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## Verma, Bhiduri vs Kejriwal, Atishi: High stakes Delhi polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With less than a week left before the announcement of Delhi assembly polls, the BJP has released its first list of 29 candidates, awarding tickets to four sitting MLAs, two former MPs, and eight former MLAs. The BJP's first list features eight prominent leaders who switched over from the Congress and AAP in recent months.

Former West Delhi MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma will contest against AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi assembly constituency. The New Delhi seat, held by Kejriwal since 2013, will witness the former chief minister taking on the sons of two other former chief ministers. Verma is the son of Sahib Singh Verma, who had a two-year tenure as chief minister in the 1990s. Former West Delhi MP Verma started his preparations for contesting from the seat even before he was announced as the official candidate, saying he had been given the go-ahead by national leaders. The Congress candidate from the seat is former three-term chief minister Sheila Dikshit's son Sandeep Dikshit.

"I thank my party's top leadership... I hope that the trust that the party has shown in me, I'll live up to it... When Delhi was facing COVID-19, when they needed Oxygen, Arvind Kejriwal ji was distributing a 'free bottle on every bottle... There are many works in Delhi - like cleaning



Yamuna, and curbing pollution... when the BJP forms the govt, we will do all these works," Verma said after the BJP released its first list. Former South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri will face chief minister Atishi in Kalkaji. Congress has fielded Alka Lamba from here, making it a triangular contest.

Four former Delhi ministers - Kailash Gahlot and Raaj Kumar Anand, who served in the outgoing AAP government, along with Arvinder Singh Lovely and Rajkumar Chauhan, who held key portfolios during Sheila Dikshit's government from 2003 to 2013 - have also been given tickets. Gahlot's seat has been shifted from Najafgarh to Bijwasan,

while Anand will contest from the reserved constituency of Patel Nagar. The two-time Najafgarh MLA resigned as minister and quit AAP to join the BJP in November. Tarvinder Singh Marwah, a three-time former Congress MLA from Jangpura who joined the BJP in 2022, will contest from the same seat. He is pitted against senior AAP leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia. Former Delhi minister Arvind Singh Lovely has been fielded from the Gandhi Nagar seat in east Delhi, replacing incumbent BJP MLA Anil Bajpai. Bajpai had defeated Lovely from the seat in the 2020 polls.

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## Kejriwal promises water bill waivers post elections

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) debt accumulated to over Rs 73,000 crore, former Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party convener Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday made another promise to the people of Delhi that his party would waive inflated water bills if his party was voted to power in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls likely to be held next month. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal urged the people not to pay inflated water bills and said that 12 lakh families got bills of zero amount. "But when I went to jail, I don't know what these people (BJP) did behind my back." He assured that these erroneous bills would be waived off after the elections, offering relief to affected residents.

The AAP government is providing 20,000 litres of free water to Delhi households. Interestingly, Kejriwal's AAP is in the power in Delhi. This comes after announcing six freebies to the people of Delhi including Mahila Samman Scheme under which Rs 2100 per month to be given to every woman, Pujaris and Granthi's monthly salary and free treatment to senior citizens. Insiders say the DJB's financial losses have jumped from Rs 344.05 crore in the 2019-20 fiscal to Rs 1,196.22 crore in 2021-22, while the board has a debt of more than Rs 73,196.55 crore, which includes Rs 37,366.59 crore in principal amount and Rs 35,829.96 crore in interest.

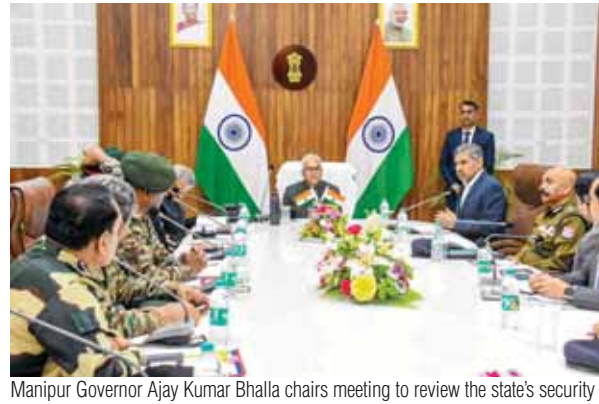
Continued on page 5

## Fresh violence erupts in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

After the apologies by Manipur chief Minister N Biren Singh, fresh violence was reported from the north eastern State as security was beefed up in Kangpokpi district where the Superintendent of Police was injured in a mob attack for failing to "remove" the central armed forces as per the demands of Kuki groups.

