer, who can be far from his goal with his team in possession, is sometimes caught out, but more often he gives the team security going forward and the opposition

little time to recover from pressure. Kicker magazine reported Bayern was paying up to 10 million euro including bonuses to Cologne for Urbig. He is expected to compete with the 36-year-old Sven Ulreich and injured Israeli goalkeeper Daniel Peretz for the No. 2 position behind Neuer. Neuer, who will be 39 in March, has faced scrutiny already this season after he was sent off for the first time

in a German Cup loss to Bayer Leverkusen. On loan at Stuttgart, the 28-year-old Alexander Nübel is another potential successor for Neuer. Urbig's signing means Stuttgart coach Sebastian Hoeness can likely count on Nübel in goal again next season, too. Nübel extended his Bayern contract last year to 2029. Urbig, who will compete with Freiburg's Noah Atubolu to be Germany goalkeeper at the Under-21 European Championship in June, started this season in the second division for Cologne, but lost his place to Marvin Schwäbe after the first 10 league games of the season. Bayern gave Urbig a contract through June 2029. "I'm proud to be here now and look forward to getting to know my new team as quickly as possible. My goal is to work on myself professionally every day and to keep up my development in our goalkeeping group around Manuel Neuer," Urbig told the club website.

## 15-year-old Kargil girl inspires women ice hockey players in Ladakh

PTI ■ KARGIL

A pair of skiing boots lying idle in her house turned into a catalyst for 15-year-old Kargil girl Samina Khatoon to become the first female from a non-descript village Trespone to pursue ice-hockey. Despite fierce opposition from her mother, Samina could not resist the temptation of putting on the pair, which was originally gifted by her uncle to her elder brother, who had no interest in skiing. The same pair proved to be her glide to glory. On Monday, the youngest player of Ladakh team, she scored in her team's 4-0 in her team's gold medal match against arch-rivals ITBP at the Khelo India Winter Games 2025, which concluded in Leh. Now her parents Mohammad

Younus and Fatima Bano are proud of their little daughter's achievements. "I have a lot to learn and a long way to go," Khatoon said. The event is split into two phases -- one held in Ladakh from January 23 to 27, and the second in Gulmarg from February 22 to 25. The ninth standard student at Mutahhary Public School, Baroo (Kargil), did not want to give up the opportunity and so juggled between school and practice, 2020 onwards, and won her parents' approval along the way. Her classmates envied her. However, they helped her catch up with missed class notes, lectures and assignments. Samina's toil paid off as she made it to Ladakh's women's ice-hockey team, making her



the youngest player to participate in this year's edition of the games.

Prior to this, she played for clubs from Kargil and went on to play in tournaments such as

the LG Cup, CEC cup. In the CEC cup of 2024-25, she scored six goals while

representing downhill Kargil adventure sports club and was declared the player of the series. In Kargil, communities have opened their doors to opportunities for the new generation sans any gender bias. Women are now being supported and encouraged by their families and society at large to pursue professions of their choice. District Youth Services and Sports Officer, Kargil Abid Ali said he has witnessed this positive change take over in the recent years, highlighting that this progress is a part of an ongoing initiative to ensure that more girls take up sports, especially male-dominated ones such as ice hockey, which is considered to be physically taxing.

There are six women's ice hockey clubs in Kargil district aloe -- from Kukshow, Chiktan, Bodkharbu, Mulbek, Drass and Kargil. To promote participation, Ali said players are being provided with gears and equipment at subsidized rates. Moreover, the clubs were last year provided with equipment free of cost under the UT administration's special development package, he said. He added that under a similar package, ice-skating rinks are also being developed across Kargil. Ladakh Women's Ice Hockey Foundation, founded in 2016 has been travelling to rural regions of Ladakh and providing coaching to young children. During the visits the foundation realised the

willingness and eagerness amongst the girls to play ice hockey and have, therefore, continued with their endeavour. "We have come a long way in making a mark and we take it upon ourselves to ensure that fresh and competent players are identified for the team," Noor Jahan, goalkeeper of the Ladakh's women team, said. Taking note of the success of such endeavours, a similar coaching programme has also been initiated by the Youth Services and Sports department in Kargil which provides basic ice hockey coaching for children under 14 years in different zones across Kargil. Ali states that out of a registration of approximately 200 children, almost 40 per cent are girls.

