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INSIDE

WORLD 9 HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT DINOSAUR FOOTPRINTS DISCOVERED IN UK

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## TERROR STRIKES UNITED STATES

AP ■ NEW ORLEANS (US)

A US Army veteran who drove a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year's revellers in New Orleans, killing 15 people, had posted videos to social media hours before the carnage saying he was inspired by the Islamic State group and expressing a desire to kill, the president said.

The FBI said it was investigating early Wednesday's attack in which the driver steered around a police blockade and slammed into revellers before being shot dead by police as a terrorist act and did not believe he acted alone.

Investigators found guns and what appeared to be an improvised explosive device in the vehicle - which bore the flag of the Islamic State group - along with other explosive devices elsewhere in the city's famed French Quarter.

President Joe Biden said Wednesday evening that the FBI found the videos the driver posted to social media. He called the attack a "despicable" and "heinous act."

The rampage turned festive Bourbon Street into a macabre scene of maimed victims, bloodied bodies and pedestrians fleeing for safety inside nightclubs and restaurants. In addition to the dead, dozens of people were hurt. A college football playoff game at the nearby Superdome was postponed until Thursday.

Zion Parsons, 18, of Gulfport, Mississippi, said he saw the truck "barreling through, throwing people like in a movie scene, throwing people into the air."

"Bodies, bodies all up and down the street, everybody screaming and hollering," said Parsons, whose friend Nikyra Dedeaux was among the people killed. "This is not just an act of



A man drove a truck into a crowd on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, US killing and injuring a number of people. The FBI said they recovered an Islamic State group flag from the vehicle; The FBI investigates the area on Orleans St and Bourbon Street by St Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter where a suspicious package was detonated after a person drove a truck into a crowd earlier on Bourbon Street



AP/PTI

Hours after the attack, several coroner's office vans were parked on the corner of Bourbon and Canal streets, cordoned off by police tape with crowds of dazed tourists standing around, some trying to navigate their luggage through the labyrinth of blockades.

Louisiana Gov Jeff Landry urged people to avoid the area, which remained an active crime scene.

"We looked out of our front door and saw caution tape and dead silence and it's eerie," said Tessa Cundiff, an Indiana native who moved to the French Quarter a few years ago. "This is not what we fell in love with, it's sad."

Nearly, life went on as normal in the city known to some for a motto that translates to "let the good times roll." At a cafe a block from where the truck came to rest, people crowded in for breakfast as upbeat pop music played. Two blocks away, people drank at a bar, seemingly as if nothing happened. Biden, speaking from the presidential retreat at Camp David, addressed the victims and the people of New Orleans: "I want you to know I grieve with you. Our nation grieves with you as you mourn and as you heal."

"My heart goes out to the victims and their families who were simply trying to celebrate the holiday," Biden said in an earlier written statement. "There is no justification for violence of any kind, and we will not tolerate any attack on any of our nation's communities."

FBI officials have repeatedly warned about an elevated international terrorism threat due to the Israel-Hamas war. In the last year, the agency has disrupted other potential attacks, including in October when it arrested an Afghan man in Oklahoma for an alleged Election Day plot targeting large crowds.

terrorism. This is evil," New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said. The attack is the latest example of a vehicle being used as a weapon to carry out mass violence and the deadliest IS-inspired assault on US soil in years.

The driver "defeated" safety measures in place to protect pedestrians, Kirkpatrick said, and was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did."

The FBI identified the driver as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, 42, a US citizen from Texas, and said it was working to determine any potential associations with terrorist organisations.

"We do not believe that Jabbar

was solely responsible," FBI Assistant Special Agent in charge Alethea Duncan said at a news conference.

Investigators found multiple improvised explosives, including two pipe bombs that were concealed within coolers and wired for remote detonation, according to a Louisiana State Police intelligence bulletin obtained by The Associated Press.

The bulletin, relying on preliminary information gathered soon after the attack, also cited surveillance footage that it said showed three men and a woman placing one of the devices, but federal officials did not immediately confirm that detail and it wasn't clear who they were

or what connection they had to the attack, if any.

Jabbar drove a rented pickup truck onto a sidewalk, going around a police car that was positioned to block vehicular traffic, authorities said. A barrier system meant to prevent vehicle attacks was being repaired in preparation for the Super Bowl in February.

Jabbar was killed by police after he exited the truck and opened fire on responding officers, Kirkpatrick said. Three officers returned fire. Two were shot and are in stable condition.

Investigators recovered a handgun and AR-style rifle, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorised to

discuss the investigation publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

There were also deadly explosions in Honolulu and outside a Las Vegas hotel owned by President-elect Donald Trump. President Joe Biden said the FBI was looking into whether the Las Vegas explosion was connected to the New Orleans attack but had "nothing to report" as of Wednesday evening.

A photo circulated among law enforcement officials showed a bearded Jabbar wearing camouflage next to the truck after he was killed. The intelligence bulletin obtained by the AP said he was wearing a ballistic vest and helmet. The flag of the Islamic

State group was on the truck's trailer hitch, the FBI said.

"For those people who don't believe in objective evil, all you have to do is look at what happened in our city early this morning," US Sen John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican, said. "If this doesn't trigger the gag reflex of every American, every fair-minded American, I'll be very surprised."

Jabbar joined the Army in 2007, serving on active duty in human resources and information technology and was deployed to Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010, the service said. He was transferred to the Army Reserve in 2015 and left in 2020 with the rank of staff sergeant.

## AAP-BJP lock horns over farmers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are locked in a letter war over the farmers issue. Senior BJP leader and Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan wrote a letter to Delhi chief minister Atishi and criticised the AAP government for not implementing several pro-farmer schemes of the Centre in the national capital. In his letter written in Hindi, Chouhan said "political competition" should not become an obstacle to the welfare of farmers.

Expressing concern over the condition of farmers, Chouhan told Atishi that Delhi government has no sympathy for farmers and it is very indifferent towards farmers, who are "upset and worried" due to the non-implementation of many welfare schemes by AAP. In a sharp response to Chouhan's letter, Atishi hit back accusing the BJP of hypocrisy regarding its stance on farmers and said the saffron party talking about them was like "Dawood (Ibrahim) giving a sermon on non-violence." Criticising the party for its treatment of the farming community, Atishi alleged that the situation of farmers under BJP rule was worse than ever before. "The hardships faced by farmers



during the BJP's tenure have never been seen before," the Delhi CM said in her letter to Chouhan. Meanwhile, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the BJP would be responsible "if something happens" to the protesting farmers in Punjab who are on an indefinite fast over a set of demands, including a legal guarantee on MSP.

Responding to Atishi's allegations, Chouhan clarified that the Centre was ready to provide benefit to the farmers but the Delhi government had failed to submit the necessary proposals for the schemes. The minister said that during the meeting with farmers they had explained their disappointments at not receiving benefits from the central government. Both the BJP and the AAP are

locked in the letters war ahead of the Assembly polls in Delhi. Lieutenant Governor Vinai Saxena slammed AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal for labeling Atishi as temporary chief minister. Saxena described the comments as not only insulting to Atishi but also disrespectful to the President of India and himself as her representative. Hours later Atishi wrote back to Saxena defending Kejriwal. "It is disheartening to note that your letter focuses on criticism rather than constructive cooperation," she added. On the New Year's day, Kejriwal has written to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat to ask if the RSS will seek votes for the BJP in the Capital, and whether it supports the party's "wrongdoings". The letter prompted an attack from BJP which claimed that

Kejriwal's claims against the BJP reflect his "political frustration" and his "fear of losing the polls". The BJP responded sharply to Kejriwal's letter with a letter. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "Today, I have written a letter to Aam Aadmi Party leader and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal...we hope that you will abandon your wrong habits of lying and deceit and bring meaningful change within yourself". In his letter, Chouhan said the AAP government has failed to implement major central initiatives including the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, and the Beej Gram programme. "I am writing this letter in sadness. You have never taken proper decisions in the interest of

farmers. Your government has stopped implementation of farmers-friendly central schemes. Your government is not sympathetic towards farmers. Today, farmers in Delhi are upset and worried," Chouhan said in the letter dated January 1. Due to the non-implementation of multiple central schemes, Delhi's farmers are being denied crucial benefits ranging from seed distribution to infrastructure development, he said. The Union minister said the absence of the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission has prevented farmers from accessing benefits for nursery establishment, tissue culture facilities, planting material procurement, and post-harvest infrastructure.

The non-implementation of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana has further impacted farmers' access to agricultural mechanization, precision irrigation, soil health initiatives, crop insurance, and the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, he added. Chouhan expressed concern over Delhi's failure to implement the Beej Gram programme, which offers benefits including seed distribution, testing facilities, laboratory infrastructure improvement, and assistance for seed certification agencies.

Continued on page 8

## Investor wealth surges as Sensex, Nifty gain 2 per cent

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth surged Rs 18.52 lakh crore in two days of market rally, with the benchmark Sensex climbing nearly 2 per cent on Thursday alone. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,436.30 points or 1.83 per cent -- its best single-day gain in more than a month -- to settle at 79,943.71 on Thursday. During the day, it soared 1,525.46 points, or 1.94 per cent, to 80,032.87. On Wednesday, the benchmark gauge had climbed 368.40 points, or 0.47 per cent, to settle at 78,507.41.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surged Rs 8,52,239.27 crore to Rs 4,50,47,345.71 crore (USD 5.25 trillion) in two days. "While markets failed to deliver a Christmas rally over the past few weeks, the New Year has provided strong optimism in the first two days with Sensex touching the psychological 80,000-mark on the back of broad-based short-covering.

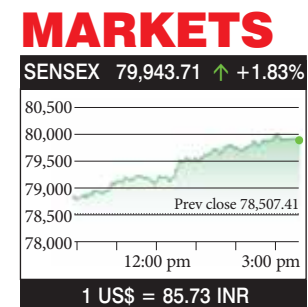
"Gains in banking, IT, auto and metal triggered a major rally despite concerns in the currency market which saw the rupee scaling fresh lows amid rising crude oil prices and subdued growth," Prashanth



Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. From 30 Sensex shares, Bajaj Finserv jumped nearly 8 per cent while Bajaj Finance soared over 6 per cent. Maruti, Titan, Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech, Zomato, UltraTech Cement and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other major gainers. Sun Pharma emerged as the only laggard. "Increased momentum was observed in the domestic market, driven by optimism about the upcoming earnings season starting next week. The rally was broad-based, with most sectoral indices posting gains. The auto sector led the way, showing the strongest momentum due to robust December sales that defied the usual subdued demand.

Banking and IT stocks also performed well, as the economy bottomed in Q2," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. The BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.89 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.68 per cent. All sectoral indices ended in positive territory. Auto surged the most by 3.66 per cent, followed by BSE Focused IT (2.34 per cent), IT (2.31 per cent), consumer discretionary (2.24 per cent), teck (2.19 per cent), consumer durables (2.02 per cent) and commodities (1.41 per cent).

Continued on page 8



## WEATHER

LUCKNOW MAX 17.1°C(-3.0) MIN 7.4°C(-0.4)

## Chess prodigy, Olympic shooter among Khel Ratna awardees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Double Olympic medallist shooter Manu Bhaker and chess prodigy D Gukesh were among the four athletes awarded the prestigious Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award for 2024, announced by the Sports Ministry. The announcement also highlighted a remarkable inclusion of 17 para-athletes in the list of 32 Arjuna awardees, celebrating their outstanding achievements at the Paris Paralympics. Joining Bhaker and Gukesh as Khel Ratna recipients were men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and

para-athlete Praveen Kumar, both of whom have made significant contributions to Indian sports in the past year. The awards will be presented by President Droupadi Murmu at a ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 17, 2025.

22 year old Manu Bhaker made history at the Tokyo Olympics by becoming the first Indian to win two medals in a single edition of the Games. She secured bronze medals in both the 10m air pistol individual event and the 10m air pistol mixed team event, further cementing her status as one of India's finest shooting talents.



Interestingly, Bhaker's name for the Khel Ratna was the subject of recent controversy, as initial reports suggested she was overlooked due to a missed application deadline. Bhaker acknowledged a possible lapse on her part but, after procedural issues were resolved, was rightfully included among the honorees.

18-year-old chess sensation D Gukesh, another Khel Ratna recipient, became the youngest-ever World Chess Champion, achieving the title last year. His remarkable feat also contributed to India's historic gold medal victory in the Chess Olympiad. Harmanpreet Singh led the

Indian men's hockey team to its second consecutive bronze medal at the Paris Olympics, solidifying his place as a hockey legend and a worthy Khel Ratna awardee. The final Khel Ratna recipient, para-athlete Praveen Kumar, claimed gold in the T64 category of high jump at the Paris Paralympics, a classification for athletes with lower-limb impairments who use prosthetics for running. The Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award carries a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh, along with a citation and a medallion, while the Arjuna awardees receive Rs 15 lakh, a statuette of Arjuna, and a citation.

# Co-accused still at large, police perplexed

## NAKA MASS MURDER

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the father of a mass murder accused still at large, police are perplexed as to why the accused did not end his own life after committing the horrific act if he was allegedly so disillusioned with life and societal pressures.

The arrested suspect, Mohammed Arshad, surrendered at the Loco police outpost under Husainganj police station on Wednesday. He confessed to killing five members of his family at a lodge in the Naka police station area on the night of December 31, 2024, alongside his father,

Mohammed Badar. The victims were identified as Asma (mother) and four sisters: Aliya (9), Aksa (16), Alshifa (19), and Rahmeen (18).

According to police, before murdering the women, Arshad and Badar consumed alcohol. They also forced Asma and Alshifa to drink beverages laced with sedatives, causing them to vomit. The three younger girls were given cold drinks mixed with intoxicants. Once all the victims were unconscious, they were killed.

Arshad confessed that he and his father committed the murders because they feared their enemies would exploit the women, possibly forcing them into human trafficking. He claimed the family had faced threats and societal ostracisation after relocating from Delhi to Agra. Badar, originally from Budaun, had previously worked in Delhi. He purchased a 100-square-yard plot in Agra but later sold half of it to a neighbour for Rs 7 lakh. Contrary to Arshad's claims, neighbours described the father-son duo as combative and overly suspicious. They allegedly kept the women confined to their home and were hostile to anyone who approached them.

Arshad told the police that after executing the murders, Badaruddin fled towards Charbagh railway station while he surrendered at the outpost. However, the police suspect name of my son from HARDIK to HARDIK TRIPATHI for all future purposes.

Arshad's statements have varied significantly during his interrogation. Initially, he claimed his father left to commit suicide, but later suggested he escorted him to the station to avoid arrest. These inconsistencies have led investigators to doubt his narrative. Police sources revealed that the family had left Agra on December 18, travelling first

# Arshad's maternal uncle to take bodies to village

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The maternal uncle of the accused of mass murder reached Lucknow to take the bodies of the victims for burial at his native place. Danish, the maternal uncle of murder accused Arshad, reached the post-mortem house on Thursday. He said that all the bodies would be taken to the village. Police sent Arshad, who killed his mother and his four sisters in a lodge in the Naka area, to jail on Thursday. The search for his absconding father Mohammed Badar, who is the co-accused, has been intensified. The post-mortem of the five bodies was being conducted by a panel of doctors. After the autopsies, the bodies would be handed over to the family members.

On being informed by the police, Arshad's paternal and maternal uncles arrived in Lucknow on Thursday morning and went to the Naka police station. After informing them about the incident, the process of handing over the bodies was completed.

hating women, a trait he claimed he inherited from his father. He disclosed a history of abusive behaviour towards his wife and daughters, including an attempt to bury one of his daughters alive. The police suspect Arshad orchestrated the murders to implicate neighbours in the land dispute. He also admitted to previously attempting to murder his family in Jaipur but failing. He claimed to have brought them to Lucknow under the pretext of meeting Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Investigators are exploring

Danish told newsmen that he would take all the bodies to his village Sambhal for the last rites there. Arshad's mother Asma was a resident of Sambhal. Danish, who lives in Sambhal, said that on getting information about the incident, he left for Lucknow with the family on Wednesday night. He said the facts that Arshad was speaking about in the video that has gone viral, were never discussed in the family. "Even information about the dispute with the neighbours was not given to us. The entire family is unable to understand why he took this step," he said. Police will seek remand of Arshad. The Naka police have filed an application in the court for his custody remand. Police said that the accused had to be interrogated regarding the incident.

Four police teams are raiding the possible hideouts in search of Badar. The help of surveillance and CCTV is being taken to trace his location. Sources in the police said the investigators were mulling a narco test of Arshad. "His behaviour appears erratic,

as if he is an addict of some intoxicant. It is required to map his brain to know his thinking pattern. The apprehensions due to which he killed the women members of his family appear baseless as was found in the investigation made so far. So a narco test is required to find out the truth," a source said. They said the accused was heard enquiring about the number of likes and views on Instagram on which he uploaded the video of the crime. "His father is seen (in the video) grabbing the mouth of one of his daughters while killing her at the lodge," the sources said.

Five bodies were found in the hotel on Wednesday. Agra resident Arshad himself went to the Loco police outpost on Wednesday and informed the police that he had killed his mother Asma, sisters Aliya (9), Aksa (16), Alshifa (19) and Rahmeen (18). After this the police took him into custody after the investigation found the truth. At the same time, the search for his father Badar, who fled from the scene of the mass murders, was started.

several unanswered questions: Why did Arshad and his father record a video after the murders if they intended to kill themselves? Why have both of Arshad's wives and his relatives distanced themselves from him? Was there a deeper conspiracy behind the murders? The police have alerted neighbouring stations and the Government Railway Police in their search for Badaruddin. They are also interrogating relatives and neighbours to verify Arshad's claims and uncover the truth behind the gruesome act.

# Retd IAS/IPS officers, VCs to be part of UP's TB eradication drive

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In alignment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'TB-Free India', Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has launched an innovative initiative to accelerate progress towards this goal, officials said here. The chief minister has entrusted retired IAS and IPS officers, former vice-chancellors, educationists, and other senior citizens with the pivotal role of 'Nikshay Mitra'. As 'Nikshay Mitras', they will play an active role in raising public awareness and supporting efforts to eradicate tuberculosis (TB). On Thursday, CM Yogi convened a meeting with these individuals, emphasising the importance of their involvement in ensuring the success of the 'TB-Free Uttar Pradesh' campaign.

He highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'TB-Free India', stating: "A strong India can only emerge from a healthy India, and India will gain true power when it becomes healthy." The chief minister emphasised the urgency of eliminating TB, noting that while the World Health Organization has set 2030 as the global target for a TB-free world, PM Modi has advanced India's goal to 2025.

He pointed out that India has the highest number of TB patients globally, and since Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state, its contribution is critical to achieving this national goal. The chief minister detailed the significant strides made in Uttar Pradesh towards TB elimination, stating, "TB testing rates in the state have quadrupled in recent years. A substantial increase in the number of Nat and X-ray machines has enhanced diag-

nostic capabilities, and the success rate of TB treatment has risen from 79% to 92% over the past four years."

He also mentioned, "Under the Nikshay Poshan Yojana, Rs 775 crore has been disbursed via DBT to the accounts of 27 lakh TB patients to support their nutritional needs. Preventive treatment is also being provided to individuals living with TB patients to curb the spread of the disease."

Emphasising the importance of public participation, the chief minister highlighted that over 45,000 Nikshay Mitras have adopted TB patients, and 1,372 gram panchayats in the state have already been declared TB-free. He called upon the retired officers and educationists to leverage their vast experience and societal commitment by contributing to this national mission. He stressed that every TB patient must receive immediate, accurate, and sustained medical care, along with proper nutrition and family screening, to prevent the disease from spreading further.

"TB patients are integral members of society, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure they are treated with respect and dignity. As Nikshay Mitras, you can provide them with guidance, support, and motivation," Yogi said. He outlined the campaign's primary goals: identifying undiagnosed TB patients, reducing TB-related mortality, and safeguarding healthy individuals from infection. The chief minister reaffirmed the state government's unwavering commitment to achieving a TB-free Uttar Pradesh, stressing the necessity of involving all sections of society in this mission. The retired officers and vice-chancellors present pledged their full cooperation in this initiative.



### CHANGE NAME

Avinash kashodhan appeared ICSE (2020) and ISC (2022). My parents name were incorrectly printed as Pushpendra Kumar kashodhan and Archana kashodhan. The correct name are Pushpendra Kumar vaish and Archana vaish. Address 78/99 Punjabi Mohalla New Ganeshganj, Lucknow.

### सूचना

मेरे भवन संख्या 15/एम/5 दबौली कानपुर नगर की केडीएन की मूल डीड प्री होल्ड डीड, कब्जा पत्र, आवंटन लेटर, नामांतरण पत्र इत्यादि कहीं खो गए हैं इनका प्रयोग अबैध होगा। मंजीत सिंह पुत्र स्वो सरबजोत सिंह

### NOTICE

Be it known to all that I Army No. JC -772307 N Rank Sub Name Jai Prakash Tripathi Unit 140 Fd workshop company EME (628 EME Battalion) C/O 56 APO presenting residing at village Sidhari Patti Tehsil Raniganj, Premdhar, Patti, Pratapgarh U.P. 230127 have changed name of my son from HARDIK to HARDIK TRIPATHI for all future purposes.

### NOTICE

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### NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that due to some mistake my father's name has been mentioned as A.R. Siddiqi and mother's name as Samim Baano in the original mark sheet of high school which is wrong. My father's correct name is Abdul Rasheed Siddiqi and mother's name is Shameem Bano. Hence I should be known and identified by these names. Uzair Siddiqi son of Abdul Rasheed Siddiqi Address-255/24, Tiliya Kot, Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh.

### NOTICE

I, Smriti Yadav is legally Daughter of No 4575630H Hav Balram Singh Yadav presently residing at House No 1563 naya rajendra nagar orai, Post Office- orai, Telegraph Office- orai, Police Station- orai, Teh- orai Dist- Jalaun I have changed my Name from Smarhi Yadav to Smriti Yadav vide 30-12-2024 before District court orai district jalaun.

### NOTICE

I have lost my original Sale Deed of Pvt. Factory Plot No-2 of Arazi No.-858 (KHA) & 1135 (KHA) Factory Area, Jajmau, Dist.- Kanpur Nagar from my office Mariyam International. Its use will be illegal. KHALID MAQBOOL (Owner)

### NOTICE

Be it known to all that I Army No. JC -772307 N Rank Sub Name Jai Prakash Tripathi Unit 140 Fd workshop company EME (628 EME Battalion) C/O 56 APO presenting residing at village Sidhari Patti Tehsil Raniganj, Premdhar, Patti, Pratapgarh U.P. 230127 have changed name of my wife from ASHOKA to ASHOKA TRIPATHI for all future purposes.

### NOTICE

I JC-340214X Sub Maj Gajendra Singh R/o Village, Post Sarwan Khera Distt Kanpur Dehat, Uttar Pradesh, hereby declared that my father namely Govind Singh Parihar. He was born on 28 Dec 1949 instead of 01 Jul 1949. Correct date of birth of my father is 28 Dec 1949 for all future purpose

### NOTICE

I AFREEN KHAN W/O MOHAMMAD KHALID KHAN R/o 41/37, NAYA CHOWK, PARADE KANPUR Nagar, have changed my name AFREEN KHAN to AFREEN KHAN for all future purposes.

### NOTICE

I JC-340214X Sub Maj Gajendra Singh R/o Village and post Sarwan Khera Distt - Kanpur Dehat, Uttar Pradesh, hereby declared that my name son name Sidhant Singh Parihar have change to Sidhant Singh Parihar for all future purposes

### NOTICE

I Mohd. Yaseen son of Mohd. Shamin Hashmi R/O E-30 GTB Nagar Kareli Allahabad, I declares that my name has been wrongly recorded as Yaseen Mohd. in my passport. My correct name is Mohd. Yaseen which I want to get corrected in the official records.