A mob on Friday evening attacked the office of M Prabhakar, throwing stones and other "projectiles" to vent their anger over the continued deployment of central forces, particularly the BSF and the CRPF, in the Saibol village. Vehicles of district police kept within the compound of the SP's office were vandalised. Prabhakar



Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla chairs meeting to review the state's security and law and order situation, at Raj Bhavan, in Imphal. PTI

was injured after being hit on the forehead by some projectile, officials said. Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla who took over the charge chaired a meeting with senior police, CRPF, BSF, Assam Rifles officials on Saturday and reviewed the

comprehensive security situation in the state. The Governor of Manipur chaired a security meeting at Raj Bhavan in Imphal. Taking stock of the prevailing law and order situation, the Governor reviewed the security apparatus and its

arrangements throughout the state, with a particular focus on border areas," the release issued by Raj Bhavan said. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023.

A senior officer in Imphal said a huge contingent of security forces have been deployed in the area. "Situation is now under control and being closely monitored," he added. In a statement, the police said that besides stones, the protestors attacked the SP office with petrol bombs. "Security forces retaliated against the mob and resorted to the use of adequate force to disperse the mob and the situation was brought under control," it said.

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## Nagaland CM calls for end to factionalism in Naga talks

PNS ■ KOHIMA

Nagaland deputy chief minister Yanthungo Patton, while emphasising that the Centre is willing to offer only one solution to the longstanding Naga political issue, on Saturday urged Naga underground factions and people to come together for a permanent resolution.

Addressing the 175th anniversary celebration of Lhisemia Thimuo, the amalgamation of different clans of Lhisemia Khel (sector) of Kohima village, Patton said, "The Centre,



under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is ready to give us a solution only if our Naga factions are united." The Centre has been holding political negotiations with the NSCN-IM since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in

1997 and also inked the Framework Agreement in 2015. It also entered into parallel negotiations with the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (WC NNPGs), composed of at least seven Naga factions, in 2017. They signed the Agreed Position in November 2017.

Negotiations between the Centre and Naga groups were declared to have concluded on October 30, 2019, by the then interlocutor and Governor of Nagaland, R N Ravi.

Continued on page 5



District hospital where injured army personnel are being treated after an army vehicle fell into a gorge in Bandipora district. PTI

## Two Army accidents in two weeks: 8 soldiers dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Three Indian army jawans were killed and two others received injuries when their vehicle skidded off the road and fell into a deep gorge in the North Kashmir district of Bandipora on Saturday. According to preliminary reports, the accident occurred due to inclement weather and poor visibility conditions in the SK Payeen area of Bandipora.

The locals in the area responded swiftly and launched rescue operations. This is the second incident in the last two weeks in which Indian army jawans lost their lives in a road accident. Five soldiers were killed in the Balnoi sector of Poonch when an army vehicle rolled down into a gorge on December 24, 2024.

Srinagar-based Chinara Corps posted on X (earlier Twitter), "On 04 Jan 24, while performing duty in the Bandipora district, an Indian Army vehicle skidded and fell into the gorge due to inclement weather and poor visibility."

Injured soldiers were promptly evacuated for medical care with assistance from Kashmiri locals, for which we express gratitude to the citizens for providing immediate succor. Tragically three bravehearts lost their lives in the unfortunate accident. Indian Army extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families."

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## Fog causes major disruptions at Delhi airport



A train moves on a Srinagar-Baramulla railway track amid snow on a foggy winter afternoon, on the outskirts of Srinagar. PTI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi airport on Saturday saw 19 flight diversions, many cancellations and over 400 flight delays as low visibility conditions due to dense fog impacted operations for the second straight day, reducing the visibility to zero in several areas for an unprecedented nine-hour stretch, the longest spell of the season. "Zero visibility prevailed for nine hours at Palam between 6 pm and 3 am (UTC), marking the longest spell of the season. The city's primary weather station, Safdarjung, recorded eight

hours of zero visibility, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). India's largest airline, IndiGo, temporarily halted both arrivals and departures. Airlines, including IndiGo and Air India, issued travel advisories urging customers to check their flight status before heading to the airport and allow extra time for travel.