# Bumrah named ICC men's Cricketer of the Year

PTI ■ DUBAI

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Tuesday won the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC men's Cricketer of the Year after delivering "a master-class in skill, precision, and relentless consistency" across formats in a record-shattering 2024. The 31-year-old was adjudged the ICC's Test Cricketer of the Year on Monday and was also named in the Test Team of the Year last week. "Jasprit Bumrah has been honoured with the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year at the ICC Awards, recognising his extraordinary 2024, in which he dominated opponents in the longest as well as the shortest format of the game," the ICC said. Bumrah played a key role across formats for India as he became the fifth winner of the award from the country after Rahul Dravid (2004), Sachin Tendulkar (2010), Ravichandran Ashwin (2016) and Virat Kohli (2017, 2018). "The pacer's brilliance was reflected in his ICC Test Bowling Rankings, where he crossed the elusive 900-point mark, ending the year with a record-breaking 907 points — the highest for



any Indian bowler in history," the governing body stated in its tribute. "Across formats, Bumrah's 2024 exploits were a masterclass in skill, precision, and relentless consistency,

as he shattered record after record and cemented his place as the world's premier fast bowler," it added. Bumrah had a stellar year 2024 in which he played a decisive role for

India with 15 wickets in their title-winning campaign in the T20 World Cup in the Americas and also became the fastest Indian pacer to reach 200 Test wickets with a bowling average of

sub-20, which is also the best in history. "I'm very happy with the honour, but I don't let myself get too high. My feet are on the ground and I'm really happy with the accolades that I get," the amiable bowler from Gujarat said in a video statement. At the T20 World Cup, his 15 wickets came at an astonishing average of 8.26 and an economy of just 4.17, making him the Player of the Tournament. He also garnered 900 points in ICC Test bowling rankings and ended the year with 907 points, which is the highest for any Indian bowler in history. In Tests, Bumrah finished the year with 71 wickets in only 13 matches at an average of 14.92, which was also the second best among fast bowlers to former India captain Kapil Dev's 100 wickets in 1983. The right-arm pacer was at the peak of his performance in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Down Under towards the end of 2024, snaffling 32 wickets in five Tests. Overall, Bumrah claimed 77 wickets in the World Test Championship points table for India but the two-time finalists failed to make a third appearance in the summit clash for the 2023-25 cycle.



## Paarl Royals defeats Durban's Super Giants

PTI ■ PAARL

Paarl Royals registered a thrilling six-wicket victory over Durban's Super Giants to complete a historic five-game 100 per cent home record at Boland Park in the SA20 here. It is the first time any team has gone unbeaten at home throughout the league phase of the competition with the previous best being Joburg Super Kings' four victories and one washout at the Wanderers in the maiden season. Durban's Super Giants have now been eliminated as last season's runners-up can now no longer qualify for the playoffs. The cream of South Africa's young talent Luhan-dre Pretorius and Kwen Maphaka played a major role in the Royals maintaining their stranglehold on top of the Betway SA20 table. The Royals moved to 28 points. The teenage duo did the double act with Maphaka delivering his best performance of the competition thus far with fine figures of 2/22 to restrict DSG to 143/7 before Pretorius clubbed 43 off 29 balls (5x4s, 1x6) in the successful run-chase. Pretorius reclaimed the top run-scorer position from his opening partner Joe Root, who was trapped LBW off the first ball of the innings on Monday evening, by becoming the first batter to pass the 300-run mark in the ongoing season. Royals have certainly unearthed new young batters this season and Rubin

Hermann also continued his dream debut SA20 season with a superb 59 off 51 balls (4x4s, 2x6s) to set up the chase. Hermann showed great innovation, particularly against the spinners as he swept and reverse-swept with confidence. But it was left to all-rounder Dayyaan Galiem to smash the winning six with just two balls remaining to take the Royals over the line. Maphaka delivered his best performance of the competition thus far with the teenager striking upfront and at the death. He sent down a peach that burst through Brandon King's defence upfront before flummoxing Heinrich Klaasen with a slower ball. Super Giants will be ruing a season where luck has deserted them with Keshav Maharaj's team not finding form when they needed it most. Australian T20 World Cup winner Marcus Stoinis tried his best to make an impact with his maiden SA20 half-century off just 35 balls (4x4s, 2x6s). He finished unbeaten on 55 and partnered with Kane Williamson (45 off 36 balls) in a 53-run partnership to lift DSG to 143/7. Stoinis was particularly severe on Root taking 24 runs off 11 deliveries sent down by the off spinner, including two maximums in the 18th over. Royals' only concern will be the fitness of captain David Miller, who left the field during DSG's innings and did not come out to bat in the run chase.