### सूचना

सूचित हो कि मेरा मूल बैनामा दिनांकित 28.12.2024 को बही संख्या 1 जिल्द संख्या-5514, पृष्ठ संख्या-107 से 130 पर क्रमांक-4348 पर कार्यालय उपनिबंधक तुलीय, लखनऊ में पंजीकृत है, कहीं खो गया है। मोहम्मद इकबाल पुत्र आस मोहम्मद नि.- 16/443, इन्दिरा नगर, लखनऊ।

### NOTICE

I JC-340214X Sub Maj Gajendra Singh R/o Village, Post Sarwan Khera Distt Kanpur Dehat, Uttar Pradesh, hereby declared that my mother namely Smt Janak Dulari. She was born on 01Jan 1954 instead of 02 Jul 1955. Correct date of birth of my mother is 01 Jan 1954 for all future purpose

### WANTED

Walk in interview Under the research and Development Plan Higher Education, Uttar Pradesh needs Research Assistant having the minimum qualification of M.A. psychology and desirable qualification is NET in psychology. Number of post -01, Rs.8000 per month, interview will be held on January 11, 2025 at 11 am. in PPN (PG) College, Kanpur Principal

### AUCTION NOTICE

दिनांक 11-01-2025 अपराह्न 12:30 बजे राष्ट्रीय अकादमी सीमा शुल्क, अप्रत्यक्ष कर एवं नारकोटिक्स, आंचलिक परिसर, ए-ब्लाक अप्रत्यक्ष कर भवन, विभुलि खण्ड, गोमलीनगर, लखनऊ में निम्नलिखित चोषित कार्यालय फर्नीचर, अलमारियाँ, एअरकंडीशनर आदि की नीलामी, सिक्कोरिटी रु. 10,000/- नकद, फर्म के जी.एच.टी. पंजीकरण, पैनकार्ड, आधार के साथ जमा होगी। आई पी. सिंह एण्ड सन्स.

# Forest officials waiting for tiger to make its next kill

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Forest department is closely monitoring the stray tiger in Rehmankhara, waiting for it to make its next kill in order to capture it. DFO, Awadh, Sitanshu Pandey, who is leading the operation, stated that they have devised a strategy for this. Two additional cages are being brought in from Dudhwa, as the tiger has reportedly localised itself and is hunting within Rehmankhara.

Pandey mentioned that they expect the tiger to make a kill within the next two days, for which preparations are in place to dart and tranquillise it. "We have set up three open baits and two baits in the cages. Additionally, we have 22 cameras traps and five CCTV cameras providing live footage," he said.

He added that while the tiger is currently well-fed, they have made provisions to secure the baits with nylon threads to prevent it from dragging the bait away, should it attack the bait in the coming days. "If the tiger kills stray cattle for food, we will use live CCTV cameras to monitor and analyse its movements, as the tiger usually waits a while before eating its kill. We are encouraging it to eat one of the open baits," he explained.

Moreover, two machans and two observation points have been set up at locations frequently visited by the tiger. "If we spot the tiger in the open, we will dart and tranquillise it then and there," Pandey said. He acknowledged the significant challenges they are facing in capturing the tiger.

The tiger is primarily moving in areas with dense tree canopies, making it difficult to track. Additionally, the animal is very clever and avoids open areas. It is nocturnal, typically moving in the forest after 4 pm. Even if it makes a kill, the tiger tends to drag its prey into dense bushes, which complicates efforts to dart and tranquillise it. Moreover, the cold weather forces the tiger to hide in well-concealed locations," he said. The tiger has been in Rehmankhara for over three to four weeks. "It has localised itself and is not moving out of this area," Pandey added. He also mentioned that the difficult terrain has contributed to delays in the capture. "Elephants cannot be brought here due to the challenging terrain," he noted.

# Dedicated webpage for Maha Kumbh weather forecasts

Lucknow (PNS): As part of the Indian Meteorological Department's 150-year celebrations, a stakeholder workshop was held in Lucknow on Thursday. A key highlight was the launch of a dedicated webpage for weather forecasts and warnings for the upcoming Maha Kumbh 2025.

Additionally, the IMD's Hindi newsletter 'KSHITIJ' and the Automatic Weather Observing System at CCS International Airport were unveiled. The event, which began with a welcome address by Dr Manish R Ranakar, head of the Meteorological Centre in Lucknow, featured chief guest Naveen Kumar, Secretary, Irrigation department, and guest of honour Sanjay Singh, Director General, Uttar Pradesh Council of Agricultural Research. Dr M Mohapatra, Director General of Meteorology, attended virtually. The workshop included technical presentations from IMD officials, including Dr RK Jenamani, Scientist-G, and Dr SD Kotal, Scientist-F.

The event highlighted department's 150 years of meteorological service and gathered feedback from sectors such as agriculture, disaster management, and aviation.

# Guidebook on chikankari for artisans released

Lucknow (PNS): The district administration has released a guidebook on chikankari for artisans and stakeholders, developed under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed with IIM-Indore. Director of IIM-Indore, Himanshu Rai, emphasised that chikankari is an integral part of Lucknow's rich cultural heritage and craftsmanship.

"The revival of chikankari was achieved through the oral and practical transmission of the craft by master artisans from recognised lineages in Lucknow. The IIM-Indore team has created a coffee-table book documenting the processes involved, which will help facilitate pre-production, production, marketing, and branding of chikankari for customers across India and around the world," he said. Rai pointed out some challenges faced by the artisans, such as the lack of information on the designs preferred by customers, the absence of quality structure, and a lack of access to machinery. "They were entirely dependent on middlemen. In our initial report, we identified these problems and proposed solutions, the implementation of which has already led to an

increase in the income of these artisans. They then requested that a book be created to address these issues. My vision was to democratise this information so that artisans would no longer have to rely on middlemen," he added. Rai mentioned that the book will be distributed to all artisans. He explained that the book covers various aspects, including steps for acquiring raw materials, focusing on quality, quantity, and price, as well as motifs for inspiration. It also provides guidance on preparing blocks, tracking trends for suitable motif creation, and detailing the intricacies involved in raw material preparation.

The guidebook further outlines the steps for preparing cloth for dyeing, embroidery, and washing, as well as standard operating procedures to be followed for readying the dress for sale. It also includes processes for packaging, inventory management, auditing, and sales and marketing strategies for chikankari branding. "The overall goal is to support artisans, common facilitation centres, and any organisations that assist chikankari artisans in connecting to remunerative markets," he added.

# Road rage: Youth bites off car driver's ear

Lucknow (PNS): In a case of road rage, a youth allegedly bit off a car driver's ear in the Saadatganj area late on Tuesday night. Police admitted the injured driver to a private hospital and arrested the accused, who has been sent to jail.

According to the complainant, Dr Hamidullah of Qureshi Hospital in Moazzam Nagar, Saadatganj, the incident occurred when his son, Khatibullah, was driving home. On his way, a cyclist, identified as Rinku Chaurasia (21) of Naubasta Mall, suddenly crossed into the car's path, leading to a minor collision.

A heated argument ensued, during which Rinku began abusing and assaulting Khatibullah. In a shocking turn of events, Rinku grabbed Khatibullah's head and bit his ear. He chewed off a portion of the ear, severing it completely. Passersby alerted the police, who rushed to the scene and took Khatibullah to SPS Hospital for treatment. The accused was arrested and later remanded to judicial custody.

# YOUTH LOSES ₹8.5L IN CYBER FRAUD

A youth in Ashiyana was duped of Rs 8.5 lakh after he was sent a WhatsApp link and was convinced to invest in a scheme which turned out to be fraudulent. The victim, identified as Ankit Singh, received a message on Monday from an unknown number, which contained a link.

When Ankit clicked on the link, an app opened, and the sender convinced him that investing in it would yield significant profits. Initially, the app displayed some profits, prompting Ankit to deposit a total of Rs 5.5 lakh over several transactions. However, when Ankit attempted to withdraw his earnings, he found that he was unable to do so. Upon demanding his money back, the scammers pressured him to deposit more funds to facilitate the withdrawal. They initially demanded an additional Rs 3 lakh, and when Ankit hesitated, the amount was increased to Rs 11 lakh. Ankit eventually transferred another Rs 3 lakh to the fraudsters. The scammers escalated their threats, warning Ankit of severe consequences if he did not comply with their demands. Ankit realised he had been scammed and filed a police complaint.

**CHAUDHARY CHARAN SINGH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, LUCKNOW ("AIRPORT")**

**INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN BIDDING PROCESS FOR PROJECT WORKS ON DEVELOPMENT OF AIRSIDE INFRASTRUCTURE AT AIRPORT**

Interested parties are invited to participate in the competitive e-tendering process for project works development of airside infrastructure at Airport.

Interested parties are requested to visit the website, <https://airports.abprocure.com/> and access the Request for Proposal (RFP) document(s).

RFP access shall be available from January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, till IST 5:00 pm on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

**सूचना**

पूर्णानंद इण्टर कॉलेज, दुबेछपरा, बलिया के साधारण-सभा (दी पूर्णानंद हाईस्कूल सोसायटी, दुबेछपरा, बलिया) की एक बैठक प्रबंध समिति के गठन हेतु दिनांक 02.02.2025 को दिन में 11.00 बजे विद्यालय पी० एन० इण्टर कॉलेज, दुबेछपरा, बलिया के प्रांगड में आरंभ की जाती है, जिसमें आप सदस्यों की उपस्थिति प्राथमिक है। प्रबंध समिति के गठन का कार्यक्रम निम्नवत् है- क्र.सं. विवरण/कार्यक्रम तिथि समय 1.नामांकन-01.02.2025 - प्रातः 10 बजे से 12 बजे दिन तक, 2. नामांकन पत्रों की जाँच - 01.02.2025 12.30 दिन से 01.30 बजे दिन तक 3. नामांकन पत्रों की वापसी - 01.02.2025 2.00 बजे से अपरान्ह 3 बजे तक, 4. मतदान -02.02.2025 दिन में 11.00 बजे से 2.00 बजे दिन तक, 5. मतगणना एवं परिणामों की घोषणा -02.02.2025 मतदान के पश्चात

(संतोष कुमार मिश्रा) (विमला मिश्रा)

अध्यक्ष प्रबंधक

पी० एन० इण्टर कॉलेज, दुबेछपरा, बलिया पी० एन० इण्टर कॉलेज, दुबेछपरा, बलिया

**THE DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL**

600/1 University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow-226007

**SUMMONS FOR FILLING REPLY & APPEARANCE BY PUBLICATION**

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 21.11.2024

(Summons to the defendants through publication under section 19(3) of the Recovery of Debt Due to Bank & Financial Institution Act, 1993 Read with rules 12 and 13 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 1993).

Original Application No. 869 of 2024

HDFC Bank Ltd. Through its Authorized Signatory \_\_\_\_\_ Applicant AND \_\_\_\_\_ Defendant

Haider Rehana \_\_\_\_\_ Defendant

To, 1- Haider Rehana, (Borrower) Daughter of Sri Husain Ishrat Resident of - House No. 528-A, Insaf Nagar, Indira Nagar, (Near - Lucknow Public School) District - Lucknow-226016

In the above noted application, you are required to file reply in paper book form in four sets along with documents and affidavits (if any) personally or through your duly authorized agent, or legal practitioner in Tribunal after serving copy of the same on the applicant or his counsel/ duly authorized agent after publication of the summons, and thereafter to appear before the tribunal on 20.01.2025 at 10:30 a.m. failing which the applicant shall be heard and decided in your absence.

Registrar Debt Recovery Tribunal Lucknow

**Form No.5**

**See Rule 12 and 13**

**THE DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL**

600/1 University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow-226007

**SUMMONS FOR FILLING REPLY & APPEARANCE BY PUBLICATION**

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 11.12.2024

(Summons to the defendants through publication under section 19(3) of the Recovery of Debt Due to Bank & Financial Institution Act, 1993 Read with rules 12 and 13 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 1993).

Original Application No. 872 of 2024

HDFC Bank Ltd. Through its Authorized Signatory \_\_\_\_\_ Applicant AND \_\_\_\_\_ Defendant

Nadeemuddin Ahmed & Others \_\_\_\_\_ Defendant

To, 1- Nadeemuddin Ahmed, (Borrower) Son of Dr. Z U Ahmed, Resident of - 3/200, Vikas Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow 2- Farhana Ahmed, Wife of Nadeemuddin Ahmed, Resident of - 3/200, Vikas Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow

In the above noted application, you are required to file reply in paper book form in four sets along with documents and affidavits (if any) personally or through your duly authorized agent, or legal practitioner in Tribunal after serving copy of the same on the applicant or his counsel/ duly authorized agent after publication of the summons, and thereafter to appear before the tribunal on 28.01.2025 at 10:30 a.m. failing which the applicant shall be heard and decided in your absence.

Registrar Debt Recovery Tribunal Lucknow

# Discipline, tradition mark grand entry of Atal, Nirvani akharas

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The 13 Akharas of Sanatan Dharma, a cornerstone of public faith, continue to establish their presence in the Akhara sector for the upcoming Maha Kumbh at the Sangam. The Shri Shambhu Panch Dashnam Atal Akhara entered the cantonment on Wednesday. A large number of devotees gathered to see the grand entry. The akharas, which came into existence in an organised form in the sixth century with the efforts of Adi Guru Shankaracharya, were established to advance both weapons and scriptures. If the scriptures spread Shankar's religious thoughts to the masses,

the weapons protected it from attacks from other religions. Among these akharas, the akhara of Shaiv Sanyasi Shri Shambhu Panch Dashnam Atal Akhara, took out its grand cantonment entry procession for entry into the Kumbh area. This entry procession was taken out from the local headquarters of the akhara at Alopai Bagh. A beautiful combination of tradition, enthusiasm and discipline was visible throughout the entry procession. This entry procession was taken out under the leadership of Acharya Maha Mandaleshwar Swami Vishwamanand Saraswati. The procession of the akhara's Isht Devta Lord Gajanan was at the front and behind him were the

traditional deities of the akhara. A crowd of local people gathered in the city to see the army of Naga ascetics at the cantonment entry of Atal Akhara, which started from the local headquarters. Naga ascetics were walking in a queue after the revered deity Bhala of the akhara, who was walking behind Isht Devta Ganapati. This was the first akhara in which Naga Sanyasis also registered their presence. A child Naga was also the center of attraction for the people at the cantonment entrance. Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Vishwamanand Saraswati of the akhara says that more than two dozen Maha Mandaleshwar and more than two hundred Naga Sanyasis were present in the

cantonment. People gathered on both sides of the roads to seek the blessings of the saints of the akhara riding on chariots. The Shri Panchayati Akhara Maha Nirvani also entered the cantonment area with regal splendour. Renowned as the wealthiest among the 13 Akharas of Sanatan Dharma, Shri Panchayati Akhara Maha Nirvani commenced its majestic procession from its local base near Alopai Bagh. Leading the procession was the chariot of the akhara's presiding deity, Lord Kapil Ji, followed by the grand chariot of Acharya Maha Mandaleshwar Swami Vishokanand Ji, offering devotees a divine spectacle.

# UP govt empowers divyangjans with jobs through MGNREGA

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership, Uttar Pradesh is making significant strides in providing employment to vulnerable groups through the MGNREGA scheme. The Rural Development Department is offering jobs to the underprivileged, labourers, women and the differently-abled (divyangjans), fostering a self-reliant society. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath firmly believes that true development is achieved when the needs of the weakest sections of society are addressed, and they are empowered to claim their rightful opportunities.

Under his leadership, the MGNREGA scheme has been implemented to enable divyangjans to achieve self-reliance. This initiative represents a pivotal step toward the holistic development of the state and the establishment of equal opportunities for all. The MGNREGA scheme ensures that divyangjans receive employment aligned with their qualifications, skills and capabilities. Chief Minister Yogi is steadfast in his efforts to guarantee equal livelihood rights for this segment of society. Since 2017-18, over 1.24 lakh divyangjans have been employed under this scheme, strengthening their livelihoods and generating 44.64 lakh man-days of work.

According to the Rural Development Department, the MGNREGA scheme provides 100 days of employment to workers in need, based on demand. Divyangjans are assigned work tailored to their abilities and requirements, ensuring inclusivity and dignity. Beyond employment, this initiative is fostering social justice and equality, contributing to a more inclusive and empowered Uttar Pradesh. The financial year 2024-25 has witnessed remarkable progress in providing employment opportunities for divyangjans. Out of 50,201 registered Divyang job Card holders, 23,262 have secured employment under the MGNREGA

scheme, generating an impressive 8.28 lakh man-days. Comparing previous years' data highlights this achievement. As many as 11,332 divyangjans were employed in 2017-18, followed by 10,993 in 2018-19, 10,699 in 2019-20, 17,400 in 2020-21, 14,065 in 2021-22, 13,948 in 2022-23, and 22,630 in 2023-24. This year, the number has already reached 23,262, showcasing consistent growth. The government has leveraged digital technology to enhance transparency in the MGNREGA scheme. Processes such as registration, job card distribution and work allocation are now streamlined on a digital platform, ensuring quick and efficient service delivery.

# 'Maha Kumbh symbolises essence of faith, spirituality'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ahead of the Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh's Minister for Tourism and Culture, Jaiveer Singh, provided an update on the preparations for the world's largest religious, spiritual, and cultural gathering during a press conference on Thursday. Singh stated, "Maha Kumbh symbolises the essence of Indian faith and spirituality, with an estimated 500 million devotees from around the world expected to participate. To ensure a holistic experience for pilgrims and travellers, we have introduced a 'spiritual triangle' connecting Kashi, Ayodhya, and Prayagraj, offer-

ing seamless pilgrimage tours." He also announced that Maha Kumbh 2025 will host a congregation of artists from January 16 to February 26. Renowned and award-winning artists, including Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan recipients, will perform in various languages and genres over the 43-day event. The aim is to transform Prayagraj into a cultural hub, offering visitors a glimpse into India's rich heritage. The minister also highlighted the development of a comprehensive security plan, including air, ground, and water surveillance, to ensure the safety of the large influx of visitors expected from around the

world. Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Mukesh Kumar Meshram, announced that Maha Kumbh 2025 will run from January 13 to February 26. Extensive arrangements have been made for accommodation, travel, and the convenience of devotees. "A dedicated website and app have been launched to provide all necessary information. A chatbot service has also been introduced for instant answers to frequently asked questions. QR codes for bookings and downloading the app are being promoted to prevent digital scams. For any issues related to digital fraud, a cyberpolice

station has been set up at the Maha Kumbh city," he said. Additionally, a parking facility for 5 lakh cars and extended ghats stretching over 12 kilometres have been arranged. Cultural programmes will be hosted at the grand Ganga Pandal, which has a capacity of 10,000 people, along with 20 smaller stages across Prayagraj, each with a capacity of 1,000 to 2,000 people. Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation, Sanya Chhabra, shared details about the establishment of a premium tent city with modern facilities. Cultural events, Yagyshalas, displays of ODOP (One

District One Product) items, regional handicrafts, and curated tours of Akharas and Kalpvasi will be available. An eight-minute helicopter ride has also been introduced, priced at Rs 3,000 per person. Dome-styled luxury tents, featuring internal stairs for a mesmerising sky view, will be set up at Maha Kumbh. The minister urged the media and citizens to actively promote and market Maha Kumbh 2025 to enhance the global stature of the state and its spiritual significance. "The Uttar Pradesh government is committed to ensuring that every devotee returns with a sense of spiritual fulfillment and cultural pride," Singh said.

# Shops selling worship materials being meticulously set up

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj are in full swing, with rapid efforts underway to ensure the event's success. As the city prepares to host millions of devotees, the excitement is palpable among sadhus, kalpvasis, pilgrims and local residents alike. Shopkeepers at the Sangam and Mela areas are stocking up essential religious items, including puja materials, patra-panchang, Rudraksha, Tulsi garlands and sacred texts, sourced from Nepal, Banaras and Mathura-Vrindavan. The Maha Kumbh is a grand celebration of the Sanatan faith, drawing devotees from every corner of the country to Prayagraj to partake in the spiritual virtue of bathing at the Triveni Sangam. This year, an estimated 40 to 45 crore devotees are expected to visit Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh. Under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Mela Authority is enthusiastically preparing for the arrival, stay and spiritual needs of the devotees. The people of Prayagraj, along with shopkeepers and traders, are equally excited about the Maha Kumbh, viewing it as an opportunity for both spiritual enrichment and economic growth through business and employment opportunities.



Across the city, hotels, restaurants, food stalls and shops selling puja materials, religious books, garlands and flowers are being decked up to cater to the needs of visitors. Wholesale traders are stocking up on goods from various cities, anticipating the high demand during the event. Rudraksha garlands are being sourced from Uttarakhand and Nepal, Tulsi garlands from Mathura-Vrindavan, and puja items like roli and sandalwood

from Varanasi and Delhi's Paharganj. Sanjeev Tiwari, a religious book seller in Daraganj, Prayagraj, reported that books from Gita Press, Gorakhpur, are in highest demand, especially the Ramcharitmanas, Bhagwat Gita, Shiv Puraan and collections of bhajans and aartis. Priests performing rituals are also purchasing patra and panchang printed in Varanasi. Additionally, brass and copper bells, lamp and

idols from Moradabad and Varanasi are being ordered in large quantities. Devotees, sadhus and sanyasis participating in kalpavas at the fair are demanding havan samagri, aasan, Gangajal, plates, urns and other items for worship. Shopkeepers are stocking these items in large quantities to meet the anticipated demand, ensuring they are well-prepared to serve the spiritual and practical needs of the visitors.

# Govt launches four QR code supported gateways

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Unprecedented security arrangements are being implemented for the safety of devotees at Maha Kumbh 2025, with extensive integration of digital technology. For the first time, devotees will receive real-time updates through social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. They can also instantly communicate their concerns or give feedback to senior police officers and the entire department within seconds. The Mahakumbh Police have introduced four 'digital doors' of security powered by QR codes. Scanning these codes will seamlessly connect devotees to the security system, providing immediate access to updates and a direct communication channel with the authorities. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is ensuring that this year's Maha Kumbh is both grand and divine. Under his guidance, extensive arrangements are being made to accommodate devotees from around the globe, with a special focus on security. A senior official of the Mahakumbh highlighted the issuance of four distinct QR codes that will act as gateways to the security network.

# 200 roads built, upgraded, beautified with saplings

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Once characterised by its narrow and worn-out roads, Prayagraj has undergone a remarkable transformation under the Yogi Adityanath government. Following the groundwork laid for Kumbh 2019, the city has seen unprecedented development ahead of Maha Kumbh 2025. With an emphasis on permanent infrastructure, over 200 roads have been newly constructed or upgraded, ensuring seamless connectivity for the millions of devotees expected to attend the grand spiritual gathering. Adding to the transformation, these roads have been adorned with three lakh plants and one lakh horticultural saplings, enhancing their visual appeal. As devotees flock to Prayagraj for Maha Kumbh, they will not only experience seamless travel, but also take home lasting memories of the city's beautified and welcoming atmosphere. In preparation for the grand Maha Kumbh event in Prayagraj, a total of 200 roads have been

upgraded to ensure seamless connectivity for devotees. These efforts include construction of new roads as well as widening and strengthening of existing ones, with contributions from three key departments. The Prayagraj Municipal Corporation has led the effort, successfully reconstructing, widening and strengthening 78 roads. The Public Works Department (PWD) has developed 74 roads, while the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) has worked on 48 roads. Beyond functional improvements, the roads have also been beautified to enhance the city's appeal. A variety of plants have been thoughtfully placed along the routes, with three lakh plants and one lakh horticultural saplings adorning these upgraded roads. These enhanced and beautified roads promise to make the journey to the Sangam smooth and spiritually enriching, offering devotees an experience of divine bliss during their visit to Maha Kumbh.