An official said 19 flights were diverted at the airport between 12.15 am and 1.30 am due to reduced visibility. Of them, 13 were domestic, four international and two non-scheduled flights. More than

### WEATHER

LUCKNOW  
MAX 17.8°C(-2.3)  
MIN 8.6°C(0.8)

45 flights were cancelled due to bad weather conditions at Delhi as well as at the destination airports, the official said.

As per information available on flight tracking website Flightradar24.Com, over 450 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport. "While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not

CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information.

"Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," the Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a post on X at 6.56 am. CAT III facility allows aircraft to operate in low-visibility conditions. Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital is operated by DIAL, handles around 1,300 flight movements daily.

"#6ETRAVELADVISORY: Departures and arrivals at #DelhiAirport are currently on hold due to reduced visibility," IndiGo said in a post on X at 1.05 am on Saturday. Air India said in an update on X at 1.16 am that poor visibility due to dense fog was impacting flight operations in Delhi and parts of northern India.

A thick blanket of fog had enveloped Delhi on Friday as well, delaying more than 400 flights. In an update on X at 10.58 am, IndiGo said dense fog continued to affect visibility in Delhi, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Srinagar, Guwahati, and Patna, even during daytime. "We assure you that our teams are working diligently to assist all impacted customers, ensuring your journey resumes as soon as the weather improves," it said in another post at 11 am.

Continued on page 5

## Delhi man scams 700 women using fake dating profiles

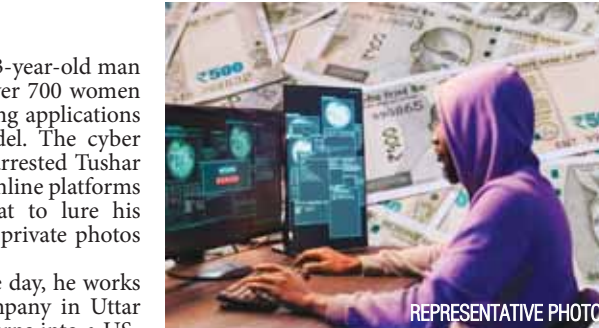
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested a 23-year-old man who allegedly scammed over 700 women after befriending them on dating applications by posing as a US-based model. The cyber police station of West district arrested Tushar Bisht on charges of exploiting online platforms such as Bumble and Snapchat to lure his victims, blackmail them using private photos and videos, and extort money.

According to police, during the day, he works as a recruiter at a private company in Uttar Pradesh's Noida. At night he turns into a US-based model on a soul-searching trip to India. His day job offered him security, and his nocturnal activities brought in the money through manipulation and blackmail. Tushar Singh Bisht, 23, was arrested from the Shakarpur area of East Delhi on Friday for defrauding over 700 women by posing as a model on dating platforms.

A resident of Delhi, Tushar has a bachelor's degree in business administration (BBA). For the past three years, he had been employed as a technical recruiter at a private company in Noida. His father works as a driver, his mother is a homemaker, and his sister is employed in Gurugram.

"Posing as a US-based freelance model, the accused created fake identities using a virtual international mobile number and photographs of a Brazilian model," Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), Vichitra Veer, said in the statement. Bisht used the fake profiles to connect with women aged between 18 and 30 years on various online dating platforms. "His primary targets were users of Bumble, Snapchat and WhatsApp," the statement said. The DCP said Bisht gained his victims' trust by engaging in conversations, and convinced them to share private and intimate images and



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

videos."Once he obtained the content, he resorted to blackmail, threatening to leak the sensitive material online, or sell them to dark web unless the victims paid him," the DCP said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the accused interacted with over 500 women on Bumble and 200 others on Snapchat and WhatsApp, police said. The accused's mobile phone contained incriminating evidence, including objectionable data of victims, a virtual mobile number, and details of financial transactions involving extortion. The police also seized 13 credit cards linked to various banks, the statement said. The matter came to light on December 13, last year, when a Delhi University student filed a complaint with the cyber police station claiming that she had connected with the accused on Bumble earlier in the year.

Posing as a US-based model visiting India for work, he gained her trust through consistent chats. As their interactions deepened, the accused persuaded her to share private photos and videos on Snapchat and WhatsApp. Despite repeated requests to meet in person, he always evaded with excuses, the DCP said.