## Trisha scores first ever century in women's U19 T20 World Cup

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Opener Trisha Gongadi etched her name in the record books by scoring the first ever century in women's U-19 T20 World Cup that powered India into the semifinals with a 150-run victory over Scotland here on Tuesday. Trisha, who was deservedly adjudged player of the match, slammed 110 not out off just 59 balls with the help of 13 boundaries and four maximums after India were sent in to bat by Scotland at toss. The Indians will next face England in the first semifinal on January 31. She was ably supported by fellow opener and wicketkeeper Kamalini G (51 off 42 balls) and Sanika Chalke, who remained unbeaten on 29 off 20 balls as India scored 208 for 1 in 20 overs. In reply, Scotland cut a sorry figure as they were bowled out for 58 in 14 overs. For Scotland, openers Pippa Kelly (12) and Emma Walsingham (12) were joint top-scorers. Left-arm orthodox spinner Ayushi Shukla was the star for India with the ball returning with figures of 4 for 8, while left-armed Vaishnavi Sharma (3/5) and Trisha (3/6), after her exploits with the bat, also performed with the ball in hand.

The 19-year-old Trisha, who hails from Telangana, has been in tremendous form in the tournament and notched up two 40-plus scores before the big knock on Tuesday. Meanwhile in other matches of the day, Bangladesh finished their campaign in style with an easy 10-wicket victory over the West Indies. The Asian side performed well with the ball to restrict the West Indies to just 54 for 6 from their 13 overs and cruised past the victory target inside nine overs on the back of an unbeaten 25 not out from opener Juairiya Ferdous. Bangladesh won the toss and elected to bowl at Bayuemas Oval after tireless effort from ground staff in the nation's capital, with spinner Nishita Akter Nishi collecting three wickets. Anisa Akter Soba claimed a pair of wickets as the West Indies struggled in the conditions and Bangladesh eased home to move up to third place on the Group 1 standings. In another Group 2 match, no play was possible in Sarawak, with heavy rain leaving the Super Six contest between South Africa and the USA abandoned without a ball being bowled. South Africa had already qualified for the semi-finals of the event, while USA picked up a point to move to third in Group 2.

## Hobart Hurricanes wins Big Bash

PTI ■ HOBART

Mitchell Owen hit the fastest century in Big Bash League history as he rushed the Hobart Hurricanes to their first Australian Twenty20 domestic title. Owen's 39-ball ton on Monday tied Craig Simmons' century on balls from 2014. He had a chance to break it but a boundary fell just short of the rope. After a shift up the order to opener, the 23-year-old Owen has become one of the brightest Australian prospects in short-form cricket. He raised his bat for a half-century in just the fourth over, powering on with 11 sixes — a BBL final record — and six fours. "That was next-level hitting that made it pretty easy for us at the end," teammate Matthew Wade said. The sellout crowd of 15,706 at Bellerive Oval chanted Owen's name as the run-rate required ticked down.



"That was super special," Owen said. "The most special thing is hearing everyone in the crowd enjoying it. And I'm so grateful, I'm so proud that we could bring this trophy to Tassie (Tasmania)."

Midway through his innings, Owen became the BBL's leading run-scorer for the season, overtaking David Warner. Owen was out for 108 off 44 balls in the 11th over at 139-3. Chasing 183 to win against

the Sydney Thunder, Hobart reached 185-3 with 35 balls to spare and won by seven wickets. Hobart's success in the 14th BBL left the Melbourne Stars as the only side yet to win the title.

## French club Lyon to hire Paulo Fonseca as its new coach

PTI ■ LYON (FRANCE)

Lyon will hire Paulo Fonseca as its new coach, a person with direct knowledge of the deal has told The Associated Press. The person requested anonymity because the deal has yet to be announced officially. Fonseca will replace Pierre Sage, who was fired despite leading the French league club out of a crisis last season and having the team within reach of a Champions League place in this campaign. Sage's dismissal on Tuesday followed a 1-1 draw with Nantes in Ligue 1 over the weekend and left many observers baffled. Sage had rapidly become a fans' favorite after guiding Lyon from the bottom of the standings to a sixth-place finish last season. And after 19 matches this season, Lyon is sixth in the



league — just four points off a Champions League spot — and in a good position to qualify for the knockout stage of the Europa League. Lyon, however, said the decision to part ways with Sage was a "sporting choice." Lyon is owned by American businessman John Textor, who visited the club in person this week. Textor, a 59-year-old digital media and entertainment

entrepreneur, owns several teams, including in Belgium (RWD Molenbeek), and Brazil (Botafogo) as part of his multi-club model that is becoming more common in soccer. Textor had been in regular contact with Fonseca in recent years and previously tried to hire him. The former Lille coach has been out of a job since he was fired by AC Milan on December 30.

## Mumbai announce 16-member squad for clash against Meghalaya

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Defending champions Mumbai announced their 16-member squad sans India stars Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shreyas Iyer to take on Meghalaya in their must-win Ranji Trophy Elite Group A clash starting here on Thursday. Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Suryansh Shedge and Atharva Ankolekar have been called back. Mumbai, who are coming off a five-wicket defeat against Jammu and Kashmir last week, will be without the India stars Jaiswal, Iyer and Rohit, who all have joined the Indian team for the upcoming ODI series against England starting on February 6. These three players had featured in the sixth round game here at the BKC Ground, with Rohit and Jaiswal following the BCCI diktat to play domestic cricket regularly.