# Rlys to ensure clean and hygienic food at stations

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): As preparations for a grand Maha Kumbh 2025 gain momentum, the Railways are gearing up to enhance the experience for devotees and visitors, ensuring the availability of clean and hygienic food to them. The Prayagraj division has instructed all catering stall licence holders to adhere to the prescribed rates and maintain cleanliness and hygiene in food services. Additionally, all stalls have been directed to keep their goods systematically, ensure that employees wear proper uniforms and display name plates, and maintain polite behaviour towards the devotees. The Railways are also expanding the services continuously to accommodate the influx of devotees and tourists during the Maha Kumbh. Himanshu Shukla, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (Coaching), stated that for Maha Kumbh 2025, crores of devotees from across

the country and abroad are expected to visit Prayagraj for darshan and bathing, with a significant number of them travelling by train. He emphasised that it is the Railways' duty to offer the best services with dedication and assured full preparedness for the task. Shukla stated: "Regular and surprise inspections of stalls and passenger facilities will be conducted. Besides, licence holders have been instructed to provide details of their base kitchens without delay. In addition, Shukla encouraged the display of visitor books at the stalls inviting feedback from devotees and encouraging staff and licence holders to contribute suggestions for improving public facilities. The senior divisional commercial manager (coaching) announced that over 13,000 trains will be operated for the convenience of devotees during Maha Kumbh. This includes more than 10,000 regular trains

and over 3,000 special trains. To manage the massive flow of passengers, a total of 560 ticketing points, including UTS, ATVM, MUTS, enquiry and PRS, will be set up across nine railway stations — Prayagraj Junction, Subedarganj, Naini, Prayagraj Chheoki, Prayagraj Junction, Phaphamau, Prayagraj Rambagh, Prayagraj Sangam, and Jhansi, as well as in the fair area. Among these, 132 counters will be located at Prayagraj Junction, where approximately 10 lakh tickets can be distributed daily. In view of Kumbh Mela, the Railways has now introduced the facility to book railway tickets 15 days in advance. A toll-free helpline number, 1800 4199 139, has been operational since November 1, 2024, and will be staffed with four operators per shift round-the-clock. This helpline will provide information in languages such as Odia, Tamil/Telugu, Marathi, and Bengali during the fair period.

ARYAVART BANK		आर्यावर्त बैंक	
(A Joint Undertaking of Govt. of India, U.P. Govt. & Bank of India)		(संयुक्त संघटक, उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार एवं बैंक ऑफ इंडिया का संयुक्त संघटक)	
Regional Office: Lucknow, Aryavart Bhawan, 569/20/K/1, Sneh Nagar, V.I.P. Road, Opp. Awadh Hospital, Alambagh, Lucknow			
Notice Under Section-13(2) of The Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. (SARFAESI Act.)			
Authorized Officer, Aryavart Bank, Regional Office - Lucknow, have issued Demand Notice under Section-13(2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 through Registered /Speed post. The contents of the same are interalia the defaults committed by you in the payment of outstanding amount including principal interest and other charges etc. The outstanding dues are mentioned here-in-below :			
Sr. No.	Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors/Branch	Description of the property	Amount of Notice
1.	Mortgagor & Borrower: Shri Santosh Kumar S/o Shri Achchhehal, House No. 118, VIII- Rajjipur (Dervan), Post-Khemapur, Darvan Ambedkar Nagar, Khempur Uttar Pradesh - 224157 Guarantor: 1. Shri. Dharmendra Kumar S/o Late Lalita Prasad, Village-Rajjipur (Dervan), Post-Khemapur, Darvan Ambedkar Nagar, Khempur Uttar Pradesh-224157 2. Shri. Pinku Kumar S/o Shri Bahadur, Ranimabad, Malihabad Mohajjipur, Rusetta, Lucknow-227116 Branch : Khushhalganj	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at Plot part of Khasra No. 432, Village - Naraua, Pargana-Kakori, Tehsil and District - Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Santosh Kumar S/o Shri Achchhehal, De. Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 01.09.2018, Boundaries: East: Plot Dharmendra Kumar, West: Plot Virendra Kumar, North: Rasta 20 Ft. Wide, South: Aaraji Seller Area: 1000 Sq. feet, 92.396 Sq.mt.	Rs. 11,67,251.87 + Interest & Expenses etc.
2.	Borrower & Guarantor: Shri Rajnish Pandey S/o Shri Shesh Narayan Pandey, House No. 46 B, Tiwari Nagar, Sarosa Bharosa, Post Sadrona, Kakori Mod, Lucknow-226008 Borrower: Smt. Sadhna Pandey W/o Shri Rajneesh Kumar Pandey, House No. 46 B, Tiwari Nagar, Sarosa Bharosa, Post Sadrona, Kakori Mod, Lucknow-226008 Guarantor: Shri Umakant Dwivedi S/o Ram Sanware Dwivedi, House No. C-4580, Rajajipuram, District-Lucknow Pin-226017 Branch : Khushhalganj	Residential Property: Plot No. 46 B, Khasra No. 1331/4/1, Village-Sarosa-Bharosa, Pargana-Kakori, Post-Sadrona, Tehsil and District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Rajnish Pandey S/o Shri Shesh Narayan Pandey, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 18.10.2005, Boundaries: East: Plot No. 47, West: Plot No. 45, North: Plot No. 44, South: Rasta 20 Ft Wide Area: 900 Sq. feet, 83.643 Sq.mt.	Rs. 9,31,317.21 + Interest & Expenses etc.
3.	Borrower/Mortgagor: Smt. Shashi Pandey W/o Shri Netra Pandey, House No. 610/1863, Keshav Nagar, Sitapur Road Lucknow-226024 Co-Borrower: Shri Netra Pandey S/o Shri Amarnath Pandey, House No. 610/1863, Keshav Nagar, Sitapur Road, Lucknow-226024 Guarantor: 1. Shri. Amit Srivastava S/o Shri. Ram Laxhan Srivastava, House No. 4, Moti Nagar Lucknow-226004 2. Shri. Sumit Kumar Srivastava S/o Shri. Shivanand Maharaj, House No. 602, 6TH Floor Pushpa Apartment Vikas Nagar Lucknow-226022 Branch : Vikas Nagar	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at Plot No. 382, part of Khasra No. 299, Situated at Village - Faizullaganj, Pargana, Tehsil & District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Shashi Pandey W/o Shri Shrinetra Pandey, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 20.06.2008, Boundaries: East: Plot No. 379, West: 25 Ft. Wide Road, North: House Build on Plot No. 381, South: House Build on Plot No. 383 Area: 1200 Sq. feet, 111.52 Sq.mt.	Rs. 13,87,748.02 + Interest & Expenses etc.
4.	Borrower/Mortgagor: Smt. Sunita Srivastava W/o Late Manoj Kumar Srivastava, House No. M.L.I.G.-4/713, Sector-H, Jankipuram Scheme, District-Lucknow Pin-226021 Guarantors: 1. Shri. Laxman Kumar Srivastava S/o Shri. OM Prakash Srivastava, House No. C-95, Sector-C, Jankipuram, Sita Road Yojna Lucknow-226021 2. Shri. Ashwani Verma S/o Shri. Keshav Verma, House No. 2/547, Viraj Khand Gorti Nagar Lucknow-226010 Branch : Vikas Nagar	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at House No. M.L.I.G.-4/713, Sector-H, Jankipuram, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Sunita Srivastava W/o Late Manoj Kumar Srivastava, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 09.09.2011, Boundaries: East: 4.5 Mtr. Wide Road, West: House No. 4/755, North: House No. 4/712, South: House No. 4/714 Area: 38.76 Sq.mt.	Rs. 5,80,343.55 + Interest & Expenses etc.
5.	Mortgagor & Borrower: Smt. Urmila Jaiswal W/o late Sahaj Ram Jaiswal, C-14 B/27A, Shivajipuram Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016 Co-Borrower: Smt. Jayanti Jaiswal W/o Shri Pramod Jaiswal, C-14 B/27A, Shivajipuram Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016 Guarantor: 1. Shri. Sandeep Gaur S/o Shri Ram Kumar Gaur, 19/460, Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016 2. Shri. Sunil Kumar S/o Shri. Jagdish Prasad, 640, Sector-15, Avanti Puram Pani Tanki, Chinhat, Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016 Branch : Chandan	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at 17/CP-205, Indira Nagar, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Mrs. Urmila Jaiswal W/o Late Sahajram Jaiswal, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 12.06.2013, Boundaries: East: 4.5 Mt. Road, West: 17/C.P. 214, North: 17/C.P.204, South: 17/C.P.206 Area: 7.92 Sq.mt.	Rs. 9,02,242.41 + Interest & Expenses etc.
6.	Mortgagor & Guarantor: Smt. Gayatri Devi Gupta W/o Shri Giridhari Lal Gupta, House No. 24A, Satyam Vihar Colony, Manas City, Sugamau, Cimpal Lucknow-226015 Borrower: Shri Ankur Gupta S/o Shri Giridhari Lal Gupta, House No. 24A, Satyam Vihar Colony, Manas City, Sugamau, Cimpal Lucknow-226015 Guarantor: 1. Shri Tika Ram Maurya S/o Shri Shri Charan Maurya, House No. 3/931, Jankipuram Vistar Lucknow-226021 2. Sunil Kumar Gupta S/o Shri Ramnath Gupta, Sector-17, Indira Nagar, Sabji Mandi, Indira Nagar, Lucknow-226016 & House no. 113/A, Vinay Vihar, Sugamau Lucknow-226016 Branch : Chandan	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the Part of Plot No. 24, Curved upon Khasra No. 556, Village-Sugamau, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Gayatri Devi Gupta W/o Shri Giridhari Lal Gupta, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 06.03.2006, Boundaries: East: Rasta 20 Feet, West: Plot Samiti, North: Balance Plot of Seller, South: Plot No. 23 Area: 700 Sq. feet, 65.06 Sq.mt.	Rs. 6,60,438.57 + Interest & Expenses etc.
7.	Borrower & Mortgagor: Shri Ful Chandra Tiwari S/o Shri Hari Prasad Tiwari, Plot No. 2, Khasra No. 249, Adil Nagar, Ward Shankar Purwa, Kalyanpur-Lucknow Pin-226022 Borrower: M/s Manish Enterprises, Prop: Shir Ful Chandra Tiwari, Plot No. 2, Khasra No. 249, Adil Nagar, Ward Shankar Purwa, Kalyanpur-Lucknow Pin-226022 Guarantor: 1. Shri Raghendra Prasad Pandey S/o Shri Jagat Prasad Pandey, Plot No. 1, Adil Nagar, Kalyanpur, Lucknow-226022 2. Shri. Pawan Kumar Pathak S/o Shri Triyagi Narayan Pathak, 6A/763, Gopesh Kunj, Raibereilli Road, Vrindavan Yojna, Lucknow-226029 Branch : Kalyanpur	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at Plot No. 02, Part of Khasra No. 249, Min. Situated at Adil Nagar, Ward - Shankarpurwa, Pargana, Tehsil & District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Ful Chandra Tiwari S/o Hari Prasad Tiwari, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 17.06.2003, Boundaries: East: Rasta 16 Feet, West: Plot No. 9, North: Araje Samiti, South: Araje Deegar Area: 46.47 Sq.mt.	Rs. 3,43,990.40 + Interest & Expenses etc.
8.	Mortgagor & Borrower: Shri Ramesh Singh S/o Shri Sambhar Singh, Rampur Devrai, Bakshi Ka Talab Lucknow-227202 Guarantor: 1. Shri. Chatar Pal S/o Shri Maliku Lal, Rampur Devrai, Bakshi Ka Talab Lucknow-227202 2. Shri. Devendra Singh Chavan S/o Shri. Shiv Kumar Singh Chavan, Rampur Devrai, Bakshi Ka Talab, Lucknow-227202 Branch : Bakshi Ka Talab	Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at 17/CP-205, Indira Nagar, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Ramesh Singh S/o Shri Sambhar Singh, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 08.03.2013, Boundaries: East: Khat Banwarli & Others, West: Rasta 15 Feet (Chakmarg), North: Plot Seller, South: Plot Seller Area: 3550.8 Sq. feet, 300 Sq.mt. Residential Property: All part and parcel of the property situated at 17/CP-205, Indira Nagar, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Ramesh Singh S/o Shri Sambhar Singh, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 10.04.2013, Boundaries: East: Khat Banwarli & Others, West: Rasta 15 Feet (Chakmarg), North: Plot Purchaser, South: Plot Deegar Area: 3550.8 Sq. feet, 300 Sq.mt.	Rs. 14,99,473.59 + Interest & Expenses etc.

Further with reasons, we believe that you are avoiding the service of said Demand Notice issued under the Act hence, we are now constrained to make this publication of demand notice, as required u/s-13(2) of said Act, the Rule-3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. You are hereby called upon to pay Aryavart Bank, within a period of 60 days from the date of publication of this Demand Notice with the aforesaid amount alongwith further interest, cost, incidental expenses, charges etc., failing which, we Aryavart Bank will take necessary action under the provisions of Section-13(4) of sale thereof. Further, you are prohibited u/s-13(13) of the said Act from transferring either by way of sale/lease etc. and encumber in any other way, the aforesaid secured asset.

Date : 03.01.2025 Place : Lucknow Authorised Officer

# Around 7.43L offer prayers at KV Temple on new year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A huge crowd of people, including tourists, thronged Kashi Vishwanath, Kal Bhairav, Sankatmochan, Bada Ganesha and other famous temples of this holy city on the first day of new year. About 7.43 lakh devotees offered prayers at Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) in comparison to around six lakh on the same day last year seeking blessings of Lord Shiva for a happy and prosperous life.



Rush of devotees at Kashi Vishwanath Temple on new year in Varanasi

Besides, various Ganga ghats, including Dashashwamedh, Assi and Namoh Ghat, were crowded. On the occasion, there was also witnessed at the Subah-e-Banaras programme at Assi Ghat in the morning and Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat in the evening. Crowds were also seen during the Kashi Vandana programme at Namoh Ghat.

After the completion of the second phase of development work at Namoh Ghat, the rush of people, especially with their families, has been heavy on the first day of this year. Similarly, a huge crowd was also seen in sandy area across Ganga river. At Saranath, rush was seen at Deer Park and various Buddhist temples apart from Sarang Nath Mahadev Temple

throughout the day. At KVT, after the Mangala Aarti ended and the doors opened the rush of devotees for darshan began with the slogan of 'Har Har Mahadev' echoing in the air. By 9 am, the number of devotees reaching Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham was over three lakh. Besides, a large number of people visited Maa

Vindhyavasini Devi Dham in Mirzapur district and started the new year with the blessings of Maa Vindhyavasini. Hundreds of locals also visited various waterfalls located in the adjoining districts of Chandauli and Mirzapur like Rajdhari-Devdhari, Lakhaniya Dhari and Vindham. Elaborate security arrangements were made at different places, including temples, Ganga ghats and Saranath, to avoid any untoward incidents. According to DSP (Kashi Zone) Gaurav Banswal, the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham was divided into five sectors where the security personnel were deployed at 45 points. Besides, the cops were deployed at 11 points at Kal Bhairav Temple and eight at Sankatmochan Temple. Lanka police personnel were deployed at Vishwanath Temple in Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Apart from them, NDRF and Water Police personnel kept a close watch on Ganga.

# MoU to develop latest technology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Director, National Sugar Institute (NSI), Kanpur, Prof Seema Paroha and Vice-Chancellor of Harcourt Butler Technical University (HBTU), Kanpur, Prof Samsher signed an MoU on new year on Wednesday. During the discussion on MoU, Assistant Professors (Sugar Engineering) Dr Vinay Kumar, Anup Kumar Kanojia, Sanjay Chauhan from NSI and Senior Administrative Officer Brijesh Kumar Sahu, were present. Director, Directorate of Technical Education, UP, Annavi Dinesh Kumar, Dean of Academic Affairs of HBTU, Prof Lalit Kumar Singh, Dean, School of Chemical Technology, Prof GL Devnani, Registrar A Verma and Prof Vandana Dixit were also present. According to the MoU, NSI and HBTU will jointly do excellent research work and develop latest technology and will send their faculty to each other as per requirement for academic work. Apart from this, national



and international seminars/conferences etc. will be organised on various subjects from time to time. This MoU will prove to be a milestone in the educational field and will be very beneficial for the students studying in both the institutions in future. Expressing happiness over the MoU, Prof Seema Paroha said work for the MoU between the two educational institutions considered to be the pride of Kanpur was going on for a long time, which was completed in the new year. **SUSPENDED:** District Development Officer (DDO)

Gajendra Pratap Singh initiated action against Village Development Officer (VDO) Manoj Verma by suspending him for allocating housing funds to 15 ineligible persons under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in Madhai Nivada of Shivrajpur block. At the time of suspension, Verma was serving in Kalyanpur block and was reassigned to Bidhnu block. About 30 days ago Chief Development Officer (CDO) Deeksha Jain received a complaint from Jitendra Singh of Madhai Nivada village stating that VDO Manoj Verma distributed housing funds to roughly

28 unqualified recipients in Shivrajpur block during the past year. Following this, the project director instructed block development officer (BDO) Ashish Mishra to conduct an inquiry which confirmed that housing benefits were wrongly given to 15 individuals. The VDO failed to provide an adequate explanation when the BDO issued a notice to the secretary. Subsequently, the CDO submitted a report regarding the VDO's improper implementation of the scheme. Thereafter, the DDO issued the suspension order for the VDO and transferred him to Bidhnu block.

# 'Role of NEP & relevance of self-reliant India important in promoting languages'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The role of National Education Policy (NEP) and relevance of self-reliant India is important in promoting Indian languages, said Prof Ravindra Raina of Durban University, South Africa while expressing views as the key speaker in a one-day lecture organised in the Commerce Faculty of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Thursday. The lecture was organised on the subject of commerce education and research. He advised academicians to write and publish such books which can be understood by every section of the society. He encouraged the young generation to innovate

in research and education. Dean of Commerce Faculty, BHU, Prof Henderson Kumar Singh welcomed the guests by presenting them a bouquet and *angavastram*. He said fundamental knowledge of India is contained in Indian languages. Along with implementing the curriculum based on the new education system, he recommended implementing the Indian knowledge system. India will become a world leader by following these footsteps. Prof RK Singh from Delhi School of Economics (Delhi University) discussed new research opportunities and highlighted the importance of India in the future and encouraged the students to write quality research papers.

Prof Dhananjay Sahu, Dr Lal Baboo Jaiswal, Dr Meenakshi Singh, Dr Alok, Dr Qureshi, Dr Surya, Dr Pallavi, Dr Shantanu Saurabh and researchers were present in the workshop. **UNNATI WINS FIRST PRIZE:** Unnati Gupta, an M Tech. student at the School of Biochemical Engineering, IIT (BHU) has been awarded the prestigious first prize for her oral presentation at the First International Conference on Recent Trends in Environmental Science, Remote Sensing, and Climate Change (WRSRSCC-2024), held at IIT Jammu recently. Unnati's winning research focuses on sustainable production of bioethanol using agricultural waste, specifically potato peel waste, as a feedstock.

# BLW family plays vital role in achieving goals of Indian Railways: GM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

General Manager Naresh Gal Singh inaugurated the cleanliness drive by actively participating in 'shramdaan' and led the employees, officials, and their families in taking the cleanliness pledge in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) while welcoming the New Year 2025 here on Wednesday. A cleanliness drive was organised at the pond complex in Kanchanpur Colony under the joint auspices of the Civil Engineering department and the Sarovar Conservation Club. As part of the campaign, the pond complex and surrounding areas were cleaned, making the premises clean and beautiful. This initiative not only served as a means to raise awareness about cleanliness



but also encouraged a spirit of environmental conservation and collective cooperation among employees and officials. The GM said, "A clean environment is a significant step toward a healthy life. Starting the new year with cleanliness is not just a tradition but reflects our commitment to society and the environment. A clean and green campus not only enhances our efficiency but

also lays the foundation for a healthy future for generations to come." He emphasised that the BLW family plays a crucial role in achieving the goals of Indian Railways. "The new year symbolises new energy and new resolutions. Together, we must set new records in the field of locomotive production", he added. The campaign saw active participation from members of the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Civil

Defence Organisation and St John Ambulance Brigade, reaffirming their commitment to cleanliness. The entire event was coordinated by Safety Officer Anup Singh Vats, who highlighted the significance of the cleanliness drive and discussed measures to continue this initiative in the future. Prominent officials who were also present were Principal Chief Electrical Engineer (PCEE) SK Srivastava, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer (PCME) Subrato Nath, Principal Chief Engineer (PCE) Vinod Kumar Shukla, Principal Chief Medical Officer Dr Devesh Kumar, Principal Chief Personnel Officer Janardan Singh, Chief Quality Assurance Manager (CQAM) Ramjanam Chaubey, Chief Design Engineer (Projects)

Anurag Gupta, Deputy Chief Personnel Officer Rajesh Kumar, Senior Medical Officer Dr Minhaj Ahmed, joint secretary of Staff Council Shrikant Yadav and its members. After *shramdaan*, the GM visited the Loco Assembly Shop, where he personally greeted employees and extended warm new year wishes. He praised their dedication and reaffirmed the goal of setting new targets and milestones in locomotive manufacturing. Singh also visited the Administrative Building, where he interacted with officers and employees, conveying his greetings and motivating them for the future. He remarked, "The hard work and dedication of the BLW family are our greatest strengths. Together, we will take locomotive production at BLW to new heights in 2025."

# Bridge construction before Maha Kumbh big achievement of 2024: DRM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Divisional railway Manager (DRM) of North Eastern Railway (NER) Vineet Kumar Srivastava said the completion of doubling work of Jhusi-Prayagraj (7.68 km) section, including construction of double line rail bridge over Ganga under Varanasi-Madhoshingh-Prayagraj project before Prayag Maha Kumbh was one of the biggest achievements of 2024 for Varanasi Division (NER). This project and bridge was inaugurated last month by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Towards the goal of Viksit Bharat-2047, Varanasi Division of NER continued its transformational journey in the year 2024, taking rapid steps towards modernisation and progress. With emphasis on making passenger and freight traffic world-class and use of advanced technologies, the division has underlined its important role in the development of the country by extensively promoting economic development through infrastructure upgradation and capacity enhancement", said Srivastava. According to him, during the year 93.20 km rail tracks were renewed with new rail tracks (60 kg per metre weight as per international standards for medium and heavy locomotive movement), apart from 26.68 track km sleepers and 105 turnouts. "A total of 127.07 km doubling and third line works were completed, which include Chhapra-Gautam Sthan (8.85 km), Belthara Road-Kidiharapur

(13.85 km), Rasra-Indara (28.22 km), Khurhat-Sathiyawan (18.17 km) and Khorasan Road-Didarganj Road-Shahganj (23.65 km) and Chhapra Kachhari-Chhapra (3 km)", the DRM said, adding that in the same sequence, work of Ghazipur Ghat-Tadighat and Ghazipur City-Tadighat (16.79 km) new railway line was completed. Besides, he said the work of automatic block signalling is being done at a fast pace. This year, so far about 29.37 km of automatic block signalling work has been completed in Varanasi division. With the completion of automatic block signalling work, operation of more trains has become possible and line capacity has also increased. "Keeping in mind Maha Kumbh-2025, road under bridge near Jhusi station yard, road under bridge between Jhusi-Ramnathpur stations and expanded passenger facilities at Prayagraj Rambagh and Jhusi stations were expanded", he said. The DRM said a total of 18 stations are being redeveloped in NER under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS). Srivastava said that during Durga Puja/ Deepawali/ Chhath in 2024, 259 Puja special trains were run in 1,725 rounds from/through NER. Besides, he said that rail coach restaurants are being operated at Banaras and Varanasi City stations. Digital payment is being promoted through QR code at all 151 PRS and UTS counters on NER. Apart from this, this year 114 hand held terminals (HHT) are being

used for allotment of berths to passengers in trains and for receiving digital payments and for paperless working, which has increased transparency in berth allotment. Under the new classification of railway stations on Indian Railways for the next five years, four stations of NER including Banaras, Chhapra and Mau, are classified in NSG-2 category, he added. Under the 'One Station One Product' (OSOP) scheme, the DRM said that 16 stalls/ 22 trolleys are being operated at 32 stations of NER. Due to availability of market for local products, employment opportunities have been provided to handicraftsmen/artisans. To ensure availability of affordable and quality medicines to passengers, Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra is operational at Banaras station of Varanasi division, he added. Not only this, in 2024, NER introduced three new Vande Bharat trains, which include 20175/20176 Banaras-Agra Cantt-Banaras Vande Bharat Express and 22345/22346 Patna-Gomti Nagar-Patna Vande Bharat Express. Apart from this, 22549/ 22550 Gorakhpur-Lucknow-Gorakhpur Vande Bharat Express was extended to Prayagraj Junction. "Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnav honoured a total of 101 dedicated officers and employees of Indian Railways including four officers/employees of NER by presenting the prestigious 69th Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Award 2024 for their exceptional con-

tribution to Indian Railways. The Railway Minister awarded Rail Madad Shield to NER for prompt redressal of passenger complaints received through Rail Madad Portal, Safety Shield for outstanding performance in safety and Govind Vallabh Pant Shield jointly to NER and Central Railway for overall outstanding performance in all areas", he added.