Continued on page 5

## Six Indian Americans sworn-in as members of US House of Representatives

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

In a momentous occasion for Indian Americans, six of their leaders on Friday were sworn-in as the members of the US House of Representatives, the largest so far for this minority ethnic community in the United States. "When I was first sworn in twelve years ago, I was the sole Indian American Member of Congress and only the third in US history. Now, our coalition is six strong! I am excited to welcome even more Indian Americans to the halls of Congress in the years to come!"

California, also posted a picture of all the six Indian American Congressman from the floor of the House. Suhash Subramanian, who represents the 10th Congressional District of Virginia is the newest Indian American to be a member of the House of Representatives. "First day of work! Honoured to be sworn into the #119th Congress, and excited to get to work to deliver results for VA10," he said as he posted a picture of him along with his family and House Speaker Mike Johnson. "Ready to Serve," said Congressman Shri Thanedar who represents the 13th Congressional District of Michigan as he posted a selfie of his from the House floor. All the six Indian American lawmakers are from the Democratic Party and voted for



(Left to right): Ami Bera, Pramila Jayapal, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, Shri Thanedar and Suhas Subramanyam

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries in the election for House Speakership. Republican Mike Johnson was elected as the House Speaker. Congressman Ro Khanna represents the 17th Congressional District of California and Raja Krishnamoorthi represents the eighth Congressional District of Illinois. Congresswoman Pramila

Jayapal, representing the seventh Congressional District of Washington state, is the first ever Indian American woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. All the three - Khanna, Krishnamoorthi and Jayapal - have been sworn-in for a fifth consecutive term, during which they have emerged as powerful

lawmakers in their own way. Krishnamoorthi is a Ranking Member of the powerful China Committee and also a member of the House Intelligence Committee. Jayapal is leader of the highly powerful progressive group of lawmakers. Khanna is not only a member of several powerful House committees, but also is seen as a potential presidential candidate in

the years to come. All the six Indian Americans constitute an informal Samosa Caucus, a term coined by Krishnamoorthi. When sworn in for the first term in 2012, Dr Bera had then wished to have 10 Indian Americans in the House of Representatives. Several Indian Americans aspiring to be elected to the House lost

elections either during the primaries or in the November 5 general elections. At least three of them were women: Sushila Jaipal, Bhavani Patel and Krystal Kaul. Dalip Singh Saund was the first Indian American to be elected to the House of Representatives in 1957. Also, the first Sikh, he was elected for three consecutive terms. He was from the Democratic Party. It took nearly five decades for a second Indian American to enter the US House of Representatives. Bobby Jindal represented the First Congressional District of Louisiana from 2005 to 2008. He later went on to become the two-term Governor of Louisiana, making him the first Indian American to be elected as the governor of a US State. Jindal is the only Indian American to be elected to the House on a Republican ticket.



# Suspicious property documents add new twist to mass murder case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The main suspect in the Naka mass murder case, Mohd Badaruddin aka Badar, remains at large, despite four police teams continuously conducting raids in his search. Meanwhile, a property document, purportedly drafted on behalf of Badar, has added a new twist to the investigation. Badar is suspected of being involved in the murder of his wife and four daughters. On the night of December 31, Mohammed Arshad, the prime suspect, along with his father Badar, allegedly murdered the women in room number 109 of Sharanjit Hotel, located in Naka, Charbagh, Lucknow. After fleeing the scene, it was revealed that Arshad took a roadways bus instead of a train, and a video of him surfaced on social media. Police later conducted searches at bus stops and railway stations, but found no leads. Currently, a police team is searching for Badar in Agra and Ajmer, while another team has gone to Sambhal with the bodies.