Iyer, on the other hand, has been a vital cog in Mumbai side for domestic competitions across formats this year. The trio is also a part of the Indian squad for the Champions Trophy next month. Karsh Kothari, who also featured in Mumbai's playing XI against Jammu and Kashmir, was not picked. The defeat against Jammu and Kashmir has dented Mumbai's title defence as the Ajinkya Rahane-led side will now be required to record a big victory

— with a bonus point — against Meghalaya and hope that Baroda beat the table-toppers Jammu and Kashmir in their backyard. Mumbai squad: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Ayush Mhatre, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Amogh Bhatkal, Siddhesh Lad, Akash Anand (wk), Hardik Tamore (wk), Suryansh Shedge, Shardul Thakur, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Mohit Avasthi, Sylvester D'Souza, Royston Dias, Shreyas Gurav, Atharva Ankolekar.

# Virat Kohli checks in at Kotla for training with Delhi team

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

At exactly 9am when his jet black Porsche zoomed in through the Feroz Shah Kotla ground's 'Virender Sehwaag Gate', it was homecoming for Delhi's very own Virat Kohli, who checked in for a training stint with his first-class team after more than 12 years. Save for pacer Navdeep Saini, all other 18 members of Delhi's squad had only seen him on TV and grown up listening to the tales of how 'Cheeku', the cherubic talent, became the 'King' of Indian cricket. In the last 15 years, Delhi's 'Cheeku' became a hazy memory as he turned into the most commercially viable

brand in global cricket, the face that ICC sold in its Olympic bid presentation. On Monday, he was at his home ground for around three hours and had everyone in his vicinity vinted. Whether the young impressionable players, or seasoned head coach Sarandeep Singh or batting coach Bantu Singh — all of them evidently wanted to be close to him. Though courteous with all, the former India skipper seemed more comfortable with his former U-19 coach Mahesh Bhati, who is also the administrative manager of this team. "Woh badlaa nahi hain. Usko chhole-poori pasand hai aur

humne mangaake rakhha tha. Usne bola chole puri nahi khawoonga (He loves chhole poori, we made arrangements for him but he said he didn't want it)," a senior DDCA (Delhi and Districts Cricket Association) official told PTI. What he did seek out after practice ahead of his first Ranji appearance in 12 years from January 30 was also an old favourite. "Practice ke baad purane time ki tarah kadhi chawal khaya sabke saath (He had kadhi chawal with everyone)," revealed the official. Everyone shadowed the icon like it was an event. Ranji Trophy matches are covered by a select bunch of



domestic cricket faithfuls but on Monday, the numbers trebled. Every move by the 'King' was followed. The two coaches --

Sarandeep and Bantu -- were by his side throughout and it would be difficult for photographers or videographers to edit them

from the frame. "I remember it was Ajit Chaudhary, the erstwhile manager of the Delhi Ranji team, who nicknamed him 'Cheeku' back in 2006-07," DDCA secretary Ashok Sharma, fondly called 'Mama', recollected as if it was yesterday. He has seen Kohli since he first came here for U-15 trials. The Training It was an occasion to remember for the Sanat Sangwans, Arpit Ranans and Siddhant Sharmas but for Kohli it was business as usual. It seemed he had left the star outside the ground and had turned up as their very own 'Virat Bhaiya'. The 35 minute warm-up

before an inconsequential final game against the Railways was the longest that the senior team has spent to loosen up prior to net session. There was a 15-minute game of football and he had some sprints down the wide right, also enjoying a laugh or two. But once the net session started, the game face was on. He quietly walked to the nets where skipper Ayush Badoni was batting. Seeing Kohli walk towards the nets, Badoni was visibly conscious before Kohli told him: 'Ayush tu batting karle, phir dono switch karke kareng (Ayush you keep batting. After sometime, we will take turns to bat.)"

He spent close to an hour at the nets. At first, he took throw-downs where he kept playing the pull shot. Once he had done enough knocking, Kohli entered the spinners' nets where he faced left-arm spinners Harsh Tyagi and Sumit Mathur. A few balls did grip and stop but there wasn't much bite in their bowling. Ditto for pacers Navdeep Saini, Money Grewal, Rahul Gehlot and Siddhant Sharma. Unlike India nets, Kohli hardly looked troubled although he did practice leaving a lot of deliveries. With the Champions Trophy round the corner, Kohli was seen trying to play a lot beside the line of deliveries.