**31 personnel retire**  
In a simple ceremony held in the Bharatendu Auditorium Room of the DRM Office, a total of ₹8,93,84,357 was paid to 31 employees who retired on the last day of 2024. On the occasion, the DRM in his presidential address wished the retiring



employees a Happy New Year and assured them of good health. He asked the retired employees not to consider themselves separate from the railways and can seek help from the branch officers or him at any time to solve any problem. He said that the biggest strength of the railways is its employees. "No matter how big infrastructure the railways build or how expensive

machinery it purchases, the biggest strength is the railway employees whose retirement causes irreparable loss to the railways", he said, adding that the job in the railways has become so complex with time that retiring with a clean record is also like an award in itself which is far greater than all other honours or awards. The DRM gave service medals to all the retiring employees and wished them a good life ahead and expressed gratitude for their long and remarkable service. Senior Divisional Personnel Officer Sameer Paul spoke in detail about the ID card, service certificate and all the documents related to PPO and explained that they should use their receipts

very thoughtfully and should not give it to an inappropriate person by getting influenced or influenced by any person or organisation or by getting carried away by emotions. Senior Divisional Finance Manager Rajesh Kumar, Assistant Personnel Officer Virendra Yadav along with inspectors and employees of Accounts and Personnel departments were also present.

# Dr Mishra elected associate dean of ICP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Principal of Moti Lal Nehru Medical College (MLNMC) Dr Vatsala Mishra has been elected Associate Dean of Indian College of Pathologists (ICP) at national level. She has been looking after the work of Head of Department and Academic Dean of Pathology Department at MLNMC for a long time. Medical teachers and staff of MLNMC and Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital have congratulated her on this achievement. This achievement is a proof of her dedication and excellent leadership. Her appointment to this post was announced by ICP in the national convention held recently in Cuttack, Odisha. **SUICIDE:** A 25-year-old youth committed suicide by hanging himself in his room in Sarayammarej police station area here on Thursday. On receiving information, the police reached the spot and took the body into possession and sent it for post-mortem examination. Vinod, son of Kamla Shankar Yadav of Hariapur Patti, committed suicide by hanging himself.

# Install RO plant in shelter home: DM



DM S Rajalingam conducting a surprise inspection at a shelter home in Varanasi

District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam conducted a surprise inspection of the Municipal Corporation-run shelter home in trans Varuna Zone (Sikraul) in Bhimnagar and took stock of the basic facilities available there and gave necessary guidelines to personnel concerned. He took information about the people who came there on Tuesday from the attendance register and saw the feedback given by people in the complaint and suggestion registers. He instructed to record the purpose of stay along with Aadhar card number and mobile phone numbers of the people coming there every day. He instructed the Municipal Corporation officials to install RO plant for drinking water. During the inspection, adequate arrangements were found in the shelter home for blankets, quilts, mattresses, sheets, drinking

water, light, bonfire, separate toilets for men and women etc. The DM talked to the people staying there and enquired about the facilities to see if there was any problem. He instructed the officer concerned to write down the names and mobile numbers of all employees working there and paste the duty chart outside the shelter home. He distributed blankets to the helpless, poor, destitute and needy people from nearby areas to protect them from the cold. He told them that the government is distributing blankets to protect them from cold. He advised people to avoid the cold. He instructed to make arrangements for lighting bonfires regularly outside public places in the city, like railway stations, bus stations, temporary night shelters, major temples to protect them from the cold. Tehsildar Sadar, ICP, Municipal Corporation officials and others were present.

# Cultural performances organised at Yeshu Darbar University Church

Prayagraj (PNS): Prayers and cultural performances were held at Yeshu Darbar University Church of SHUATS to celebrate new year. Vice-Chancellor and Bishop Prof Rajendra B Lal prayed for the development of the country and the state along with good health of president, prime minister, governors, chief ministers etc. The students presented dance on the hymns 'Tere bhawan me anand ki bharpoori ho' followed by a song 'Hai Pak Khudavan Yeshu Masih' presented by Snigdha. University Chaplain Lalchung Gantge offered prayer. Avdesh presented a bhajan 'Swarg Rajya



Me Naam Likhaibu'. University treasurer also sang a bhajan 'Dhanyawad Ke Sath Stuti Gaunga'. Director HRM & R Dr Abhilasha J Lal wished everyone Happy New Year and described love as a priceless gift given by God. She also presented a hymn. Bishop Prof Lal said one should not be disappointed by failure and forget the old things. He said by keeping

faith in God and continuing efforts, success is sure to be achieved. Vice-President of Yeshu Darbar University Church Dr Sudha Lal, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academics) Prof Jonathan A Lal, Pro-V-C (Administration) Prof Bishwarup Mehra, Director Public Relations Dr Ramakant Dubey, Director Administration Sanjay Philip Das along with university teachers, employees and devotees of Yeshu Darbar University Church were present. **MISHAP:** Three youths were killed when the car in which they were returning home after New Year celebration met with an accident in Meja area.

# Kanpur residents welcome new year with metro ride

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The people of Kanpur rang in the new year with a smooth ride on the metro. From children to adults, a large number of residents chose the Kanpur Metro to celebrate New Year. While the city's roads were clogged with traffic, those travelling by metro enjoyed a hassle-free and relaxing journey. The metro line became a bustling hotspot throughout the day, with passengers also visiting the book fair organised at Motijheel station. Commuters continued to flock to the metro well into the evening. Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail

Corporation Limited (UPMRC) Sushil Kumar, expressed his gratitude to the people of Kanpur on this special occasion. "Thanks to your love and support, Kanpur Metro has had a warm start to the New Year", he said. "This is just the beginning. In the coming year, we will extend Kanpur Metro's passenger services to Kanpur Central, which will further increase ridership. We are deeply thankful to the people of the city for their continued trust in Kanpur Metro. On behalf of the entire UPMRC team, I wish everyone in Kanpur a very Happy New Year." **FIR LOGGED:** The Kalyanpur police lodged FIR against nine

cops, including seven sub-inspectors, after 11 case diaries were reportedly found missing from the police station. Head clerk lodged a report against seven former S-Is and two head constables in this regard. Following the court's notice DCP (West) directed the ACP Kalyanpur to conduct an inquiry which verified the disappearance. Inspector Ramchandra Dohre, posted at Kalyanpur police station in 2008, investigated a forgery and fraud case. The case diary, which should have been presented to the court, remains unaccounted for even after 16 years. DCP (West) Rajesh Kumar Singh confirmed through ACP Kalyanpur

Abhishek Pandey's investigations that numerous case diaries from 2008 to 2021 were missing. The missing documents include S-I Devendra Kumar's 2010 cheque bounce case investigation, S-I Narendra Bahadur Singh's 2013 investigations into electric meter tampering, forgery, breach of trust and conspiracy. Besides, S-I Dinesh Kumar Singh's 2014 investigations into attempted murder, abuse, assault, threats and Section 7 CLA were unaccounted for. Further missing records involve S-I Prembabu Goyal's investigation of a minor's abduction, head constable Phushpendra Singh's cases involving robbery, molestation, SC/ST Act, and

Arms Act violations. Also missing were S-I Chandra Bhan Singh's theft investigations and S-I Imtiaz Ahmad's cases concerning breach of trust and threats. Reports have been filed against all nine officials, with investigations in progress. The matter came to light when the case diaries did not reach the court. A report has been filed and action will be taken based on the investigation, ACP Rajesh Singh said. **DRIVER DIES:** A tempo driver, Dhiraj (27), was killed after his vehicle, going on the wrong side, suddenly overturned on Thursday morning. Police sent the body for autopsy after investigation.

# Will implement recommendations of panel on NEET-UG exam: Centre to SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Centre on Thursday informed the Supreme Court that it would be implementing all the corrective measures suggested by its seven-member expert panel on exam reforms after reviewing the National Testing Agency's functioning in holding NEET-UG last year.

The top court on August 2, last year refused to annul the controversy-ridden NEET-UG of 2024, saying there was no sufficient material on record at present to indicate a systemic leak or malpractice compromising the integrity of the examination. It had also expanded the remit

of the seven-member expert panel, headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief K Radhakrishnan, to review the functioning of the National Testing Agency (NTA) and recommend exam reforms to make the NEET-UG (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test Undergraduate), transparent and free from malpractices.

On Thursday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, apprised a bench comprising justices PS Narasimha and Manoj Misra that the Centre-appointed committee has filed its report and the government will be implementing all the recommendations. "We are going to implement all



the recommendations and it (matter) can be listed after six months," the law officer said. "The matter is adjourned for three months. List this special leave petition in the month of April," the bench said.

The entire report has not been placed on the records as it also contained some details regarding issues like printing of questions etc. On October 21 last year, the top court had extended the time granted to the Centre-appointed seven-member expert panel to file its report on exam reforms. The NEET-UG is conducted by the NTA for admission in undergraduate medical programs. While expanding the scope of the expert panel, the top court

had flagged multiple lapses on the part of NTA like the security breach at an examination centre in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh where the rear door of the strongroom was opened and unauthorised people were permitted to access question papers, transportation of question papers by e-rickshaws and distribution of wrong set of question papers among the candidates. Besides Radhakrishnan, other members of the expert committee are Randeep Guleria, B J Rao, Ramamurthy K, Pankaj Bansal, Aditya Mittal and Govind Jaiswal. The bench said the remit of the committee, in addition to the tasks that it has been entrusted with by the Union government and the

NTA, shall encompass examination security and administration, data security and technological enhancements. Its responsibilities will also include policy and stakeholder engagement, collaboration and international cooperation, and recommendations for providing mental health support to students and training of NTA staff.

Over 23 lakh students took up the NEET-UG in 2024 for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses. In November last year, the top court dismissed a petition seeking review of the August 2 verdict by which it had refused to allow a fresh NEET-UG 2024 examination.

## Report submitted in Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid dispute

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The long-awaited survey report of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal has been submitted in the Chandausi court, intensifying the debate surrounding the contentious site. Advocate Commissioner Ramesh Singh Raghav handed over the 40-page document on Thursday to Civil Division Judge Aditya Singh in a sealed envelope.

The contents of the report, compiled during surveys conducted on November 19 and 24 last year, remain undisclosed pending further orders from the Supreme Court.

Raghav, explaining the delay in submission, said, "The survey was thorough and based on photos and videos collected over two days. Due to my health issues, there was some delay, but the report has now been filed and will remain sealed until directed otherwise by the Supreme Court." The survey's second day, November 24, coincided with violent clashes that left five peo-



ple dead. Local residents recall the chaos vividly. "The violence shook our entire community. People are still struggling to move past the events of that day," said Rajiv Kumar, a shopkeeper in the Kot Purvi area where the mosque is located.

The dispute revolves around claims by the Hindu petitioners that the Shahi Jama Masjid

was originally a Shri Harihar temple, demolished by Mughal emperor Babur in 1529. Mahant Rishi Raj Giri of Kailadevi temple, one of the petitioners, said, "This place holds immense religious significance. It is believed to be the prophesied site for Lord Vishnu's Dashavatar Kalki. There are several proofs within the structure that point to its

origins as a temple." The petitioners, led by Supreme Court lawyer Harishankar Jain and his son Vishnushankar Jain, have presented a 95-page document citing historical texts and archaeological findings to support their claim. Other petitioners include Mahant Dinanath and social workers Vedpal Singh, Madanpal, Rakesh Kumar, and Jeetpal Yadav.

The Advocate Commissioner confirmed that the next steps in the legal proceedings depend on potential appeals in the High Court. "For now, the court cannot open the report until a Supreme Court directive is issued. Even the judges have no access to the findings," Raghav added.

The submission of the report has heightened tensions in Sambhal. Many locals fear a resurgence of unrest. "We want peace and resolution, not more conflict," said Ayesha Begum, a resident living near the mosque. The case remains a sensitive issue, blending historical, legal, and communal aspects, as the nation awaits clarity on the court's next move.

## NHRC seeks action report on stampede death at 'Pushpa 2' screening

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

NHRC has sought an action taken report within four weeks from the Hyderabad police chief on the death of a woman in a stampede at a theatre in the Telangana capital early December where 'Pushpa 2' movie was screened, according to the case's proceedings. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has also said that the allegations in the stampede case be inquired by a senior rank police officer and sought "needful action" on it. The complaint was filed with the NHRC on December 5 and registered on December 17, as per the proceedings. The commission took action on January 1 and has sought a detailed action taken report "within four weeks".

A 35-year-old woman died during the stampede at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad on December 4 when the Allu Arjun-starrer 'Pushpa 2' movie was screened and her eight-year-old son was hospitalised. Following the incident, a case



was registered against Allu Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on a complaint by the deceased woman's family. Allu Arjun was arrested by the city police in connection with the death of the woman on December 13. The Telangana High Court granted him a four-week interim bail on the same day and he was released

from a prison in Hyderabad on December 14. According to the proceedings, the complainant has drawn attention of the commission towards death of a woman allegedly "due to lathi charge" by the police of Chikkadpally who accompanied Allu Arjun during a promotional show of 'Pushpa 2'. The stampede that happened there resulted in "serious injuries" to the woman and her two children, the complainant said.

"He has further alleged that lathi charge resorted to by police officials and lack of necessary arrangements, when film star Allu Arjun entered the theatre, resulted in the death" of the woman and injuries to her children, it said.

The complainant has requested the "intervention" of the NHRC to take "necessary action on erring police officials who had resorted to the lathi charge," it adds.

## SC orders copy of medical reports of Mukhtar Ansari be provided to son

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh authorities to provide medical and magisterial inquiry reports on the death of jailed gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari on March 28, 2024. A bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti took note of the submissions of senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Umar Ansari. Umar said the medical and the judicial inquiry reports pertaining to his father's death were not furnished by the State Government.

Ansari, 63, a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar, died of cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh on March 28, 2024. He was in jail since 2005, with over 60 criminal cases pending against him, and was convicted in the murder case of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai. Prior to his death, the son moved the top court in December, 2023, seeking a direction to transfer his father to any prison outside



Uttar Pradesh fearing for his life. In 2023, the State Government assured the bench it would strengthen Ansari's security inside the Banda jail, if required so that no harm was done to him. On Thursday, additional solicitor general K M Nataraj, appearing for UP Government, said the documents would be supplied to Umar. The bench observed a post-mortem was conducted on Ansari and a magisterial inquiry was also held later.

The top court asked the State

Government to provide the copies of the medical and inquiry reports within two weeks to the son who could file his response within three weeks thereafter. Umar's plea said after his mother approached the Allahabad High Court for protection, safety and security of Ansari, the court ordered enhancing his security in May, 2024. When Ansari died, his brother and Ghazipur MP Afzal Ansari alleged he was being subjected to "slow poisoning" in jail, a charge denied by the authorities.

## Cyber fraud known as 'pig butchering scam' targetting youths, hosuwives, students: MHA report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Ministry in its latest report cautioned that a new cyber fraud known as "pig butchering scam" or "investment scam" has emerged, targeting unemployed youths, housewives, students, and needy people who are made to lose large sums of money daily. The report said that cybercriminals have also been using Google services platforms to initiate these crimes.

"Google Advertisement platform provides a convenient facility for targeted advertisement from across the border. This scam, known as 'Pig Butchering Scam' or 'Investment Scam' is a global phenomenon and involves large-scale money laundering and even cyber slavery," it said. The pig butchering scam, which is believed to have started in China in 2016, targets gullible individuals with whom cyber criminals build trust over time, ultimately convincing them to invest in cryptocurrency or some other lucrative scheme when their money is stolen. The analogy to pig butchering comes from



the fattening of swine before their slaughter. To curb the menace, the Home Ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has partnered with Google to share the threat intelligence for urgent action periodically. The cybercriminals are using sponsored Facebook to launch illegal lending applications in India, the report said. "Such links are proactively identified and shared with Facebook, along with Facebook pages for necessary action," said the report by MHA.

WhatsApp remains the biggest social media platform that is possibly misused by cyber

criminals in India, the report said. The data published in the report on "cybercrime complaints where Big Tech platforms have been misused" shows that 14746 complaints were related to WhatsApp, 7651 against Instagram, 7152 against Facebook, and 1135 against YouTube till March 2024.

"Big techs play an important role in proactive identification and action on cyber criminals. I4C has partnered with Google and Facebook for sharing intelligence and signals for proactive actions," the report said.

National Cybercrime Threat

Analytical Unit (NCTAU) of I4C analyses the complaints reported on the portal and prepares analysis reports on the latest trends of cybercrime and misuse of services provided by service providers, it said.

"These reports are shared with all the concerned stakeholders, i.e., banks, wallets, merchants, payments aggregators, payment gateways, e-commerce and other departments to take preventive measures and mitigate the misuse of their platforms/services," the report said.

The Ministry has also rolled out a Cyber Volunteer Framework, which enables

citizens to enrol as cyber volunteers for reporting unlawful content on the Internet, dissemination of cyber hygiene and as cyber experts to aid law enforcement under which 54,833 volunteers had registered by March 31, 2024, according to the report.

The Ministry's integrated platform Citizen Financial Cyber Frauds Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS), where all stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies of states/Union territories, all major banks and financial intermediaries, payment wallets, crypto exchanges and e-commerce companies, work in tandem.

The platform ensures quick, decisive, and system-based effective action to prevent the flow of money from the victim's account to the cyber fraudster's account and the seized money is restored to the victim following due legal process, it said.

"Since its launch in April 2021, so far this platform has been able to save more than Rs 16 billion from going into the hands of fraudsters, and thus benefiting more than 5,75,000 victims," it said.

## High nitrate levels found in groundwater of 440 districts across India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

High nitrate levels have been found in groundwater of 440 districts across India, with 20 per cent of the samples collected exceeding the permissible nitrate concentration, the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) has said in a report. Nitrate contamination is a significant environmental and health concern, particularly in agricultural regions using nitrogen-based fertilizers and animal waste. The "Annual Groundwater Quality Report - 2024" also revealed that 9.04 per cent of samples had fluoride levels above the safe limit, while 3.55 per cent showed arsenic contamination.

A total of 15,259 monitoring locations were chosen nationwide to check groundwater quality in May 2023. Of these, 25 percent of wells (the most at

risk per BIS 10500) were studied in detail. Groundwater was sampled at 4,982 trend stations before and after the monsoon to see how recharge affects quality. The report found that 20 per cent of water samples exceeded the nitrate limit of 45 milligrams per liter (mg/l), the threshold set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) for drinking water. Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu had over 40 per cent of samples above the limit nitrate levels have remained stable since 2015. However, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana showed increasing contamination from 2017 to 2023, the CGWB said.

High nitrate levels can cause health issues like blue baby syndrome in infants and are unsafe for drinking. Fifteen districts in



Goa, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, all samples were within safe limits. In states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, nitrate levels have remained stable since 2015. However, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana showed increasing contamination from 2017 to 2023, the CGWB said.

High nitrate levels can cause health issues like blue baby syndrome in infants and are unsafe for drinking. Fifteen districts in

India have been identified as the most affected by high nitrate levels in groundwater including Barmer and Jodhpur in Rajasthan; Wardha, Buldhana, Amravati, Nanded, Beed, Jalgaon, and Yavatmal in Maharashtra; Rangareddy, Adilabad and Siddipet in Telangana; Villupuram in Tamil Nadu; Palnadu in Andhra Pradesh; and Bathinda in Punjab.

High nitrate levels in groundwater can be a result of excessive irrigation which can push nitrates from fertilizers deep into the soil, the report said. Poor management of animal waste in livestock farming adds to the problem, as it releases nitrates into the soil. Urbanisation and population growth increase wastewater and sewage, which often contain high nitrate levels, while leaking septic systems and poor sewage disposal worsen

contamination. The report further said fluoride concentrations exceeding the permissible limit are a major concern in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Elevated arsenic levels (more than 10 parts per billion) were found in several states, particularly in the floodplains of the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers. This includes regions of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur, as well as areas in Punjab and Rajasthan. The report also noted that long-term exposure to fluoride and arsenic contaminants can have severe health consequences, including fluorosis (from fluoride) and cancer or skin lesions (from arsenic). A major concern in the groundwater quality report was also the elevated levels of uranium in several regions.

## CISF records lowest number of suicides amongst its personnel in 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) on Thursday said it has recorded the lowest number of suicides amongst its personnel in 2024 -- at 15 -- over a six-year period due to some "credible" steps taken to resolve the problems of its staffers.

As per official data, the force, which guards vital and sensitive installations in the aerospace, nuclear and government domain, saw 15 deaths last year due to suicide, which comes to 9.86 per lakh in an organisation that has an operational strength of over 1.51 lakh personnel. The comparative data of deaths due to suicide in the force over the last five years stood at 25 (2023), 26 (2022), 21 (2021), 18 (2020) and 17 (2019). "The



CISF has taken credible steps in combating this challenge by implementing a series of proactive measures, which has led to substantial reduction in suicides of force members in 2024," said a CISF spokesperson.

As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the spokesperson said that the national suicide rate stood at 12.4 per lakh in 2022. "In comparison, the CISF has

significantly reduced its suicide rate to 9.87 per lakh in 2024, a decline of over 40 per cent from 2023," he said. It is for the first time in the last five years that suicide rate in the CISF has fallen below the national rate, the spokesperson claimed.

The official said the CISF has taken a series of steps to address "mental health issues" on "proactive" basis, leading to a "substantial" reduction in suicides.

This includes personalised engagement by the officers with the troops on the theme of 'know your men and hear your men', stress management through yoga and games, online grievance redressal, tele-counselling on mental health issues for 4,200 personnel till last year and taking action on mental health issues as recommended by the AIIMS.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Save Priya

Priya's story reveals a harrowing struggle. Efforts must intensify to stop her execution and ensure repatriation

The story of Nimisha Priya, a nurse from Kerala, currently on death row in Yemen, has sparked widespread debate and concern. With her death sentence sanctioned by Yemen's President Rashad al-Alimi, the clock is ticking on securing her release. Her story is not an isolated case but an ordeal that many workers face in the Gulf and many other countries. This case is not only about the fate of one individual but also raises critical questions about justice, diplomacy and human rights. Nimisha Priya, a trained nurse, moved to Yemen to work in private hospitals and make a career. In 2015, she partnered with Yemeni national Talal Abdo Mahdi to set up a clinic in Sana'a. Yemen's laws necessitate local sponsorship for businesses and Mahdi played that role for Priya. However, this professional relationship spiraled into a nightmare. Mahdi manipulated ownership documents of the clinic, claimed he was her husband using forged and morphed photographs and seized control of her finances. She was harassed mentally



and subjected to physical torture and imprisonment in her own home. In 2017, desperate to reclaim her passport and escape his clutches, Priya attempted to sedate Mahdi. Unfortunately, the sedatives proved fatal due to an overdose, leading to his death. The Yemeni judicial system found her guilty of murder, sentencing her a death sentence.