Authorities are also examining the call detail records (CDR) of the three mobile phones found at the crime scene. Badar's house in Agra was searched, and a joint team of Agra and Lucknow police quizzed local residents. During the search of Arshad's house in Agra, police recovered photographs, electronic items, property documents, and other materials, all of which were seized. The police are receiving assistance from the police forces in Ajmer, Sambhal, and Delhi to locate Badar. His photo has been distributed to railway stations and bus stands, and raids are being carried out at all possible locations. Additionally, the police are utilising surveillance to extract messages from the phones recovered from the hotel room. Investigators believe that Arshad and Badar communicated primarily through text messages rather than calls. The call details and messages are expected to shed light on the details of the murders. Notably, there were no calls made after 30 December, and

most of the calls were from Arshad's phone. It also contained photos and videos, which Arshad made viral. Residents of Arshad's neighbourhood described both father and son as eccentric, with frequent altercations, often due to intoxication. Arshad was reportedly abusive towards his mother and sisters, restricting their movements and isolating them from others. Police suggest that Badar holds the key to solving the mystery, and the full truth will only be revealed after his capture. The actual motive behind the murders is expected to be clarified by cross-checking the statements of both Arshad and Badar. Meanwhile, some media reports have claimed that Badar had made a legal will of his property in favour of his daughters, as he allegedly had a strained relationship with his son Arshad. These reports surfaced after the police recovered certain documents during a search of Arshad's house in Agra. However, police teams involved in the case have not confirmed

these claims, as they are still examining the documents for their authenticity and admissibility as evidence. The bodies of Arshad's mother, Asma, and his sisters—Alshia (19), Rahmeen (18), Aksa (16), and Alia (9)—were discovered on January 1 in Sharanjit Hotel. They had been staying in room number 109. On the night of December 31, Arshad and his father Badar allegedly killed them, after which Arshad reached a nearby police outpost to report the crime. Badar, however, managed to escape with the help of his son. Arshad also filmed a video during the murder, in which he accused his neighbours in Agra of harassment. He claimed that they wanted to seize his house and had forced him and his family to sleep on the footpath for 13 days. He also alleged that his neighbours intended to sell his sisters. However, these accusations were not corroborated by local residents. Instead, neighbours described Arshad as ill-tempered and speculated that the murders were a result of his erratic behaviour.

# Forest officials using jumbos to track tiger in Rehmankhera

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Jumbos Sulochana and Diana from Dudhwa National Park are being used by the Forest department to track the stray tiger at Rehmankhera. District Forest Officer (DFO), Awadh, Sitanshu Pandey, said that combing operations with the help of the elephants have already begun. He said that the elephants were helping them move through the dense forests. "We are using the mahout and the doctor on the elephant, and they are combing each and every area within Rehmankhera where normal patrolling cannot take place. This way they can dart and tranquillise the tiger on sighting it," he said. Explaining the benefits of using an elephant for tracking the tiger, he said that the benefits are fourfold. "First, it can enter the dense forest. Second, the elephant can sense the tiger if it is 500 to 600 metres away and give an indication. Third, these are not untrained but trained elephants. Both are 36 years old and have been doing this work since the age of 16, which means they have been doing it for the past 20 years. Fourth, they come into the picture when, in rescue operations, the security of the forest staff is threatened," he explained. Pandey further said that the elephants were used in the morning because the visibility was good. "We cannot use them at night because there is a possibility



that if there is an encounter between the elephant and the tiger, the mahout and the doctor, who are riding the elephant, may fall off. In the morning, the mahout and the doctor can see the surroundings and can safeguard themselves. Thus, the patrolling with the help of the elephant takes place between 7 am and 1 pm," he said. He admitted that the tiger was moving in the premises of the Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture

(CISH). "Today, fresh pug marks were found on the campus of the institute," he added. Recalling the incident when a stray tiger had moved to CISH campus in 2012, he said that the tiger at that time had been trapped in a similar manner. "The animal was darted and tranquillised by a man sitting on top of an elephant. They trapped the tiger in 109 days, and we are hoping to complete the operations and trap the tiger in less than 109 days. The tiger is moving on the same

road as the one in 2012 and in the same area," said Pandey. The DFO said that two more members had arrived from the WTI to assist them in their operations in the tiger rescue at Rehmankhera. "We have also called one biologist and one sociologist from Dudhwa. The biologist will help us track the pug marks and the movement of the tiger, and the sociologist will carry out awareness programmes in neighbouring villages," he added.