Efforts to appeal her conviction have been exhausted, with the Yemeni Supreme Court and President rejecting her pleas. While Mahdi's death is undeniably tragic, Priya only wanted to regain her life and runaway from coercion and cruelty. If she is executed

than it would be travesty of justice and would mean penalising a victim. Priya's actions, though legally punishable, occurred in a context of desperation and fear for her safety and freedom. The Government of India must assist Nimisha Priya and her family in securing her release and repatriation. Her release hinges on a complex process involving Yemen's tribal justice system and the payment of blood money to Mahdi's family must be paid by the accused to get a pardon. High-level diplomatic discussions with Yemeni authorities and tribal leaders are essential to secure a waiver of the death penalty. Besides, mobilising public support to raise blood money can be a way out. Employing a dedicated legal team with expertise in Yemeni law and tribal negotiations is crucial to ensuring fairness and efficiency in the process. Highlighting Priya's case on global platforms as a human rights issue may garner international support and pressure Yemen to reconsider her sentence. Priya's case underscores the plight of expatriates caught in abusive circumstances. Her actions, while grave, were not premeditated but driven by self-preservation against a backdrop of systemic exploitation. Repatriating Priya to India would allow her a better trial. The Indian government and civil society must step up efforts to secure her release and ensure she receives a fair chance to rebuild her life.

## PICTALK



Local folk singers (Baul Fakir) perform to entertain visitors and wishing them Happy New Year, in Birbhum

## Winter session stalemate: Urgent need for reform



KALYANI SHANKAR

There is a pressing need for parliamentary reforms to ensure discipline, decorum and efficiency as a lot of parliamentary time is simply wasted

The Parliament's productivity in the recent Winter Session was a record low, with only 52 per cent of scheduled work completed. Various factors, including disruptions and lack of quorum, contributed to the reduced output. The confrontation between the treasury benches and a belligerent Opposition continued throughout. The current performance highlights the challenges in maintaining productivity. The Opposition, in particular, wanted to discuss the Adani issue. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi has been raising the issue in public. It is a matter of significant public interest due to its implications. Also, the Opposition asked Union Home Minister Amit Shah to apologize for his comments about Dr BR Ambedkar, a highly respected figure in Indian history. The government was not willing to be flexible. With a productivity of merely 40.03 per cent during the Winter session.

Lok Sabha passed four of the five bills it received. Rajya Sabha approved 3 bills. During this session, the Lok Sabha lost 65 hours and 15 minutes, the highest in 2024. Many requests for adjournment motions made in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were not accepted. The 18th Lok Sabha is different in many respects. For the first time in a decade, we have a strong opposition with an official leader of Opposition (LOP). The bitterness between parties within and outside Parliament is increasing. Neither side is willing to accommodate. Discipline, decorum and dignity of Parliament are of paramount importance. The pressing need for parliamentary reforms is more evident than ever, and action is needed now. Over Rs 97,87,50,000 of taxpayers' money was spent during the Winter Session. The cost of running a Parliament session is over Rs 2.5 lakh per minute, a considerable burden on the exchequer, which should prompt reevaluating our parli-



mentary practices. The Parliament's high cost and low productivity must be addressed sooner or later. House is often adjourned many times a day. In the last five decades, it has increased by over 100 times. This underlines the need to address the issue. For instance, Parliament saw protests from the ruling BJP-led NDA and the aggressive Opposition INDIA Bloc. BJP MPs accused the Congress party of "insulting" Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and INDIA Bloc MPs demanded the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his comments about Ambedkar. The escalating conflict over this issue resulted in two injuries and police involvement. Political parties should focus on honouring Ambedkar's legacy instead of blaming each other. Other bills include the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, the Bharatiya Vayuyan Vidheyak, the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, the Bills of Lading Bill, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, the Railways (Amendment) Bill, the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, and the



DURING THIS SESSION, THE LOK SABHA LOST 65 HOURS AND 15 MINUTES, THE HIGHEST IN 2024. MANY REQUESTS FOR ADJOURNMENT MOTIONS MADE IN LOK SABHA AND RAJYA SABHA WERE NOT ACCEPTED

Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill. The government also introduced a controversial bill, 'One Nation, One Poll'. While the MPs are called lawmakers, Bills have been passed amidst the din and noise without proper discussion. The decreasing time available for parliamentary debates is detrimental to democracy. Protests, adjournments, and shortened sessions have lost nearly half of the sessions. Parliamentarians question the government, elicit information, and check it mainly through the Question Hour. Short Notice questions, calling attention, and adjournment motions all check the executive. But all these are relevant only when the House runs. More efforts need to be made to establish the success of a parliamentary system: Discipline, character, and a strong sense of public morality. The need for comprehensive and immediate parliamentary reforms is more evident than ever, and the time for action is now. All stakeholders, including political analysts and citizens, must understand the urgency of the system. All stakeholders, from

oilfield parties to citizens interested in governance and parliamentary affairs, should feel this urgency. Economic reforms are imperative to ensure sustainable economic growth. The role of Parliament is linked with the new economic policy, which should lead to a drastic reduction in the role of the State. Professionalising floor management techniques is crucial to ensuring Parliament's efficient functioning. While we can legitimately be proud of the reasonably successful work of Parliament during the last five decades, Parliament must function in step with the needs of the changing times. We must proceed carefully and cautiously and evolve a national consensus on desirable changes. After all, Parliament is the communication link between the people and the government. The solution lies in adopting healthy parliamentary practices and maintaining decorum and discipline, which are crucial for dignified conduct in the Parliament. For this, both the government and the Opposition must cooperate.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## AN EXCELLENT ARTICLE ON DR SINGH

Madam — I am writing to express my heartfelt appreciation for the excellent article titled 'The Statesman and a Gentleman' published in your esteemed newspaper. The article captures the life, legacy and unparalleled contribution of Dr Manmohan Singh to India's economic and political landscape. The article is very informative and educative. I have found Dr V K Bahuguna extremely well-informed. His writings are excellent and deep.

R K Sharma | New Delhi

## SIMPLIFY H-1B VISA PROCESS

Madam — The H-1B visa system, a vital link between international talent and US companies, has become a contentious issue in the global workplace. It offers opportunities for skilled professionals in fields like technology, medicine, and engineering but faces significant challenges such as intense competition, complex procedures, and unclear minimum wage thresholds. According to a 2024 report by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, only 85,000 of 387,000 applications were approved, with the lottery-based system often excluding highly qualified professionals. Companies like Infosys, TCS, and Google face talent shortages due to limited approvals, while startups struggle with high costs, ranging from \$35,000 to \$50,000 per application.

The lack of a minimum wage threshold further fosters unfair competition for U.S. workers. Tesla CEO Elon Musk has called for reforms, including a minimum wage of \$150,000 to ensure only highly skilled professionals qualify. He advocates simplifying and automating processes to enhance efficiency. Musk also suggests reducing fees to support startups and small businesses, aligning the system with its goal of advancing America's technological and industrial leadership. Reforming the H-1B visa system could boost U.S. innovation, productivity, and tax revenues while balancing competition

## Farmers' protests disrupt daily lives



Hindu sentiment of the fundamentalist Khalistani forces added up force in the agitation under the grab of farmers.

Though obviously the so-called farmers who are agitated are from Punjab and have been the recipient of the biggest cake from the state in the name of MSP, subsidies, loan waivers, free electricity etc., what they are demanding now is untenable. The Supreme Court which called for suspension of the farm laws without exercising its authority against the roadblocks is still deaf towards the tragedy of commuters on the highway blocked by these anarchists supported by AAP, Congress and SAD politically just to vent their hatred towards the BJP and Modi. Only forcible evacuation of the highway is the very first thing that needs to be done, the SC and the CJJ must order the use of force in public and national interest at the earliest.

Jai Prakash Gupta | Ambala

between local and foreign workers. With transparent and efficient procedures, the system could become a cornerstone of global collaboration and long-term growth, positioning the U.S. as a leading hub for global talent.

R K Jain | Barwani

## ROHIT SHARMA NEEDS A BREAK

Madam — Australia is the champion in the 'Boxing Day' test at Melbourne when they have everything in their command. The will to win made all the difference and the Aussies did it professionally at MCG in the fourth test to take the lead 2-1 in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. While India lost by a margin of 184 runs by bowled out for a meagre 155 in their chase, the selectors must take a serious call at this juncture. It's once again the pathetic failure of Rohit Sharma, which has been highly disappointing and Kohli partnered him soon in the pavilion by recklessly fishing one well outside the off-stump. K L Rahul and N K Reddy can't always be among runs and get out by the beauty of deliveries. Yashasvi Jaiswal was

the lone fighter in the middle and his fluent 84 couldn't help the team when wickets were falling like ninepins at the other end.

When Pat Cummins sets an example by his responsible all-round display for the Aussies, Rohit Sharma can't have any excuses for his dismal batting. Selectors would continue with Rohit for the final test at Sydney and if the stewardship doesn't go to change in the near future it will be construed as gross injustice for Jasprit Bumrah by denying him the captaincy at the right time. Time has ripened for Bumrah to take over and it's high time for Rohit to gently take a break from the test cricket format to make room for deserving young guns who are in the waiting for long to take pride by wearing the Indian hat. Maybe the Head Coach Gautam Gambhir might have felt that his fitness and form are much better than relying on Rohit and Kohli at this stage.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

## Crowdfunding can transform science research funding



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

By connecting directly with the public, crowdfunding offers researchers an opportunity to explore bold ideas fueled by passion

The conventional research funding model, which is primarily dependent on government grants and institutional allocations, is currently under increasing scrutiny. Scientists and innovators frequently find themselves facing competition for a diminishing pool of resources as budgets tighten and priorities shift in numerous regions of the globe.

A novel paradigm is emerging, one that is influenced by the digital economy: crowdfunding for research. Is it possible that this community-driven, decentralised approach could revolutionise the way we finance science? Government funding has been a cornerstone of scientific research across the globe, particularly in the domain of basic research. This funding plays a vital role in driving innovation, supporting the exploration of fundamental scientific principles, and fostering advancements that often serve as the foundation for applied research and technological development. Despite its critical importance, accessing government research grants presents sig-



nificant challenges for scientists and institutions, making it a complex and often time-consuming endeavour. The exhaustive application process is one of the foremost difficulties in securing government funding. Researchers must navigate hectic administrative paperwork, including filling out detailed forms, providing extensive documentation, and adhering to strict procedural guidelines. This bureaucratic overhead often becomes a distraction, diverting researchers' time and energy away from their primary focus—scientific discovery.

Writing and refining grant proposals, ensuring compliance with submission requirements, and coordinating with institutional administrators

consume weeks or even months. This process can be overwhelming for many scientists, particularly those involved with teaching responsibilities or other professional commitments. Another challenge is the influence of governmental policy on funding priorities. The allocation of research funds is often tied to the strategic objectives of the ruling government. This means that researchers must tailor their proposals to align with themes or areas of focus deemed significant by policymakers.

As a result, projects that do not align with government priorities may struggle to find financial support, even if they hold substantial scientific or societal value. Moreover, the eligibility criteria for government funding further restrict access. Typically, government grants are available only to individuals holding doctoral degrees and those affiliated with recognised academic or research institutions, and some agencies restrict people from private institutions.

Crowdfunding is emerging as a revolutionary alternative to

overcome these hurdles. Crowdfunding involves gathering financial support for a project or venture by soliciting small contributions from a large group of people, typically through online platforms. It offers a direct, democratic, and flexible solution, empowering researchers to pursue their ideas with fewer constraints while promoting passion-driven inquiry. Crowdfunding allows researchers to connect directly with the public, garnering financial support for projects that resonate with a broader audience. Platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, FundRazr, Hoope, GoFundMe, etc. have already successfully funded creative projects and their application in scientific research is growing. Crowdfunding science projects require researchers to dedicate considerable time and effort to campaign management, diverting resources away from their core research work.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## INDIA'S NEW TRADE PARADIGM WITH THE US

India faces new challenges from the Trump's tough stance, spurring urgent talks on tariffs and trade



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

The year gone by saw some crucial path-altering elections in nearly 70 of the most powerful democracies in the world. Some of the most populous countries led by India and including the US, Bangladesh, Indonesia etc. voted for a leadership of their choice in 2024. While the Indian electorate chose to renew another 5-year term for Prime Minister Modi (albeit with a less-than-expected mandate), Bangladesh too renewed its faith in Sheikh Hasina (who was accused of rigging the electoral process to retain power), which ultimately led to her being thrown out in a coup. In a highly polarised election ground, in the US, the incumbent President a front runner for the top job at the white house, pulled out near the finish line, leaving his second in command the Vice President to throw her hat in the ring against a mighty opponent Donald Trump. The US electorate gave a clear mandate for Donald Trump to lead the new global order for the US. Donald Trump's clear victory in the US elections, now potentially could lead to several multilateral, bilateral rejigs, around the globe. President-elect has already nominated several friends and allies from the past, in some of the top jobs.

He has threatened high tariffs for Canada and Mexico while joking that the former is another state of the US. He has strong views on India's trade surplus with the US which is already an issue of concern for Indian officials. Several Indian ministries were in a huddle in the last week of the year 2024, trying to assess the amount of exports from their respective sectors, while looking at the tariffs imposed on US imports. New Delhi-based policy research institute Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) spent the last day of the year discussing 'Trade Tariff and Trump'. Several recommendations were made by the panel of experts regarding the future of India-US bilateral trade relations.



A press release from the event highlighted in the first paragraph that "India should have comprehensive engagement with the US, as new administration led by President-elect Trump takes over. India should explore a comprehensive new institutional framework to address the multiple issues that arise from trade, investment, technology and finance linkages. India should urgently consider appointing a Task Force or create other institutional mechanisms that bring in domestic policy coherence on these lines." In an unrelated development, India's External Affairs Minister Jaishankar spent the last week of the year in the US, meeting key presidential nominees for the incoming Trump administration and also attending the last foreign affairs ministers meeting under President Biden, even though QUAD as the framework was empowered by Trump Presidency 1.0.

The policy research institute RIS has cautioned to not respond with any knee-jerk reactions, to possible volatile statements emerging from Washington, immediately after President Trump's swearing-in, instead, it suggests "India may need to plan first, plan hard, and yet plan fast." An agile, business approach may be the best way forward to dealing with the incoming administration.

It may also be worthwhile to note that the Indian government should reconsider some of the non-tariff barriers it imposes on imports in the form of regulatory compliances and compulsory testing etc. To avert losses, tie up with our US importers need to be strengthened so that they lobby for their own needs. However, low technology products have high US tariffs. We may be left with an avenue there to improve our participation in the value chains being built up in the US manufacturing sector. "A diversification of markets for Indian products may be needed, which could also have a sectoral focus. India can focus on exporting a certain bunch of products to say the Gulf Nations or the ASEAN group of countries depending on the price advantage. Some hedges need to be built to prevent any major hit of Trump tariffs.

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

## AI: Revolutionising Punjab's governance



A S MITTAL

Punjab has the potential to harness artificial intelligence as a cornerstone for global competitiveness and unprecedented growth and bring about substantial gains



Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic concept confined to science fiction; it is a transformative force redefining governance globally. For a state like Punjab, rich in culture and potential but grappling with multifaceted challenges, embracing AI could be a game-changer. With a technocrat policymaker like Arvind Kejriwal, Punjab is uniquely positioned to leapfrog other states by recognising AI as a critical element for global competitiveness to unlock unprecedented growth. One of the first steps toward AI-driven transformation is the creation of a dedicated Ministry of Artificial Intelligence (MAI). Such a ministry, backed with an Artificial Intelligence policy equipped with adequate budget provisions, could centralise its AI initiatives, ensuring that day-to-day work across multiple departments is well-coordinated and strategically aligned.

The ministry could also promote AI literacy among citizens, emphasising the benefits of AI and addressing any potential concerns or ethical challenges. A robust policy framework led by MAI could position Punjab among innovative states. States like Telangana have already set an example by launching an AI mission to drive AI adoption across governance, healthcare, and agriculture. Punjab can adapt these learnings to build a robust AI ecosystem that attracts accountability and efficiency. Fostering Accountability and Efficiency AI is not a replacement for human effort but a tool to support it. AI can free up human resources for more strategic work by automating routine tasks and providing real-time insights. For example, Finland has successfully used AI to improve public services, ensuring accountability and efficiency in governance without overburdening employees.

Punjab's administration can similarly use AI to track project progress, measure outcomes, and enhance transparency. AI can also play a vital role in curbing corruption, a long-standing issue in governance. By using AI algorithms to analyse pat-



AI CAN ALSO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN CURBING CORRUPTION, A LONG-STANDING ISSUE IN GOVERNANCE. BY USING AI ALGORITHMS TO ANALYSE PATTERNS IN FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS AND DETECT ANOMALIES, THE GOVERNMENT CAN IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS INSTANCES OF MISMANAGEMENT OR FRAUD

terns in financial transactions and detect anomalies, the government can identify and address instances of mismanagement or fraud. Such measures save resources and build public trust in the governance. Empowering Citizens Through AI Successful implementation of AI empowers citizens. AI-driven e-governance platforms can simplify administrative processes, making it easier for people to access government services. For example, AI chatbots can assist citizens in filing complaints, applying for permits, or seeking information, significantly reducing bureaucratic delays.

AI can enhance public safety by enabling predictive policing and improving disaster management systems. By analysing data on crime patterns and natural disasters, AI can help authorities take preventive measures, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Punjab's residents.

Revolutionising Key Sectors - AI can be the cornerstone for transformation in Punjab's key sectors: **1. Health:** AI-powered diagnostic tools can revolutionise healthcare delivery in Punjab, especially in rural areas with limited access to quality healthcare. Tamil Nadu's use of AI to predict disease outbreaks and improve maternal healthcare outcomes offers a model worth emulating. Punjab's healthcare system could leverage AI for telemedicine, enabling remote consultations and reducing the burden on overworked medical professionals. Moreover, AI can assist in making cutting-edge treatments more accessible to patients.

**2. Education:** AI-driven platforms can personalise student learning experiences, addressing individual strengths and weaknesses. For instance, a country

like Estonia has integrated AI into its education system to offer tailored teaching, ensuring no student is left behind. Punjab can adopt similar systems to improve education levels and employable skill development. AI can also predict dropout rates and identify at-risk students, enabling timely interventions to keep them in education. Additionally, AI tools can train teachers, equipping them with modern methodologies to enhance classroom engagement.

**3. Agriculture:** Agriculture is Punjab's backbone, but the sector faces multifaceted challenges. AI can optimise irrigation, predict weather patterns, and offer crop-specific advice to farmers. Karnataka's use of AI to predict crop yields and help farmers secure better prices exemplifies how technology can empower agricultural communities. Punjab could take this further by implementing AI-powered precision farming techniques, which use data from drones and sensors to monitor soil health and pest activity, ensuring higher productivity with lower resource consumption.

**4. Industry and Infrastructure:** For enterprises, AI could bring regulatory clarity or, conversely, added scrutiny in areas such as data sharing, intellectual property and the ethical use of AI.

It can streamline manufacturing processes, enhance supply chain efficiency, and improve project monitoring in infrastructure development. Gujarat's use of AI to attract investments and facilitate industrial growth shows how a state can harness technology to boost its economy. Punjab's industrial sector could use AI to identify global market trends and adapt its manufacturing capabilities accordingly. In infrastructure,

AI can ensure better planning and execution of projects, reducing delays and cost overruns.

**5. Resource Mobilisation:** AI tools can help Punjab's government enhance efficiency in tax collection, reduce revenue leakages, and improve financial planning. Andhra Pradesh's Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS) uses AI to monitor and optimise resource allocation, providing a blueprint for Punjab to follow. AI can also assist in identifying untapped revenue streams, enabling the government to fund developmental projects without increasing the financial burden on its citizens.

The Way Forward By embracing AI with a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach, Punjab can address its existing challenges and set itself on a path toward sustainable and inclusive growth. The magic of AI lies in its ability to amplify human potential and solve complex problems. Under the visionary leadership of Bhagwant Mann and with the proper policy framework, Punjab can harness this magic to transform its socio-economic landscape. Establishing a dedicated AI ministry, investing in infrastructure, and adopting AI across key sectors will make Punjab a leader in good governance and improve its people's quality of life. The time to act is now, and Punjab must rise to the challenge to set a precedent for other states to follow.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association. Views expressed are personal)

## From vision to reality: How good governance is transforming education in India

Vajpayee's vision of a 'New India,' anchored in democratic principles and citizen-centric governance is giving a new look to the education

Ten years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set forth his vision of sushasan (good governance), calling it "the key to a nation's progress." He declared December 25, former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary, as Good Governance Day. Vajpayee had envisioned a "New India" where the government would embody the principles of democracy and development, emphasising citizen-centric decision-making, transparency, and public participation. Put simply, good governance means that the day-to-day functioning of the government is effective, transparent, and accountable, which, in the modern age naturally includes e-governance and



TUHIN A SINHA

digital empowerment. In fact, in the context of a welfare government functioning in a vastly unequal society, good governance is fundamental for ensuring sustainable development, social justice, and the protection of human rights. In 2019, India also adopted a metric called the Good Governance Index (GGI) to track and compare governance among the states and

union territories across ten key sectors. The 11th Good Governance Day presents an apt moment to pause and reflect on the state of governance in one of the most critical sectors—education. Even though Human Resource Development, composed of indicators like "quality of education" and "elementary school retention rate," is one of the ten key sectors covered by the GGI, a close look at India's education governance reveals substantial room for improvement, particularly at the school level. Vajpayee's commitment to education was evident during his tenure as Prime Minister—he pioneered the landmark Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002,

which emphasised universal school enrollment and went on to form the cornerstone of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Building decisively on this foundation, Prime Minister Modi's leadership has elevated education to new heights through bold reforms. The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, along with the NIPUN Bharat Mission, has revolutionised the approach to foundational learning. This shift is being carefully monitored through multiple assessment initiatives - states have implemented third-party evaluations, while programs like CBSE's SAFAL, the National Achievement Survey, and Gujarat's groundbreaking Vidya



Samiksha Kendra (VSK) use cutting-edge technology to track progress systematically. These assessment systems have revealed both progress and persistent challenges in our education system. The data highlights critical areas that need attention, particularly in learning outcomes. Various learning sur-

veys show that over 5 crore elementary-grade students lack foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Learning gaps for these children only keep widening as they progress through grades with a weak foundation. It is then unsurprising that almost 33 per cent of Grade VIII students are unable to read simple sentences or do basic arithmetic. Recognising these challenges, PM Modi's administration has taken a step through the State School Standards Authority (SSSA), recommended in the NEP 2020, which emerges as a pivotal reform to enhance India's school governance standards. The proposed SSSA would be an indepen-

dent quality regulator for all schools, both public and private. One of the key functions of the SA is to ensure public disclosure of school performance data for all schools through a digital portal. With all schools being held to clear and uniform quality standards and policymakers being informed by data-driven insights, educational resources will be used more efficiently. The SA can create a culture of transparency where parents are active participants in their children's education. With its emphasis on streamlining bureaucracy, focusing on outcomes rather than inputs, and integrating technology to reduce administrative burdens, not only

does it embody Prime Minister Modi's ideal of "minimum government, maximum governance". A pertinent example is the set of eight principles of good governance recommended by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)—participation, rule of law, transparency, accountability, equity, effectiveness, consensus, and responsiveness. As the nation observes Good Governance Day, the call to action is clear: states must embrace the SA to realise the shared vision of a "New India," where quality education is a right, not a privilege. (The writer is National Spokesperson, BJP; views are personal)

## ICMR proposes new diagnostic tests in PHCs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nine types of diagnostic tests, including those for diabetes, Malaria, TB, HIV and syphilis should be made available at the health centres in village-level health facilities, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has proposed in a revised version of the National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL). The list enumerates the minimum number of tests that should be available at various levels of healthcare facilities in the country. Ayushman Arogya Mandirs should have facilities for Hepatitis B tests available in addition to the nine diagnostics that are available at the village-level health centres, said the revised draft list which has been prepared incorporating inputs from relevant stakeholders and feedback from multiple consultation meetings. It builds upon the first list and provides recommendations for diagnostic tests across various levels of healthcare facilities, including village-level facilities, Ayushman

Arogya Mandirs, primary health centre (PHCs), community health centres (CHCs), sub district hospitals (SDHs) and district hospitals (DHs). The draft of the second NEDL has been put up on the public domain for feedback and comments from various stakeholders. The new set of guidelines states that tests for dengue and Japanese Encephalitis and other common illnesses must be accessible at the Primary Health Centres in addition to X-rays and ECG facilities. The district-level hospitals must facilitate CT scan, MRI, mammography and echocardiography, according to the draft guidelines. The ICMR released the first NEDL in 2019 to make diagnostics an essential component of the health care system. In 2018, the World Health Organisation had recommended the development and implementation of an NEDL to facilitate the availability of in-vitro diagnostics across the various tiers of the healthcare pyramid, in facilities with or without an onsite laboratory.

## Bangladesh court denies bail for ISKCON monk over sedition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A court in the southeastern port city of Chattogram on Thursday denied bail to Hindu monk and former ISKCON leader Chinnoy Krishna Das in a sedition case. A group of 11 lawyers stood for him with a bail petition during the hearing for which Das appeared virtually. "The hearing continued for some 30 minutes when (Metropolitan Sessions) Judge Mohammad Saiful Islam heard both the prosecution and the defence lawyers and then rejected his (Das') bail

petition," a court official said. Das, formerly with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and now a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote organisation, was arrested at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on November 25. He was brought to Chattogram where the court sent him to jail rejecting his bail petition the next day. He was arrested on sedition charges for allegedly "desecrating" the Bangladesh flag brought to Chattogram

# Munde refuses to resign amid sarpanch murder controversy

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Dhananjay Munde -- who is in the eye of a controversy over the sensational murder of a Sarpanch in his home district of Beed -- on Thursday refused to resign from his post, a couple days after prime accused in the murder case Walmik Karad surrendered to the police. The development came a day after the Maharashtra government set up formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the murder of

Massajog village Sarpanch, Santosh Pandit in the wake of Karad's surrender before surrendered to the CID Pune office on Tuesday. Karad, who is allegedly linked to with Dhananjay Munde, is currently in 14 days' police custody. Karad is the key accused in the Rs two crore extortion case linked to the murder. Sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh (45) was allegedly killed for attempting to thwart the extortion bid on the windmill company. He was first abducted, brutally tortured and later killed in broad daylight near the wind-

mill company office on the afternoon of December 9, 2024. Talking to media persons here, Munde wondered: "Why should I resign? I am in no way directly or indirectly involved (in the murder or extortion cases)...the police is probing the matter", Munde, who is a close confidant of NCP President and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, said that the state government had announced three probes - by Crime Investigation Department (CID), a Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe and a judicial inquiry. "I want that the charge-sheet be filed at the earliest, the accused

should be tried before a fast track court and those found guilty should be hanged," Munde said. Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis, who holds the state home portfolio, had earlier said: "No one would be spared...we will not allow goonda raj in Maharashtra". Four persons - Vishnu Chate, Jairam Chate, Mahesh Kedar and Pratik Ghule - have so far been arrested in connection with the murder, while three others Sudarshan Ghule, Krushna Andhale and Sudhir Sangle wanted in the case are absconding.

## Omar defends statehood demand, cites legal and political necessity

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Newly elected Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Omar Abdullah Thursday reignited the debate surrounding the 'Kashmir issue' by claiming the issue still exists, whether on this side of the border or the other.

Conference in its election manifesto during the Assembly polls Omar, flanked by his cabinet colleagues in the SKICC, told the gathering of media persons, "Some issues were important to us and we fulfilled those including the resolution on the statehood, and the resolution on the special status".

In his maiden interaction with the media in Srinagar, Omar also expressed hope that the biggest promise of the restoration of statehood would be fulfilled by the central government soon. Before opening the floor for questioning Omar in his brief remarks observed, "It has been a little over two months since we came to power. It took us time to understand how the UT government works. We have been associated with the government earlier, but there is a vast difference between that form and the present form". I thought working in such circumstances would be difficult, but our start has been quite 'decent' and they "did not find much difficulty" in it.

"We the people are now expecting that the promises made with us will be fulfilled. The biggest promise is the restoration of statehood. The Supreme Court in its judgement had also stated that the statehood should be restored as soon as possible. One year has passed since and we think one year should be enough," he added. Abdullah said the sentiments of the people should be respected and their aspirations fulfilled.

When asked why his government went to New Delhi with the resolution on the restoration of J-K's statehood, instead of approaching courts, Abdullah said a legal fight on the matter should be the last option. He said no chief minister of a Union territory is as empowered as a chief minister of a state. "That is a fact. There is no point in living in denial. If I were an empowered CM, why would I ask for restoration of statehood?" Brushing aside speculation that the Centre was trying to destabilize his government and that NC was going to join the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, Abdullah said, "There is no pressure from the PM, home minister or Raj Bhawan on us to change our ideology. I have been told by the PM and the home minister that your government will not be destabilised, and that we will give you the same cooperation as given to the LG.

However, reacting to a straight question on the permanent settlement of the Kashmir issue Omar Abdullah attempted to reignite the spark by claiming "Even if we accept that the status of Jammu and Kashmir has been permanently resolved, the fact remains that a part of Jammu and Kashmir lies on the other side of the border. When the BJP claims the Kashmir issue is resolved, does it mean they believe the issue on the other side of the border is also resolved? It hasn't. The Kashmir issue still exists, whether on this side of the border or the other, and that is something we can discuss." Commenting on the promises made by the National

## AAP-BJP lock horns over farmers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are locked in a letter war over the farmers issue. Senior BJP leader and Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan wrote a letter to Delhi chief minister Atishi and criticised the AAP government for not implementing several pro-farmer schemes of the Centre in the national capital. In his letter written in Hindi, Chouhan said "political competition" should not become an obstacle to the welfare of farmers. Expressing concern over the condition of farmers, Chouhan told Atishi that Delhi government has no sympathy for farmers and it is very indifferent towards farmers, who are "upset and worried" due to the non-implementation of many welfare schemes by AAP. In a sharp response to Chouhan's letter, Atishi hit back accusing the BJP of hypocrisy regarding its stance on farmers and said the

safron party talking about them was like "Dawood (Ibrahim) giving a sermon on non-violence." Criticising the party for its treatment of the farming community, Atishi alleged that the situation of farmers under BJP rule was worse than ever before. "The hardships faced by farmers during the BJP's tenure have never been seen before," the Delhi CM said in her letter to Chouhan. Meanwhile, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the BJP would be responsible "if something happens" to the protesting farmers in Punjab who are on an indefinite fast over a set of demands, including a legal guarantee on MSP. Responding to Atishi's allegations, Chouhan clarified that the Centre was ready to provide benefit to the farmers but the Delhi government had failed to submit the necessary proposals for the schemes. The minister said that during the meeting with farmers they had explained their disappointments at not

receiving benefits from the central government. "The Centre stands ready with funds, but their release hinges on state proposals. Unfortunately, Delhi's government has not submitted any proposals, leaving farmers unable to access scheme benefits," Chouhan said in the video message. He urged the Delhi government to set aside political competition for farmers' welfare, emphasising that many schemes operate on a 60:40 funding ratio between the Centre and states. Both the BJP and the AAP are locked in the letters war ahead of the Assembly polls in Delhi. Lieutenant Governor Vinai Saxena slammed AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal for labeling Atishi as temporary chief minister. Saxena described the comments as not only insulting to Atishi but also disrespectful to the President of India and himself as her representative. Hours later Atishi wrote back to Saxena defending Kejriwal. "It is disheartening to note that your letter focuses on criticism

rather than constructive cooperation," she added. On the New Year's day, Kejriwal has written to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat to ask if the RSS will seek votes for the BJP in the Capital, and whether it supports the party's "wrongdoings". The letter prompted an attack from BJP Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "Today, I have written a letter to Aam Aadmi Party leader and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal...we hope that you will abandon your wrong habits of lying and deceit and bring meaningful change within yourself." In his letter, Chouhan said the AAP government has failed to implement major central initiatives including the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, and the Beej Gram programme.

## Mamata accuses BSF of allowing infiltrators from Bangladesh to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA / NEW DELHI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused the Border Security Force (BSF) of letting infiltrators from Bangladesh enter India and charged the BSF with trying to destabilise the state. Stating that she could sense a "blueprint of the central government behind this attitude of the BSF", Banerjee also accused a section of District Magistrates and SPs of helping the border guards in their illegal act. Reacting to the allegations, Union minister Sukanta Majumdar flayed the Chief Minister and said that she has reached the "ultimate level of delusion". Majumdar alleged that according to Banerjee, the "incompetent" district magistrates and superintendents of police under her administration are allowing foreign criminals to infiltrate the border to kill the elected representatives of her party. "Until now, she used to hold the opposition responsible for such incidents. But why this sudden shift in Mamata Banerjee's narrative? Is she trying to shield the misdeeds of her party's looter, criminal representatives by making such claims?" the member of Parliament from West Bengal's Balurghat asked. The Trinamool Congress supremo claimed that it was a conspiracy to blame the TMC for the infiltration issue. "If someone thinks of destabilising the state and blaming it on the Trinamool Congress, I would say that it is not done by TMC



as (border) areas are controlled by the BSF and not by the TMC. Some media channels are trying to spread this for the sake of their TRP," she said. Banerjee also alleged that goons are entering the state from across the border, killing people and going back. "We have got information that the BSF is letting infiltrators enter India through Islampur, Sitai, Chopra and several other bordering areas. The BSF is also torturing women and trying to destabilise the state," Banerjee said at an administrative review meeting at the state secretariat "Nabanna". "Border security is not our responsibility and BSF looks after this. Visa is not our matter but that of the central government. We used to get the list of who were taking flights to come here, but now it has been stopped. So, we do not know who all are coming,"

she said. "This is a deep-rooted conspiracy of the BSF and the central government has a blueprint for it. If there was no blueprint of the Centre, it would not have happened," she said. "There is no bad relationship between the two Bengals (West Bengal and Bangladesh). We speak the same language and we follow a similar way of lifestyle. People across the border can come here for treatment. But we should be informed," she stated. The CM asserted that she had told the Centre several times that she would follow whatever decision it would take on the situation in Bangladesh. "But if I see that someone is helping terrorism to disturb my state, we will have to protest," Banerjee said adding that she would send a strongly worded letter to the Centre in this regard.

"But why didn't you people (DM, SPs) protest this act of the BSF? I will ask DGP Rajeev Kumar to find out through which spots they had entered the state and where these people stay. The police get information of infiltrations. But (a section of) the DMs and SPs have not shared any information with us. They have not carried out their responsibility properly," Banerjee said. The Bengal CM directed the DGP to share a detailed report on the matter as she has planned to send a protest letter to the Centre. "Rajeev Kumar has shared some information and also some inputs from the locals. But I want detailed information on this to understand why this is being done. I will be writing a strong letter (to the Centre). I want to have peace on both sides of the border," she said.

## SC slams Punjab over Misleading claims on Dallewal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday pulled up the Punjab Government and said its officials and some farmer leaders are creating a false impression in media that attempts are being made to break farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said it needs to clarify that court has never directed to break Dallewal's protest but is only concerned with his health and wants medical aid to be provided to him urgently. Justice Surya Kant said the court does not want to say much but it appears that Punjab government officials and some farmer leaders are making irresponsible statements in media to further complicate the situation on the ground. "We need to check the bonafide of some farmer leaders towards Dallewal," the bench observed. Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh denied any such attempt to complicate the situation and said efforts are being made to persuade Dallewal to take medical aid without breaking his fast. The bench said since the chief secretary and the Director General of Police (DGP) of Punjab are appearing virtually in the matter, hopefully the court's message will go down the line.



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi during the inauguration of the Punjabi Bagh flyover.

Ranjan Dimri

## Delhi Police uncovers immigration racket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has uncovered a large-scale illegal immigration racket involving Bangladeshi nationals and arrested four people, including two persons from the neighbouring country who allegedly entered India illegally. The other two arrested are accused of facilitating the Bangladeshi nationals' unlawful immigration and document fabrication.

## Indian arrested in Pakistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A 30-year-old Indian man crossed over illegally into Pakistan to meet a Facebook friend he wanted to marry, but instead found himself behind bars. And the woman told the local police she does not want to

tie the knot. Badal Babu from the Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh was arrested last week in the Mandi Bahauddin district of Pakistan's Punjab province (some 240 kms from Lahore) for illegal border crossing. Babu attempted to cross the border illegally.

## Investor wealth surges as Sensex, Nifty gain 2 per cent

From page 1

As many as 2,395 stocks advanced while 1,574 declined and 117 remained unchanged on the BSE. The gross GST collection rose 7.3 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1.77 lakh crore in December despite a significant increase in both domestic and export refunds. India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 12-month low in December, as new business orders and production expanded at softer rates, a monthly survey said on Thursday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index was at 56.4 in December, down from 56.5 in November, indicating a

weaker improvement in operating conditions. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets were closed on Wednesday for New Year holiday. Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,782.71 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.09 per cent to USD 75.47 a barrel. The BSE benchmark climbed 368.40 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 78,507.41 on the first trading session of 2025 on Wednesday. The Nifty went up by 98.10 points or 0.41 per cent to 23,742.90.

## AAP-BJP lock horns over farmers

From page 1

According to Chouhan, Delhi farmers face additional burdens as agricultural equipment like tractors and harvesters are categorized as commercial vehicles, leading to higher purchase costs. Despite the AAP government's free electricity promises, farmers are being charged commercial rates for power, he said, adding that farmers along the Yamuna are struggling after their

irrigation equipment's power connections were disconnected. "Your government has been in power for the last ten years, and it appears former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has betrayed farmers after making election promises," Chouhan said. The minister urged the Delhi government to implement central agricultural schemes immediately, stating that political competition should not hinder farmer welfare.

Referring to the ongoing hunger strike by farmers in Punjab, Atishi urged Chouhan to tell Prime Minister Narendra Modi to engage with the protestors and address their issues. She also asked the BJP to stop "politicising" the farmers' struggles and accused it of using "bullets and lathis" against farmers. "The condition of farmers has never been as bad as it is during the BJP rule. Farmers in Punjab are on hunger strike. Tell Modi ji to talk to them.

Stop playing politics with farmers. Bullets and lathis have been fired on farmers during the BJP rule," Atishi responded. Kejriwal, in a post on X, also claimed that the Centre is preparing to implement the now-revoked three farm laws "through the backdoor" by calling it a "policy". He said copies of the new "policy" have been sent to all states for their views on it. Kejriwal posted on X that while the farmers were on a fast unto death in

Punjab, the BJP, due to its arrogance, was not talking to them. The AAP supremo charged that the BJP-led Centre accepted farmers' demands three years ago but is now reneged on it. "Why do the BJP have such arrogance that it does not even talk to anyone," Kejriwal asked. "May God keep the farmers who are on an indefinite protest safe, but if something happens to them, the BJP will be responsible for it," he said in a long post in Hindi.

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# UK upgrades law to crack down on 'vile' people smugglers

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK on Thursday unveiled tougher laws including travel restrictions and a ban on phone usage to clamp down on "vile" people smugglers behind organised immigration crime networks.

The Home Office said new interim orders will allow immediate action to disrupt and deter suspected serious criminality in a "major upgrade" to the country's Serious Crime Prevention Orders.

The changes form part of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, with new powers mirroring those which are already used to disrupt other harmful criminality such as knife crime, slavery and trafficking.

"Dangerous criminal people-smugglers are profiting from undermining our border security and putting lives at risk. They cannot be allowed to get away with it," said UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper.

"Stronger international collaboration has already led to important arrests and action against dangerous gangs over the last few months. We will give law



enforcement stronger powers they need to pursue and stop more of these vile gang networks," she said.

Under the proposals, breaching an interim order could lead to up to five years in prison. Restrictions to be imposed under such orders will vary on a case-by-case basis and could include: travel restrictions on suspects; ban on laptop or mobile phone usage; ban on accessing social media networks, including via a third party; restrictions on whom someone can associate with; restrictions on devices and communications with certain individuals; and restrictions on their finances, helping to prevent criminal proceeds from going under the radar.

The Home Office said that

enforcement to disrupt these individuals who are operating in the UK, in some cases allowing investigations and prosecutions to continue whilst preventing further serious criminality from taking place.

"The new orders will form an important part of preventing organised immigration crime while complementing the UK's relentless pursuit of criminal gangs."

It comes as the UK signed new agreements with Germany and Iraq to tackle people-smuggling gangs and enhanced cooperation with the Calais Group to clamp down on the problem of migrants illegally crossing the English Channel in dangerous small boats.

Home Office provisional data for the New Year showed that 36,816 people arrived in Britain by such small boats in 2024, a quarter more than in 2023 (29,437). People from Afghanistan accounted for the single largest group of arrivals in the first nine months of 2024 at 17 per cent, Iranians were the second-largest group (13 per cent), followed by Vietnamese and Syrians (12 per cent).

## UNICEF calls for safety of migrant children

AP ■ ROME

The UN children's fund urged governments on Thursday to prioritise the safety of migrant children after the latest Mediterranean shipwreck left about 20 people missing and added to a gruesome annual tally.

Among the seven survivors of the New Year's Eve wreck off the Sicilian island of Lampedusa was an 8-year-old girl whose mother is among the missing, UNICEF said.

The agency noted that last month, an 11-year-old girl found floating off Lampedusa was believed to be the lone survivor of a migrant boat that had left Sfax, Tunisia, with about 45 people on board.

According to the International Organisation of Migration's missing migrant tracker, 2,275 people were unaccounted for in the Mediterranean in 2024, bringing the total number of people missing since 2014 to 31,180. The vast majority — 24,466 — were believed to have died on the perilous central Mediterranean route, which is most often used by smugglers from Libya and Tunisia to ferry desperate people toward Italy.

# Imran' party, Pak govt to hold third round of talks next week

Bid to end prevailing political tension, instability in country

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The second round of talks between the government and jailed former premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party representatives concluded on Thursday with the commitment to meet again next week in a bid to end the prevailing political tension and instability in the country.

National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq facilitated the talks held in the parliament house. Later, he told the media that the two sides participated in good spirits and with the commitment to continue the process.

"The two sides have agreed to meet again next week," he said, adding that talks were held in a cordial atmosphere. Senator Irfan Siddiqui, who is part of the government team, read out the joint communique issued after the talk, stating that Omer Ayub Khan from the PTI demanded that all political prisoners should be released and a probe commission should be formed to investigate the events of May 9, 2023, and Nov 26, 2024. He said that the PTI commit-

tee also demanded that they should be facilitated to meet Imran Khan, who has been held in the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi, to get his direction for talks.

Siddiqui said that the government agreed to facilitate the meeting after which the next round of talks would be held. He also said that Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, who led the government side, said that the PTI was expected to present its charter of demands but it sought time. Dar also said that his side has no objection if the PTI will present its demands in writing during the next meeting. The first meeting between committees representing the government and the PTI took place on Dec 23, kicking off long-anticipated talks between the rival parties to end the political tension.

Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Omar Ayub Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, PTI lawmaker Asad Qaiser, Sunni Ittehad Council chief Hamid Raza, Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen chief Senator Raja

Nasir Abbas Jafri and PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja attended the meeting from the opposition.

From the government side, ruling PML-N Senator Irfan Siddiqui, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leaders Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Naveed Qamar, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political and Public Affairs Rana Sanaulah and others attended.

Speaking to reporters before the meeting, Omar Ayub Khan said that the PTI wanted its jailed leaders released. "Our agenda for the negotiations is clear. The release of under-trial political prisoners and the formation of a judicial commission to probe the events of May 9, 2023 and Nov 26," he said.

The talks come after an acrimonious political tussle between the PTI and the government due to differences over the outcome of the general elections held on Feb 8 last year. PTI also accuses the government of implicating its leaders in fake cases, an allegation rejected by the government.

# Gunman who killed at least 12 people in shooting rampage in Montenegro dies by suicide

AP ■ PODGORICA (MONTENEGRO)

A gunman who fatally shot at least 12 people, including two children, in Montenegro has killed himself while surrounded by police, officials said Thursday.

At least four others were wounded in the shooting rampage in the western town of Cetinje on Wednesday that followed a bar brawl, officials said.

The shooter, identified as 45-year-old Aco Martinovic, killed the owner of the bar, the bar owner's children and his own family members, Interior Minister Danilo Saranovic said. The attacker, who fled after the rampage, was later located and surrounded by police. He died

after shooting himself in the head, Saranovic said.

Police had dispatched a special unit to search for the attacker in the town, which is located about 30 kilometres northwest of the capital, Podgorica. All the roads in and out of the city have been blocked as police swarmed the streets.

Saranovic said that Martinovic had died while being taken to a hospital in the capital and succumbed from the "severity of his injuries."

The government has declared three days of national mourning starting on Thursday, with Prime Minister Milojko Spajic describing the shooting as a "terrible tragedy."

"The level of rage and brutality shows that sometimes such people ... are even more dan-

gerous than members of organised criminal gangs," Saranovic said.

Martinovic was at the bar throughout the day with other guests when the brawl erupted, Police Commissioner Lazar Scepanovic said. He said that Martinovic then went home, brought back a weapon and opened fire at around 5:30 pm.

"He killed four people" at the bar before heading out, and then continued shooting at three more locations, Scepanovic said.

He said that the suspect received a suspended sentence in 2005 for violent behaviour and had appealed his latest conviction for illegal weapons possession. Montenegrin media have reported that he was

known for erratic and violent behaviour.

The small country of Montenegro, which has a population of around 620,000 people, is known for its gun culture and many people traditionally have weapons.

Wednesday's shooting was the second shooting rampage over the past three years in Cetinje, Montenegro's historic capital. An attacker killed 10 people, including two children, in August 2022 before he was shot and killed by a passerby in Cetinje.

President Jakov Milatovic said that he was "shocked and stunned" by the tragedy. "Instead of holiday joy ... we have been gripped by sadness over the loss of innocent lives," Milatovic said in a post on X.

# Hundreds of different dinosaur footprints discovered in UK's Oxfordshire

PTI ■ LONDON

Researchers from the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham have uncovered a huge expanse of quarry floor filled with hundreds of different dinosaur footprints. In a stunning find, the teams uncovered multiple enormous trackways dating back to the Middle Jurassic Period (around 166 million years ago).

The trackways form part of a huge 'dinosaur highway' and include footprints from the nine-metre ferocious predator Megalosaurus, and herbivorous dinosaurs up to twice that size.

The excavation will be broadcast on BBC Two's Digging for Britain on January 8 and featured in a new public exhibition Breaking Ground at Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH).

These footprints offer an extraordinary window into the lives of dinosaurs, revealing details about their movements, interactions, and the tropical environment they inhabited.

The dig, carried out at Dewars Farm Quarry in Oxfordshire, uncovered five extensive trackways with evidence of more in the surrounding area. The longest continuous trackway measured more than 150 metres in length.

Four of the trackways were made by gigantic, long-necked, herbivorous dinosaurs called sauropods, most likely to be Cetiosaurus, an up to 18-metre-long cousin of the well-known Diplodocus.

The fifth trackway was made by the carnivorous theropod dinosaur, Megalosaurus which had distinctive, large, three-toed feet with claws.

One area of the site shows the carnivore and herbivore tracks crossing over, raising questions about whether and how the two were interacting. Megalosaurus was the first dinosaur worldwide to be scientifically named and described in 1824, and kick-started the last 200 years of dinosaur science.