# Bank heist: Masterminds Vipin, Kailash met in Jalandhar jail

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Police on Friday interrogated the accused involved in the Indian Overseas Bank robbery in Chinhat after they were brought to Lucknow jail. The accused revealed important details during the interrogation. They said that they had bought a car from a market in Sultanpur for the theft. According to their confession, they spent the night at bus stops and railway stations to avoid being seen by anyone. The stolen goods were to be divided into seven parts, but due to police raids, they could not be properly divided. The police suspect that some of the stolen goods may have been hidden by the gang. It was

revealed that the mastermind of the bank heist, Vipin, conducted the recce while his trusted aide, Kailash, planned the robbery. The police on Friday interrogated Arvind Kumar, Balram Kumar, Kailash Bind, and Mithun, who are lodged in Lucknow jail. They revealed that out of the two cars involved in the incident, one belongs to Kailash, while the other was bought by Kailash from the car market in Sultanpur. During the interrogation, it was revealed that the masterminds, Vipin and Kailash, were friends. Both had met in Jalandhar jail. Vipin had started living in Takrohi, and it was here that both of them had planned the robbery. Vipin had conducted the recce of the bank, while Kailash had arranged for a cutter to cut the locker, a car for their escape, and food and drink. The police are continuing to gather information about the stolen goods from the bank. It was also revealed that the alleged gangster Sovind was released from jail a day before he executed the bank heist. During interrogation, the police learned that Sovind was skilled at breaking locks and had been the one who broke into the lockers during previous robberies. He had been released from Jalandhar jail on December 19. From there, he travelled by

bus to Delhi, and then to Lucknow. From the bus stop, Vipin brought him to his house in Takrohi, where they planned the bank robbery. Interestingly, the police had no clue about the robbers' movements when they were staying in the area around the targeted bank and continued to move undetected. After finalising the plan, everyone in the gang did a recce of the bank one by one, and the crime was executed. Another team also questioned Vipin in Ghazipur jail. On the night of December 21, the bank lockers were cut open, and the robbery was committed. Sovind and Sunny were killed by the police in an encounter.

# Inter-state gang member held for duping people with fake Army documents

PTI ■ MEERUT

Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) has arrested a member of an inter-state gang accused of duping people by promising recruitment in the Indian Army through forged documents, officials said on Saturday. The accused, Rahul Kumar was apprehended late Friday night from the Meerut Cantonment area in Sadar Bazar, Additional Superintendent of Police, STF Fief Unit, Meerut, Brijesh Kumar Singh said. During the operation, five coloured photocopies of fake Indian Army admit cards, a forged list of selected Agniveer candidates, two mobile phones, and a car were recovered from the accused, Singh said. Based on a tip-off, the STF unit tracked down Kumar, from Baghat, who allegedly collected large sums of money by producing fake recruitment documents, the officer said. He said that during interrogation the accused revealed he was a part of a network involving Raj Patel from Bihar and Sumit and Sombir, residents of Haryana. The gang allegedly lured aspirants by promising them jobs in the Indian Army and charged hefty sums, he added. A case has been registered against Kumar and further investigation is underway, the police said.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Shauliya Begam to Saleha Begam for all future purposes, Saleha Begam W/o Mohammad Zafar R/o 654, C-Block, Yashoda Nagar Kanpur

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

It is informed to the General public that due to an error in the records, my name has become Pratibha wife of Teerth nath. Which is incorrect. My correct name is Pratibha Shukla wife of Teerth nath Mishra. Therefore, I should be known and recognized by this name only. Pratibha wife of Teerth nath Mishra Resident- Pure Sadhai Mishra Pure Thammam Post-Parsadepur Tehsil- Saloni District- Raebareilly.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

Service-No-6499543L Rank-L/NK Name-Anil Kumar Gupta. I Am Anil Kumar Gupta S/o Mithai LaL GUPTA VILL+ Post-SUHVAL, GHAZIPUR in my service Record my Mother Bechni Devi's date of Birth is Recorded as 06/03/1969 which is wrong. Aadhaar number is 262472129912, her date of birth is 01/01/1966 Which is correct.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Sharat Kumar to Sharat Kumar Dubey. Both the names belong to the same person. I should be known and identified by the name of Sharat Kumar Dubey in future. Sharat Kumar Dubey S/o Kusum Kumar Dubey R/o 128/213 Shiv Kripa Apartment, Near U.P. Kirana School Kidwai Nagar Kanpur Uttar Pradesh 208011

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I have changed my name Nirmal Trivedi to Nirmal Prakash Trivedi S/o Late Laxmi Shankar Trivedi R/o 106/1, P. Road Gandhi Nagar Kanpur