Dr Emma Nicholls, Vertebrate Palaeontologist at OUMNH, explained: "Scientists have known about and been studying Megalosaurus for longer than any other dinosaur on Earth, and yet these recent discoveries prove there is still new evidence of these animals out there, waiting to be found." The footprints were buried under mud but came to light when quarry worker Gary Johnson felt 'unusual bumps' as he was stripping the clay back with his vehicle, in order to expose the quarry floor. At this point, the experts were called in. Working closely with Dewars Farm and Duns Tet Quarry Manager Mark Stanway, and his staff, the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham co-led a team of more than 100 people on a week-long excavation in June 2024.

# Pak govt reduces pension benefits of retired civil, armed forces personnel

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan government has drastically reduced pension benefits of retired civil and armed forces personnel to reduce a growing pension bill which has already swelled over Rs 1 trillion, according to a media report.

The Ministry of Finance on Wednesday issued three separate notifications to discontinue multiple pensions, reducing both the first home take pension and also lowering the base for determining future increases in pensions, The Express Tribune newspaper reported. After debt servicing, defence and development, the pension is the fourth largest expenditure in the budget, the paper said.

According to the Ministry of Finance's notification, on the recommendations of the Pay and Pension Commission of 2020, "it has been decided that henceforth, in an event where a person becomes entitled to more than one pension, such person shall only be authorised to opt to draw one of the pensions".

Instead of taking a pension on the basis of the last drawn salary, the new pensioner will get a pension based on the average salary of the last two years.

The finance ministry stated that all the existing instructions on multiple pensions should stand amended with immediate effect.

The changes will not be applicable to people who have already retired, except in cases where multiple pensions are paid.

It also ended the annual compounding of the pension and any increase would be treated separately from the base pen-

sion, a concept that is similar to the ad-hoc salary increase that is not made part of the basic salary to avoid compounding.

The changes will take effect from January 1 and will be applicable to both retired civil and military personnel. Many serving federal government employees, who are taking salary and pension, would also be affected by the changes.

The finance ministry's notifications stated that the changes in the pension rules have been made on the basis of recommendations given by a commission constituted by the government of former prime minister Imran Khan in 2020.

For the current fiscal year, the government has allocated Rs 1.014 trillion in the budget for paying pensions and its lion's share, as 66 per cent or Rs662 billion has been allocated for military pensions. There is an increase of 24 per cent in the pension bill compared to the last year, which is funded from the budget and is not sustainable.

After these changes, it is expected that in the next decade, the pension bill will significantly reduce and will become manageable.

Apart from the new changes made in the pension system, the government already abolished the traditional pension scheme for the civilian employees hired from July 1, 2024. The scheme will also be applicable to employees of defence forces from July 1, 2025.

Instead, the new employees have been provided with a system of contributory pension based on the contribution made by them through salary.

# Rescuers find gruesome scene at Honolulu home after fireworks blast kills 3, injures 20

AP ■ HONOLULU

Emergency crews arrived to a chaotic and gruesome scene in a Honolulu neighbourhood after a large New Year's firework tipped over after being lit and ignited a fiery, shrapnel-studded blast that killed three people and injured more than 20 others, several of them critically.

Two women died at the scene and a third woman died at a hospital, authorities said Wednesday as they implored people to abandon their New Year's tradition of setting off fireworks across the city.

Officials promised tougher penalties for illegal fireworks. Hawaii Gov Josh Green graphically described the deaths in a news conference Wednesday to emphasize the potential danger of fireworks. "We're talking about the worst possible, war-zone injuries that took their lives."

Some of the more than 20 people taken to hospitals with

severe burns and shrapnel wounds included children, said officials who had not yet publicly identified any victims including those killed.

Police were investigating whether charges for the person who lit the firework near midnight were warranted, Honolulu Police Chief Arthur Logan said.

The blast happened at a three-story home with a bottom-level carport. Piles of debris including bundles of blackened firework mortars could be seen in front of the house in Wednesday's daylight.

The explosion broke windows across the street. It happened within a lit bundle of aerial, mortar-style fireworks called a "cake" tipped over or fell off a table and fired sideways into crates containing additional fireworks, which then exploded.

The cake's rounds could be separated but had been lit as a bundle of 50, part of what officials said was tens of thousands

of dollars' worth of fireworks at the home.

Ambulance crews arrived but had to triage — separate and treat victims with the worst injuries first — several houses away because of parked cars and crowds on the streets, Honolulu Emergency Services Department Director Dr. Jim Ireland said.

Some people nearby continued setting off fireworks even as blast victims were being taken to hospitals, officials said.

The neighbourhood is near Honolulu's international airport and a joint US Air Force and Navy base and a little more than 2 miles (3.22 kilometers) east of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, which honours sailors who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor that drew the US into World War II.

"I've been in EMS for 30 years and this is probably one of the worst calls I've ever been on as far as the immense tragedy and amount of patients and severity of the injuries," Ireland said

in an earlier news conference. A fourth person was killed in a different fireworks explosion elsewhere on Oahu, officials said. At least four other serious injuries occurred in unrelated fireworks accidents overnight.

Social media posts overnight showed fireworks being set off across wide areas of Honolulu even though sparklers, fountains and aerial fireworks are illegal and a permit is required to set off firecrackers, according to the Honolulu Fire Department.

"We're angry, frustrated and deeply saddened at this unnecessary loss of life and suffering. It's a tragic way to start the new year," Mayor Rick Blangiardi said. "No one should have to endure such pain due to a reckless and illegal activity."

Green said he was looking into whether new penalties including a felony charge for possessing large fireworks are needed to curtail fireworks in Hawaii.

# Israeli strikes kill at least 18 in Gaza

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli airstrikes killed at least 18 people in the Gaza Strip on Thursday, including three children and two high-ranking officers in the Hamas-run police force, according to Palestinian and hospital officials.

One strike early Thursday hit a tent in an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone known as Muwasi, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people are sheltering in tents during the cold and rainy winter.

Another strike killed at least eight Palestinians in the central Gaza Strip. The dead were members of local committees that help secure aid convoys, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. An Associated Press

reporter at the hospital confirmed the toll.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the strikes.

The war was sparked by Hamas-led militants' October 7, 2023 attack into Israel. They killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 that day. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive has killed over 45,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health officials, who say women and children make up more than half the fatalities. The officials do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their tally.

Israel says it targeted Hamas official in a strike that killed 9

others: The Israeli military says it targeted a senior member of Hamas' internal security apparatus in a strike in the Gaza Strip that Palestinian officials say killed nine other people, including three children.

The strike early Thursday hit a tent in an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone known as Muwasi, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people are sheltering in tents during the cold and rainy winter.

The military said Hossam Shahwan, a senior officer in the Hamas-run police force in Gaza, was involved in gathering intelligence used by Hamas' armed wing in attacks on Israeli forces.

Maj Gen Mahmoud Salah, another senior police officer, was also killed in the strike.

The military says Hamas militants hide among civilians and blames the group for their deaths in the nearly 15-month war, which was ignited by Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack into Israel.

The Hamas-run government had a police force numbering in the tens of thousands that maintained a high degree of public security before the war while also violently suppressing dissent.

The police have largely vanished from the streets in many areas after being targeted by Israel, contributing to the breakdown of law and order that has hindered the delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid.

Syrian security forces search for militants who refuse to turn in their weapons: The forces together with armed vehicles were

deployed in the city of Homs Thursday to look for the militants affiliated with ousted President Bashar Assad, state media reported.

SANA, citing a military official, said that the new de facto authorities led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham had set up centres in Syria's third-largest city for former soldiers and militants to hand over their weapons, similar to other parts of Syria.

In early December, a lightning insurgency took out the decades-long rule of Assad in less than two weeks. HTS has since run much of its leader Ahmad al-Sharaa. Officials who were part of Assad's notorious web of intelligence and security apparatus have been arrested over the past few weeks.

# India's textile exports grew seven per cent to USD 21.35 bn during Apr-Oct period of FY25: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's textiles and apparel exports, including handicrafts, grew 7 per cent during the April-October period to USD 21.35 billion, the government said on Thursday. The outbound shipments from the sector stood at USD 20 billion in the same period of the previous financial year, FY 2023-24. "The Ready Made Garments (RMG) category with exports of USD 8,733 million has the largest share (41 per cent) in the total exports (USD 21,358 million) during the period of April-October of FY 2024-25, followed by Cotton Textiles (33 per cent, USD 7,082 million), Man-Made Textiles (15 per cent, USD 3,105 million)," the Textiles Ministry said. Growth of exports was observed in all principal commodities during April-October of FY 2024-25, as compared to corresponding period of FY 2023-24, except wool and handloom, which declined by 19 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively, the Ministry said. Meanwhile, the overall import of textiles and apparel including handicrafts declined 1 per cent during the April-October period of



FY 2024-25 (USD 5,425 million), compared to the same period of FY 2023-24 (USD 5,464 million). The man-made textiles category with import of USD 1,859 million has the largest share (34 per cent) in the total imports (USD 5,425 million) during the period of April-October of FY 2024-25, as there is a demand-supply gap in this sector, the Ministry said.

"Growth of imports is observed majorly in Cotton Textiles mainly on account of import of long staple cotton fibre and such trends of import indicates an increase in production capacity of the country amidst rising consumption and self-reliance," the official statement said. During FY 2023-24, the import of textiles and apparel products by India

stood at USD 8.94 billion, down by nearly 15 per cent in comparison to USD 10.48 billion in FY 2022-23. India was the sixth largest exporter of textiles and apparel in the world in 2023. The share of textile and apparel (T&A) including handicrafts in India's total exports stood at 8.21 per cent in FY 2023-24. "Our country has a share of 3.9 per cent of the global trade in textiles and apparel. Major textile and apparel export destinations for India are USA and EU and with around 47 per cent share in total textile and apparel exports. "India is a major textile and apparel exporting country and enjoys trade surplus. Bulk of import takes place for re-export or for industry requirement of raw material," the Textile Ministry said. It is noteworthy that export is a function of demand and supply and depends on factors such as global demand, internal consumption and demand, order flow, logistics etc. Exports in FY 2024 were initially low mainly due to the geopolitical crises around the Red Sea, which affected export movement during January, February and March 2024, the Ministry stated.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as strong dollar demand from importers and foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the dollar gained against most currencies during 2024 and continued to remain on a strong footing this year. Moreover, persistent foreign fund outflows further dented investors' sentiments. Additionally, global markets are expected to see low volumes as the holiday season is underway in major economies like those in Europe. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and witnessed an intra-day low of 85.79 and a high of 85.68 against the American currency. The local unit settled for the day at 85.73 (provisional), registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close amid a sharp recovery in domestic equities. On Wednesday, the rupee settled flat at 85.64 against the US dollar.



On December 27, the local currency touched its lifetime intra-day low of 85.80 against the greenback. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strength in the US Dollar and dollar demand from importers. Sustained FII outflows may further pressure the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. "However, any intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may support the rupee at lower levels. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.50 to 86, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's

strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent lower at 108.46. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.91 per cent to USD 75.32 per barrel in futures trade. India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 12-month low in December, as new business orders and production expanded at softer rates, a monthly survey said on Thursday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index was at 56.4 in December, down from 56.5 in November, indicating a weaker improvement in operating conditions.

## Employment increases 36 per cent to 64.33 Crore in last ten years: Mansukh Mandaviya



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union labour minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said employment in the country has increased by 36 per cent to 64.33 crore in 2023-24 from 47.15 crore in 2014-15, which shows improvement in job creation during NDA period. Talking to media persons, the minister also stated that employment under UPA grew by just about 7 per cent between 2004 to 2014. He noted that under the UPA government between 2004 to 2014 just 2.9 crore additional jobs were created whereas

under the Modi government between 2014-24, 17.19 crore jobs were added. In the last one year (2023-24) alone, the Modi government has created around 4.6 crore jobs in the country, the minister stated. The data assumes significance in the backdrop of pressure on the government for job creation in the country. About the agriculture sector, the minister stated that employment declined by 16 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under UPA tenure whereas it has grown by 19 per cent between 2014 -2023 under Modi tenure.

Similarly, employment in the manufacturing sector grew by just 6 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under UPA tenure while it increased by 15 per cent between 2014-2023 under Modi tenure. He further informed that employment in the services sector grew by 25 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under UPA tenure while it increased by 36 per cent between 2014 -2023 under Modi tenure. He also stated that the unemployment Rate (UR) dropped from 6 per cent in 2017-18 to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24 while the employment rate (WPR) grew from 46.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 58.2 per cent in 2023-24. Similarly, he informed that the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) grew from 49.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 60.1 per cent in 2023-24. About the growth in youth joining the formal job market, the minister also informed that in the last seven years (between Sept 2017- Sept 2024) over 4.7 crore youth (Age 18-28 years) have joined Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) fold.

## Govt clears PLI incentive of ₹246 Crore sought by M&M, Tata Motors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of Heavy Industries has approved incentive claims of Rs 246 crore submitted by Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors under the Rs 25,938 crore PLI scheme for the automobile and auto components industry, officials said. Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H D Kumaraswamy has expressed satisfaction with the progress made by auto original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) toward achieving localized manufacturing through initiatives like PLI scheme. He also congratulated Tata Motors and M&M for developing this capability and exuded confidence that more applicants would take advantage of the PLI scheme. According to sources, Tata Motors submitted an incentive claim of approximately Rs 142.13 crore based on determined sales in FY 2023-24. The eligible sales of Advanced Automotive Technology (AAT) products from Tata



Motors include the Tiago EV (electric four-wheeler), Starbus EV (electric bus), and Ace EV (electric cargo vehicle), totalling Rs 1,380.24 crore. Mahindra & Mahindra submitted an incentive claim of Rs 104.08 crore based on determined incremental sales of AAT products totalling Rs 800.59 crore for FY 2023-24, with a cumulative investment of Rs 978.30 crore, officials said. The eligible sales from their e3W models, including Treo,

Treo Zor, and Zor Grand amount to Rs 836.02 crore, supported by a certificate of domestic value addition (DVA) issued by the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI). "The total claims from these two applicants amount to approximately Rs 246 crore, which have been examined and recommended by the Project Management Agency (PMA) and subsequently approved by Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI)," an official said.

The scheme aims to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities in AAT products, address cost disabilities, and establish a robust supply chain. Approved on September 15, 2021, the PLI scheme is designed to operate from FY 2023-24 to FY 2027-28, with incentive disbursements scheduled from FY 2024-25 to FY 2028-29. Under this scheme, incentives of 13-18 per cent are offered for components related to electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cells, while other AAT components receive incentives of 8 per cent and 13 per cent. As of September, 2024, the scheme has already facilitated an investment of Rs 20,715 crore, leading to incremental sales of Rs 10,472 crore, said an official. The first incentive disbursement is anticipated in 2024-25. Key features of the scheme include requirement of a minimum of 50 per cent domestic value addition and eligibility for both domestic and export sales.

## IOCL to provide fueling services at Noida International Airport

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL), a public sector oil marketing company, will provide fueling services at Noida International Airport (NIA) in Jewar, Gautam Buddha Nagar district, Uttar Pradesh. The airport is expected to be inaugurated early next fiscal, according to a statement released on Thursday. Under a 30-year concession agreement, IOCL will operate fuel stations at three locations within the airport premises - near the main western access road for passengers, at the airside for airport operations, and close to the eastern cargo precinct, the private airport operator said. "Our collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation Ltd marks another milestone in NIA's journey to operational readiness. By partnering with IOCL, we will ensure seamless and efficient fueling services at the airport," said Christoph Schnellmann, CEO, Noida International Airport.

## Sasan Power pays \$150 million to IIFCL, UK

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sasan Power Limited (Sasan Power), a subsidiary of Reliance Power Limited (Reliance Power), on Wednesday has made a bullet payment of US\$150 million to IIFCL, UK, fulfilling its debt obligation on 31 December 2024. This repayment will bolster Sasan Power's debt coverage metrics, improve liquidity, and enhance its credit rating. Sasan Power operates a 3960 MW Ultra Mega Power Plant (UMPP) in Sasan, Madhya Pradesh, which is the world's largest integrated coal-based power plant. It boasts a captive coal mining capacity of 20 MTPA. The plant supplies electricity to 14 Discoms distribution companies (DISCOMS) across seven states—Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, and New Delhi—at the lowest tariff in India of Rs. 1.54 per unit, benefiting more than 40 crore people. For seven consecutive years, Sasan Power has been ranked as the best-performing power plant in India. The loan repayment further strengthens Reliance Power's balance sheet as the company transitions its focus toward the renewable energy sector, which is poised to drive future growth. Reliance Power, a zero-debt company, recently raised Rs. 1,525 crore through equity-linked warrants via a preferential issue.

## India-EFTA trade pact likely to be implemented before end of 2025: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The implementation process of free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA is progressing fast and is expected to come into force before the end of this year, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said. The two sides signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) on March 10, 2024. Under the pact, India has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products such as Swiss watches, chocolates and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties. The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. "Yes, EFTA is progressing very fast," Goyal told PTI when asked if the agreement would come into effect this year. The minister said the Swiss Council of States has approved the agreement and now will go to their National Council for approval. "So this overwhelming support in political circles in Switzerland for the TEPA with EFTA is truly a sign of the times to come... And in their statement also, it shows that that it has cleared an important hurdle and they are hoping to bring in entry to force by autumn of 2025, before the end of calendar year 2025," Goyal said. The bloc committed an



investment of USD 100 billion - USD 50 billion within 10 years after the implementation of the agreement and another USD 50 billion in the next five years - which would facilitate the creation of 1 million direct jobs in India. This is a first-of-its-kind pledge agreed upon in any of the trade deals signed by India so far. The commitment is the key substance of the TEPA (Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement), which took almost 16 years to conclude, for India in return for opening its markets for several products coming from the EFTA nations. There is a provision in the agreement that if the proposed investments would not come because of some reasons, India can suspend duty concessions to the four countries. Domestic customers will get access to high-quality Swiss products such as watches, chocolates, biscuits, and clocks at lower prices as India will phase out customs duties under the trade pact on these goods over 10 years. It is taking time to implement the agreement due to an

## India's non-life Insurance industry may register double-digit growth in 2025

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Despite flat general insurance penetration in the country, the non-life insurers are expecting to register double-digit growth in 2025 with a conducive regulatory environment and launch of innovative products catering to specific customer needs, stakeholders said on Thursday. The industry is also expected to meet this expectation if it receives a favourable outcome on GST relief and a revisit of motor third-party rates, a top private insurer said. "While health insurance will continue to drive growth in the coming years, there will likely be significant expansion in non-motor and non-health segments, such as pet insurance, liability, professional indemnity, and housing insurance," Future Generali India Insurance Company Ltd managing director & CEO Anup Rau said. The industry estimates a 14 per cent annual growth rate and is expected to witness significant developments as the sector "emerges as a true partner in progress, integrating digital fabric, delivering hyper-personalised solutions, and harnessing the power of data to mitigate emerging risks," he said. HDFC ERGO General Insurance Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Anuj Tyagi emphasised the need to make insurance affordable and accessible. "We anticipate increased innovation in product development, underwriting,

and customer servicing, which will play a crucial role in deepening the reach of insurance to citizens not only from urban cities but also from tier 2 and 3 locations. Bajaj Allianz General Insurance MD & CEO Tapan Singhel said the insurance industry is set to undergo transformative shifts, emphasising personalised and proactive offerings driven by digital innovation. "Cyber insurance is expected to gain prominence alongside the adoption of parametric insurance for disaster management and surety bonds as alternatives to traditional bank guarantees in infrastructure projects," he said. The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), in its latest annual report, said that the insurance density in the non-life industry has increased to USD 25 up from USD 22 in 2022-23. The insurance density is a measure of a country's insurance sector development, calculated as the ratio of premiums collected by companies to the country's population. Rau pointed out that the industry will require support, particularly around GST and motor third-party rates to reverse the trend. "Removing GST on health insurance would make it more affordable, driving higher penetration and reducing the government's burden to provide coverage. Motor third-party premiums have been unchanged for five years, these rates need to be revised," he pointed out.

## Tata Power-DDL joins hands with Delhi Police to enhance public safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL) leading power utility supplying electricity to a populace of around 9 million in North & Northwest part of

Delhi, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Delhi Police, for enhancing public safety awareness across the National capital. Under the MoU, the two parties will work together to produce content on a variety of safety issues.

## INBRIEF

### INAUGURATION OF THE DESIGN CLINIC FACILITY TO BOOST INNOVATION, COMPETITIVENESS FOR STARTUPS AND MSMEs

NEW DELHI: The Design Clinic Facility, a new initiative aimed at empowering startups, MSMEs, entrepreneurs, and innovators, was inaugurated by Dr. N. Kailaiselvi, Secretary, DSIR & DG, CSIR in the presence of Cmde.



### INDIAN RAILWAYS AND THE MAHARAJAS' EXPRESS TRAINS

There is well used adage, "If wishes were horses, men would fly". Maybe it is a vogueish predisposition of humans to transcend mountains, skies and water bodies like the avian species.

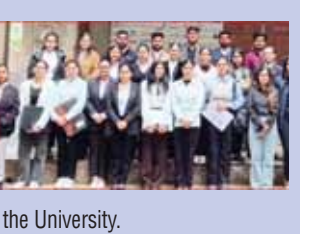


### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ENHANCED PASSENGER SERVICES ON INDIAN RAILWAYS

One is a talismanic cricketer - Mahendra Singh Dhoni and the other an iconic sprinter who scorched the tracks, P.T. Usha. One began his career with the South Eastern Railway and the with Southern Railway.

### HDFC LIFE OFFERED JOBS TO 10 GNDU MBA STUDENTS

AMRITSAR: Under the able leadership of Vice Chancellor Dr. Karamjeet Singh, Directorate of Placement & Career Enhancement of Guru Nanak Dev University organized Campus Placement drive by HDFC Life Insurance company for MBA - Batch 2025 students of the University.

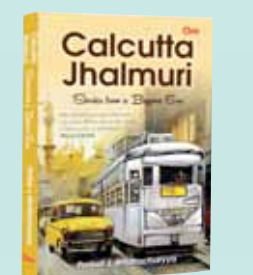


JANUARY  
READS

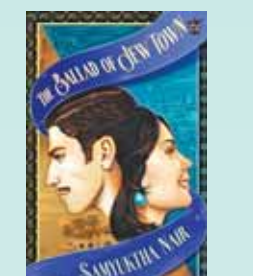
Book: Romancing The 80s  
Author: Seema Sethi  
Publisher: Om Books International  
Price: ₹3,995



Book: Stree: The Women of the Ramayana  
Author: Lalita B Jai Shulka  
Publisher: Om International Books  
Price: ₹395



Book: Calcutta Jhalmuri  
Author: Probal J. Bhattacharyya  
Publisher: Om Books International  
Price: ₹295



Book: The Ballad of Jew Town  
Author: Samyuktha Nair  
Publisher: Niyogi Books  
Price: ₹350



Book: Stylistic Trends in Later Bundelkhand Painting  
Author: Seitz Konard  
Publisher: Niyogi Books  
Price: ₹4,500

Thalassery, a small town in Kerala's Kannur district, is known as the land of three Cs: Cake, Circus and Cricket. It is said that cricket made its first appearance in Thalassery in the 1830s, making the town the cradle of Kerala cricket. The game was introduced in Thalassery by Sir Arthur Wellesley, who led a military campaign to Malabar to defeat the Islamic aggressors and Pazhasi Raja, the monarch of the kingdom who had challenged the East India Company (EIC) for imposing heavy taxes on the people. Wellesley's mission was to subdue Pazhasi Raja, who had incited the local population to resist cooperation with the EIC and refuse to pay the arbitrarily imposed taxes. To keep his soldiers engaged, Wellesley introduced the game of cricket at the military station. He also included players from the local population to build trust. Although cricket was considered a game of royalty, Wellesley recruited washermen, porters, rickshaw pullers, and others from the working class. The local players exceeded expectations, excelling in all aspects of the game. Talented batsmen, bowlers, and fielders emerged, and some quickly gained prominence. Notable players like Aboobaker, Ahmed and Kunjipakki became local legends. Aboobaker was famously nicknamed Anson Aboobaker for his

# THE EVOLUTION OF THALASSERY CRICKET

"STUMPED: LIFE BEHIND AND BEYOND THE TWENTY-TWO YARDS" OFFERS AN INSIGHTFUL LOOK INTO KIRMANI'S LIFE, STRUGGLES AND CRICKETING JOURNEY, WRITES KUMAR CHELLAPPAN



batting style, which resembled *Geoffrey Anson's*, while *Kunjipakki* earned the title *Sixer Kunjipakki* for his crowd-pleasing sixes. Records of *Kunjipakki* and *Aboobaker's* performances, chronicled in scorebooks

imported from England, are preserved in the *Arakkal Home*, the ancestral house of the chieftain. This home, with its panoramic view of the maidan, houses a collection of cricket memorabilia from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. *Ernest*

*Cowdrey*, father of British cricketer *Colin Cowdrey*, regularly represented the English team at the Thalassery maidan. Old-timers fondly recall the golden era of cricket in Thalassery, when players' names became part of local folklore.