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME REHAN KHA TO REHAN KHAN S/O SAEED FOR FUTURE PURPOSE. ZAFARPUR KAUSHAMBI.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME NAGEENA TO MUSTAK AHMAD S/O NIJAMUDDIN FOR FUTURE PURPOSE. SAMDA KAUSHAMBI.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I Praveen Chandra resident of 71-Alam Vihar Colony Alam Nagar, Mohan Road Lucknow-226017, have changed my daughter's name from Avisha Chandra to Arana Chandra vide affidavit dated 11-12-24, in future she shall be known by this name only.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

**NARROW ESCAPE FOR SHOP OWNER**  
A shop owner narrowly escaped injury after a reckless driver crashed into his shop in Alambagh on Friday night. Two other shops were also damaged in the incident. Fortunately, no one was injured. Police have registered a case under the relevant sections of the BNS. On Saturday, Jitendra Sonkar, a resident of Alambagh's Natkheda submitted a complaint to the local police station. He stated that his clothing shop, located at Alambagh intersection, was hit by a car (Swift Dzire) at around 10:30 pm on January 3. The driver, speeding recklessly, crashed into his shop, causing significant damage. Two adjacent shops were also damaged, and a bike and scooter parked outside were also affected. A case was registered at the Alambagh police station.

# UP signs pact with WSU for setting up campus

Lucknow (PNS): The Government of Uttar Pradesh and Western Sydney University (WSU), Australia, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish WSU's first campus in India, which will be located in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh. The MoU was signed in Lucknow by UP Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, and Prof Deborah Sweeney, acting Vice-Chancellor of WSU. The chief secretary highlighted the significance of this partnership for both WSU and Uttar Pradesh. He stated that WSU will be the first foreign university to establish a campus in Greater Noida, with the campus planned in a commercial building during the first phase. In the second phase, a full-fledged university campus will be developed on a sprawling 7-acre site in Greater Noida. He also emphasised that Uttar Pradesh is the fastest-growing state in India, particularly in the western UP region, which contributes significantly to the GDP and agricultural production. Furthermore, the upcoming

Jewar Airport in Greater Noida will boost exports and provide seamless global connectivity. The Greater Noida campus aligns with Uttar Pradesh's Higher Education Incentive Policy 2024, which aims to create a flexible, inclusive, and robust higher education system. This policy provides financial incentives to attract domestic and international institutions, unlocking the potential of the state's youthful population and promoting long-term economic growth. As part of WSU's global expansion, the Greater Noida campus will bring world-class education and innovation to India, strengthening ties between India and Australia. Ranked among the top 10 young universities, WSU is known for its excellence in sustainability and innovation. The proposed campus in Greater Noida will serve as a hub for transformative learning and entrepreneurship, supporting Uttar Pradesh's AgTech initiatives and advancing smart agriculture, water management, and climate adaptation, positioning the state as a leader in emerging industries.

# Hospitality sector witnessing remarkable growth in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh is witnessing remarkable growth in the hospitality sector, which is thriving alongside the state's booming tourism industry. With an increasing influx of tourists, the state has become one of the most significantly benefited regions in India, paving the way for consistent growth in employment opportunities across hospitality and related sectors. According to a report by Global Hiring Indeed, job vacancies in the tourism and hospitality sector increased by 50 per cent in 2023. Experts predict an additional 24 per cent growth in the coming years. This surge is expected to benefit cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Braj, Jewar and their surrounding areas. Ayodhya has emerged as a hotspot for the hospitality industry, especially since the construction of the Ram temple began. Many renowned brands are eager to establish hotels in the city, with approvals already granted for over two dozen projects, including Taj Hotels. Local hotels are also expanding and

upgrading their properties to meet rising demand. This trend, however, is not limited to Ayodhya. Other popular tourist destinations in the state are also witnessing similar growth. Jewar, home to Asia's largest international airport, is quickly becoming a preferred location for the hospitality sector. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath envisions integrating tourism with local communities to transform it into a people's industry. He has emphasised leveraging major events like the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, the Makar Sankranti celebrations, and the Kichdi Mela at Gorakhnath temple to boost tourism. The government is actively supporting initiatives to encourage residents to turn these events into unique and welcoming experiences for tourists and pilgrims. To attract investors to the hospitality and tourism sector, the Yogi government is considering offering additional concessions for hotel construction in major cities such as Ayodhya, Lucknow and Varanasi. Some relaxations in