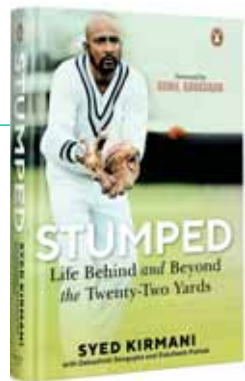
The tradition of naming players after cricketing icons persisted. At *Sree Sankara College, Kalady, Ramakrishna Iyer*, a wicketkeeper-batsman, was nicknamed *Kirmanji Ramakrishnan* for emulating *SMH Kirmani*, India's renowned wicketkeeper. *Kirmanji* was honoured with the Best Wicketkeeper in the World award after the 1983 World Cup, a recognition yet unmatched.

Despite his exceptional performance, *Kirmanji* was often dropped from the national team for reasons known only to selectors. His eventful career, spanning nearly four decades, is documented in his memoir, *STUMPED: Life Behind and Beyond the Twenty-Two Yards*. Co-written with *Debashish Sengupta* and *Dakshesh Pathak*, the memoir includes articles by cricket writers and highlights *Kirmanji's* contributions to the game.

Cricket, once a status symbol for the elite, became a sport for the masses with players like *Kirmanji*, *Kapil Dev* and *Balwinder Singh Sandhu*. Before their rise, the game was dominated by royals like *M. A. K. Pataudi* and *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. In the 1970s, cricket coaching was a privilege, but players like *Kirmanji*, born into a lower-middle-class family, worked tirelessly to succeed. *Kirmanji's* determination and resourcefulness, using bricks as wicketkeeper's gloves in his school days - echo the humble beginnings of sports legends like *Pele*.

*Kirmanji's* memoir recounts his inspiration from England's wicketkeeper *Alan Knott* and his experiences keeping wickets for unpredictable bowlers like *Chandrasekhar*, *E. A. S. Prasanna* and *Bishan Singh Bedi*. Despite his dedication, *Kirmanji* was undervalued. While other players received ₹1 crore for benefit matches, *Kirmanji* was allocated a mere ₹25 lakh, a glaring injustice.

Announcing his retirement from first-class cricket with sorrow, *Kirmanji* criticised the selectors' inability to appreciate talent. However, he remains a beloved figure in Indian cricket history, celebrated for popularising the game and his unparalleled skill as a wicketkeeper. The only drawback in *STUMPED* is the occasional typos and grammatical errors, which detract from the reading experience. Penguin, the publishers, could have ensured a more polished presentation.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: STUMPED: Life Behind and Beyond the 22 Yards  
by SYED KIRMANI  
Publisher: Penguin  
Price: ₹599

The book "Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks" by Nandini Sahu, published by Authorspress in Delhi, presents an inclusive and forward-progressive perception of the advancing academic field of Hindu Studies. By plunging into the literary, philosophical, cultural and social aspects of Hinduism, the book surpasses a singular perspective and instead assumes an interdisciplinary framework. The ambitious breadth and complexity of the book are evident in *Sahu's* effort to interweave various academic fields, including religion, sociology, anthropology, art history, and literature, among others. The book is carefully structured into ten parts, each delving into different aspects of Hindu Studies. Her analysis is both thorough and extensive, initiating with an introduction to the field of study and progressing to an analysis of Hindu scriptures and settings. The book delivers a comprehensive basis for understanding the fundamental scriptures of Hinduism, including the four Vedas and the works linked with them, as well as the Epics, Puranas, and Smriti literature. Furthermore, *Sahu's* discussion of Hindu philosophical traditions, such as Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta, demonstrates a sophisticated engagement with Hindu philosophy's intricate metaphysical and epistemological disputes. *Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks* is a rigorous and broad investigation of the many factors of Hinduism. By employing a variety of research methods, the book offers a deeper understanding of the complexity of Hinduism, making it a relevant and engaging read for scholars and practitioners. "Hindu Studies" is an interdisciplinary field that intersects with anthropology, sociology, history and religious studies.

The book argues that this study goes beyond historical or theological examination, encompassing contemporary issues such as the influence of Hinduism on global politics, the diaspora and modern religious groups. By blending traditional and contemporary ideas, the book initiates a dialogue between Hinduism and other global faiths, creating a comparative framework crucial for interfaith discourse. The chapters that dive into the lived experiences of Hindu devotion and the cultural representations of religion are equally captivating. These chapters are devoted to Hindu ceremonies, customs, and traditions. The presence of *Sahu's* focus on regional variants and vernacular traditions contributes to the enrichment of the discourse by drawing attention to Hinduism's heterogeneous and dynamic character. The work is exceptional in its methodological rigour, one of its most remarkable aspects. Using comparative methods, historical gradient analysis, and ethnographic research, *Sahu* establishes Hindu Studies as a science founded on scientific principles. In order to evaluate and analyse Hinduism not only as a religious belief system but also as a cultural and historical phenomenon, *Sahu* uses the theoretical foundation of Cultural Materialism as a continuous thread. It is both relevant and vital for *Sahu* to focus on the social and ethical knowledge systems that are part of Hinduism, especially in relation to caste, gender, and the dynamics of society. The critical debate on class, caste, and gender reveals the socio-political components of Hinduism, hence challenging the narratives that are often linked with the tradition of Hinduism. *Sahu's* critical analysis of these aspects provides a deeper understanding of the social and



## Hinduism's Global Perspective

*Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks* offers an inclusive, interdisciplinary exploration of Hinduism's cultural, philosophical and social dimensions, says SHALEEN KUMAR SINGH

ethical structures within Hinduism. In the final sections of this book, *Sahu* investigates what modernity and Hinduism have to offer each other and how the role of Hinduism in a multilateral context is changing. It is a critical examination of how Hinduism has responded to the challenges posed by modernity without losing its fundamental identity. The discussion of Hindu art, architecture, and iconography illustrates even more the extent to which

the religion has influenced Indian artistic traditions during this timeframe. Her inquiry into the global reach of Hinduism through diasporic movements, engagement with interfaith dialogues, and interaction with Western intellectual traditions illustrates how Hinduism has transcended regional and cultural boundaries. The subsequent chapter, "Navigating New Frontiers," is the most argument-rich in terms of content because it shows us the newer paradigms

emerging in Hindu Studies. *Sahu* at least has the matter of stretching the limits of traditional research on her side-she is considering what possibilities and tensions exist in the field. This is part of current academic debates around decolonising knowledge systems and assimilating dialogue between cultures, as her essay calls for a more muscular and democratic engagement with Hindu Studies. The findings are categorised thematically, geographically, and textually. Analysis of epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* shows their deeper connection with Indian culture and ethos. *Bhakti* literature highlights the role of devotional movements in reshaping regional cultures. Puranic literature relates myths and stories, bridging the ancient with the modern. *Nandini Sahu* has produced a landmark volume that provides the foundation for the discipline of Hindu Studies and

proposes an innovative conceptual grid for future scholarship in the field. The name of this work is "Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks." This book presents an interdisciplinary approach, methodological rigour, and critical engagement with the complex socio-cultural concerns replete with the issues at stake. *Sahu's* deft balancing act between scholarly depth and accessible prose ensures that the book will be valuable to academic and popular audiences. In this way, she highlights the importance of Hindu Studies in contemporary academia and beyond. The fact that this work uses the examples noted above is a compliment to *Sahu's* intellectual brilliance and her persistent desire to move the discourse forward in an increasingly globalised world with special reference to Hinduism. Much of the book deals with the Sanskrit tradition, portraying its centrality in Indian forms of knowledge. Details of contributions and development in Sanskrit grammar by Panini, Katyayana, and Patanjali have been recorded and comprise a solid foundation for India's linguistic and philosophical discipline. Sanskrit, described as the "foundation of Indian epistemology," is represented as a language of unmatched precision and beauty that lies at the heart of understanding Hindu thought. The book deserves serious attention from scholars and critics.

**About the Reviewer:**  
*Shaleen Kumar Singh (shaleensingh.in)* teaches English at Swami Shukdevanand College, Shahjahanpur, India. *edits creativesaplins.in* an online journal and can be contacted at *shaleen@scollegespn.ac.in*

## Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks

Nandini Sahu

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks  
by Nandini Sahu  
Publisher: Authorspress  
Price: ₹1195

# Debates in dressing room should stay there: Gautam Gambhir

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Asserting that "debates" in the dressing room should not come out in public domain, India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Thursday said he has had some "honest" conversations with his players and that the ongoing transition in the team will be all-encompassing. Gambhir also side-stepped queries on whether out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma will get a place in the final XI for the fifth and final Test against Australia starting on Friday. Amid reports of unrest in the dressing room, the head coach sought to douse the fire by declaring that they were "just reports, not truth". "There were some honest words is all I can say. Honesty is extremely important if you want to go on and achieve some great things," Gambhir told mediapersons on the eve of the Test match that India need to win to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and stay alive in

the World Test Championship. The straight-talking former opener refrained from taking names but acknowledged that a transition is in progress and performance will be the sole criteria to stay in the side. "Indian cricket will always be in safe hands as long as there are honest people in that dressing room. Honesty is the most important thing for any transition. And it's not phasing out senior players and bringing in new players. Ultimately what will keep you in the dressing room is performance," Gambhir couldn't be more precise. If one read between the lines, it seemed that even Mohammed Shami's days as an international cricketer are numbered. Shami could not regain fitness for the current series despite being a rehab for a while. "Earlier when transitions happened it seemed, one department is taking the team forward but (in this case) transition will happen in both



batting as well as bowling," he said. The question of natural game versus situational awareness cropped up and the coach reiterated his stand that the team's needs come first. "Only one ideology matters and that's team first. It's a team sport and you have got to play how team needs you to play. You can play the natural game but in team sport, individuals only contribute." When Rishabh Pant's shot-selection in the Melbourne Test was specifically mentioned, he brushed it aside, saying, "I don't want to talk about individuals, they know where they stand." The feisty Gambhir was on full view when an Australian reporter threw a query on why Rohit had not showed up for the interaction as is the "tradition". "Can you confirm the playing eleven?" he asked. The response was vague when it came to addressing the question on his final XI. "Everything is fine with Rohit and

I don't think there is anything traditional here. The head coach is here and that should be good enough," he said. "We will decide on the playing XI after looking at the pitch," he added. When the same question was repeated, he was more terse. "The answer remains the same." So, what are the conversations that he has had with Rohit and Virat Kohli, whose dismissals outside the off-stump continue to hurt the team. "There's only one conversation and that's how to win matches for India. We all know how important that is," he said. However, Gambhir said that he doesn't appreciate dressing room debates get space in public discourse. "Debates between coaches and players should be confined between them. This sport is known for results but conversations between individuals should stay inside dressing room," he asserted.



## Sri Lanka beats New Zealand by 7 runs in the 3rd T20

AP ■ NELSON

Kusal Perera scored Sri Lanka's fastest Twenty20 International century — from 44 balls — on Thursday to spur his team to a consolation win over New Zealand by seven runs in the final match of the three-match series. Perera's career-best score in a century partnership with captain Charith Asalanka lifted Sri Lanka to 218-5 — its second-highest T20 score, as it batted first for the first time in the series. New Zealand held a winning 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first match by eight runs and the second by 45 runs. New Zealand needed to achieve its highest run chase in T20s to complete a clean sweep of the series and was given a good start by Rachin Ravindra who made 69 from 39 balls. But it fell just short, held to 211-7. The Black Caps began at a pace to match Sri Lanka, reaching 60-0 in the six-over power play. But Asalanka slammed the brakes on the New Zealand innings when he dismissed Ravindra, Mark Chapman (9) and Glenn Phillips (6) in quick succession. Asalanka had figures of 3-25 after those dismissals but Daryl Mitchell hit four consecutive sixes from his final over to wreck his analysis and bat New Zealand back into the game. Wanindu Hasaranga then dismissed Mitchell Hay (8)

and Michael Bracewell (1) in the 16th over to tip the match back in the visitors' favor. Asalanka took a superb diving catch to remove Bracewell and managed his bowlers well in a superb all-round performance. "I think it's a good win for us," Asalanka said. "I think throughout the series we've played good cricket but couldn't manage to get a win. Finally we got it. I hope this is a momentum shift for us. Adapting to these conditions has been a key for us." New Zealand came to the last over, bowled by Binura Fernando, needing 22 to win. After taking six runs from the first three balls, one of which was a wide, Zak Foulkes hit the fourth ball for six, leaving New Zealand needing 10 from the last two balls. It was too much and the New Zealand batters managed only three more runs. The start of the match was delayed by 30 minutes by a wet outfield and when it began Sri Lanka lost the toss but had the chance to bat first on a good pitch at Saxton Oval. The tourists lost both openers, Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis, inside the power play. But Perera powered up the Sri Lanka innings in an outstanding batting performance, hitting 13 fours and four sixes in his 101 from 46 balls. One of the keys to victory was the 75 runs Perera and Asalanka hit between the 14th and 18th overs which proved vital in making the run chase just too much for New Zealand.

## Australia captain Pat Cummins likely to miss tour of Sri Lanka

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia captain Pat Cummins hinted that he may skip the tour of Sri Lanka later this month to be present for the birth of his second child. Australia are scheduled to play two Tests in Sri Lanka on January 29 and February 6, around the same time his wife — Becky — is due to give birth. "It's pretty hard to plan exactly the day, but definitely (I might miss the Sri Lanka tour)," Cummins told 'The Daily Telegraph' at the launch of the Pink Test, starting here on Friday. In Cummins absence, Steve Smith or Travis Head will lead Australia. Cummins revealed that his mother's death last year had a profound impact on reshaping his priorities in life. The pacer had returned



midway through the tour of India to be with his mother when she passed away. "In some ways, it really makes you focus in on what I think is important. It's family, it's enjoyment, it's trying to find joy in life and I think that's been a slight shift in the way I've approached playing and

touring and it's just given me that real decluttering mindset. "When you go out, you just want to play well, and of course, there's going to be pressure, but you don't want to forget what mum and dad used to say to us every time we went out to play as kids: 'Go and enjoy it. Try your

best, but make sure you enjoy it.' I try to remind myself of that every time I go on a tour or play." "Whatever you choose to do, there's always an opportunity cost," Cummins reflected. "In the last few years, that's really rung true. When you go away on tour, you're missing out on family time or moments. That's a deliberate choice, so you have to make sure you're making the most of that tour or that game, if that makes sense." Cummins has previously admitted that he regretted missing the early weeks of his son Albie's life due to his commitment to the World Cup. "I missed a big chunk (of Albie's early days) last time and I want to work out how we can spend a bit more time at home for that initial period this time," he had said.



## Marsh dropped, Starc declared fit for BGT finale

PTI ■ SYDNEY

All-rounder Beau Webster will replace an out-of-form Mitchell Marsh in Australia's squad for the fifth and final Test against India, home skipper Pat Cummins said here on Thursday. The 33-year-old Marsh scored only 73 runs in seven innings across four Tests and Cummins cited this as the reason for his axing. He has bowled merely 33 overs in the series so far, claiming just three wickets. "We have one change in our side. Beau Webster comes in place of Mitch Marsh. Mitch knows that he hasn't scored enough runs," Cummins said at the pre-match press conference. "Mitchie obviously hasn't quite got the runs or perhaps wickets said he would have liked this series. So, it felt like it was time for a fresher up and Beau's been with the squad. He's been great. But I feel like now is a good week for Beau to get a chance." The 31-year-old Webster, who played against India A in November, has scored 5247 runs and taken 148 wickets in first-class cricket. Webster has been in good form in the Sheffield Shield as well and averaged over 55 last season. "He's just been one of those star performers for Tasmania with the bat or ball, or in the field. He always seems to have a big impact, quite aggressive. (He) can change the game, like we've seen Mitch Marsh or Travis Head or Alex Carey do in that middle order." Cummins admitted that

Webster's crafty bowling played a role in the decision. "That was definitely a factor. It's always nice to have a fifth bowler that bowls quite a lot for Tasmania. So if we need to call on that, we can." "Firstly, if you're going to bat six, you picked for your batting, which he's shown in Shield over the last couple years when he takes the game on, and he's really changed some games for Tasmania. That pace bowling of Beau's going to be handy," said Cummins. However, Cummins asserted that the Boxing Day match will not be Marsh's last Test for Australia. "Particularly here in Australia, when a batter misses out or gets dropped, it's always seen as a big thing, but it's not the case. We love pulling a squad of players together who we can call on at different times, and we thought the time was right for Mitchy to have a fresher-up and miss this one. "But doesn't mean that he won't be back in the team at some point," the skipper said. Starc fit Cummins also put to rest the speculation surrounding Mitchell Starc's fitness, saying the left-arm pacer will play the game. "He went for scans yesterday. But he got the all clear to play this match. He is good to go," Cummins said. The 34-year-old's fitness was the main concern for the hosts after he battled through sore ribs in the Boxing Day Test but still managed to bowl effectively with help from the team's physios.

## Arsenal moves up to 2nd place in Premier League with 3-1 win over Brentford

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal is back into a second place in the Premier League and in no rush to add players in the transfer window. Mikel Arteta's team beat Brentford 3-1 on Wednesday to leapfrog Nottingham Forest and close the gap on league leader Liverpool to six points. "If there's an opportunity, we'll look at it," Arteta said of the January window. "I really like my players. I really value what we have, because it's a lot of quality and a lot of commitment from all of them." That includes 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri, who got his first Premier League start in place of the injured Bukayo Saka. The teenager was involved in second-half goals by Mikel Merino and Gabriel



Martinelli. Bryan Mbeumo put the home team ahead in the 13th minute at Gtech Community Stadium, but Gabriel Jesus made it 1-1 just before the half-hour mark — his sixth goal in the past four games. Merino scored in the 50th minute and Martinelli added

a third three minutes later. It was Arsenal's second straight win without Saka, who is likely to be sidelined until at least March. The England winger tore his right hamstring in a 5-1 win over Crystal Palace on Dec. 21. Arsenal extended its unbeaten streak to 12 games

in all competitions. Liverpool has a game in hand on the Gunners, who play at Brighton on Saturday. Liverpool hosts Manchester United on Sunday. Brentford remained in 12th place and has lost three of its past four Premier League matches. HAVERTZ SENT HOME WITH ILLNESS Several Arsenal players were dealing with a virus before and during the game, Arteta said. Kai Havertz was sent home, and Declan Rice only entered the game as a substitute in the 78th minute. "These things happen. There are always things thrown at you, infections, viruses, so I try to delay the lineup as late as possible because you can get up in the morning and unfortunately have a surprise like this," the manager said.

# Unfortunate that India aren't travelling to Pakistan for Champions Trophy: Shane Watson

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson termed India's inability to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy as "unfortunate" but said the ICC showpiece will offer star batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma a chance to liberate themselves from a prolonged form slump. The global governing body has adopted the 'Hybrid' model for this edition of the CT with India scheduled to play its matches at a neutral venue in Dubai. "It's unfortunate that things have worked out that way for sure. But there's no doubt that what everyone loves seeing — the India-Pakistan games. Whenever they come together, whether it's an ICC event, it is a really special time because

we've got a sense of what's on the line," Watson told the media here during the Champions Trophy Tour. "It's unfortunate that India aren't travelling to Pakistan for this Champions Trophy. But, unfortunately, that's just the way it is right now," he added. Watson said the CT offers cricket a fresh context, breaking the long lull of four years between two ODI World Cups. "The CT is a critically important tournament in world cricket because the One Day World Cup is only once in every four years. It is great because it breaks up those four years," he noted. The 43-year-old also said the CT keeps the ODI format alive amidst the rightful prominence Test cricket receives and the upsurge of T20s. "You keep

giving one-day cricket the energy that it needs because it is a great game. It's a great format. It provides that balance between Test cricket and T20 cricket. "We never want to lose the format of one-day cricket, but there needs to be context as often as possible. And the CT certainly provides that." "When you play a CT where there's only eight teams, there is something riding on every ball. And as a team, you have to hit the ground sprinting. Otherwise, you'll be out like it was for the Australian team in 2013." Then defending champions Australia had finished at the bottom of Group A with a solitary win and crashed out of the tournament, which India won eventually under MS

Dhoni. Current form no worry for Rohit, Kohli Both Rohit and Kohli were part of that victory in England 12 years back, but now these two superstars are finding it tough to make big runs as they did in the past. But Watson was not worried over the Indians' patchy form for talks surrounding their retirement. "I don't think it (current poor form) will really play a part at all with Rohit Sharma and Virat's impact in one-day cricket. It's going to be different conditions where they're playing in Dubai. One-day cricket does really free them both as well," said Watson. He placed his faith in Kohli's extraordinary ODI numbers — 295 ODIs, 13906 runs, Average: 58.18 with 50 hundreds and 72 fifties. "Kohli is an absolute

master of one-day cricket." "Yes, he's a master of all formats, but especially ODIs. You see his extraordinary numbers over a long period of time, averaging around 57 and a strike rate of 93 over a long period of time. It's crazy to think the control that he has over his innings." Watson said Rohit could be back to his best in ODIs. "We'll see that again in the Champions Trophy. Rohit, like we saw in the one-day World Cup (2023), when he was at his very best, he was taking on the game. "It's more difficult to be able to do that in Test cricket. He hasn't been able to find that balance here in Australia. But when he goes out for the batting in one-days, he lets loose. That's when we see the very best of Rohit Sharma."

"So I'd be very surprised if he doesn't perform really well in the Champions Trophy, knowing that he probably doesn't have a lot of time left, whatever that is, but a lot of time left in international cricket. So I'm sure he'll let the handbrake off," he added. Pat for Nitish Kumar Reddy Watson said Nitish Kumar Reddy who made a hundred in the Boxing Day Test, will have to improve as a bowler to realise his full potential as an all-rounder. "It's exciting to see a young all-rounder coming through, he is able to do what he did in the IPL just from a batting perspective. (because of) The impact player, which is sort of one of the rules that I don't particularly like... Someone like Reddy didn't get an opportunity

to be able to really bowl much. "But now we're seeing it in Test cricket and he will fit beautifully into one-day cricket and T20 cricket because of the versatility he provides. He's got all the gears from a batting perspective and his bowling is only going to get better the more exposure he gets," he concluded.

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No. e-597081/40

The Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, invites bids from registered appropriate class of contractor for 15 groups of building works in different PM-Shri schools as per the detailed notice inviting tender which can be downloaded from the website <https://www.assamtenders.gov.in>.

The last date of submission of tender is 20-01-2025 upto 2:00 PM.

Sd/- Mission Director,  
Samagra Shiksha Axom  
Kahilpara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/CF/3073/24/2-Jan-25

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