land-use norms have already been provided, and the government is actively encouraging homestay initiatives to further enhance tourism infrastructure. According to Bhavya Malhotra, a former banquet manager at ITC Maurya, New Delhi, a well-functioning hotel ideally requires three service providers per room across departments such as front office, housekeeping, food and beverages, laundry, finance, HR, horticulture, and sales. Smaller properties may operate with fewer staff, but maintaining at least two employees per room is crucial to deliver satisfactory customer service, he stated. The rising number of tourists and pilgrims is not only boosting the hotel industry, but also benefiting related sectors such as aviation, railways, road transport, logistics and local businesses. Increased demand for regional products enhances the visibility of local arts and crafts, providing a natural boost to Chief Minister Yogi's flagship ODOP (One District, One Product) scheme, transforming it into a global brand.

# Girl alleges sexual assault, blackmail by former friend

Lucknow (PNS): A former friend of a student was booked for allegedly creating an obscene video of her and blackmailing her into submission in Vikas Nagar. The accused, Karan Verma, reportedly attended the same school as the victim. The victim, a resident of Aliganj, told police that two years ago, Karan Verma, a resident of Aliganj Sector-C Sabauli, befriended her and exchanged phone numbers during their interactions. She alleged that during one of their meetings, he secretly recorded an obscene video of her. Using the video, Karan began threatening to release it online unless she agreed to his demands for a physical relationship. The victim stated that Karan's harassment continued for over a year, during which he frequently blocked her way and intimidated her. Out of fear, she did not confide in anyone. The matter escalated on January 2 when Karan allegedly deceived her into meeting him, assaulted her, and threatened to attack her with acid. Following the victim's complaint, the police registered a case against Karan Verma. Vikas Nagar inspector confirmed that an investigation into the matter is underway.

# Two cops among 14 booked for embezzlement

Bhadohi (PTI): Fourteen people, including two constables, were booked on Saturday for embezzling Rs 17 lakh from a student under the pretext of securing his admission to a medical college in Prayagraj, a police official said. Police said that a case was registered on Friday against Kulbhusan alias Kuldeep Mishra, Rajan Tripathi, constables Narendra Singh and Ankit Tripathi and 10 unknown persons at Suriyawan police station here, following a court order. According to the Station House Officer (SO) of Suriyawan police station, Arvind Kumar Gupta, the accused took Rs 17 lakh from Neeraj Yadav and his father in exchange for securing Neeraj's admission to the MBBS course at Motilal Nehru Medical College in Prayagraj. Neeraj had met Kulbhusan alias Kuldeep Mishra of Prayagraj and Rajan Tripathi of Jaunpur in 2021 during coaching in Varanasi. Later, he met constable Narendra Singh, a resident of Jaunpur, who was posted in the crime branch of Bhadohi police. After taking the money, the accused provided Neeraj with a forged admission card. Despite complaining about the matter to both the police station and senior police officers, no FIR was initially registered.

# 10-day Khadi exhibition inaugurated

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), under the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, inaugurated its 10-day regional-level Khadi exhibition at Gomti Riverfront, near Chatori Gali, on Saturday. The event was inaugurated by DGM Bank of Baroda, Mohammad Mehfooz Nishat, Dr Nitish Dhawan, state director of KVIC, and Umesh Kumar, deputy CEO of Khadi and Village Industries. The exhibition, scheduled from January 4 to 13, features 75 stalls set up by representatives from various states. The exhibition will also feature daily cultural programmes to enhance its appeal. Speaking at the inauguration, Dr Nitish Dhawan highlighted that representatives from seven states have set up their stalls, showcasing PMEGP and Khadi Village Industries products. He added that this year's exhibition will also feature a conference of successful entrepreneurs and

daily cultural programmes. Umesh Kumar emphasised that the exhibition offers a unique platform for young entrepreneurs to gain maximum benefits and generate employment opportunities. He expressed hope that the exhibition would introduce Lucknow residents to diverse Khadi products. DGM, Bank of Baroda, Mohammad Mehfooz Nishat, lauded the exhibition as an excellent opportunity for young entrepreneurs to take calculated risks and progress. He remarked on the commendable display of products and stressed the importance of marketing for any product, for which this exhibition serves as an ideal platform. Representatives from 12 states (West Bengal, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh) are participating. Additional attractions include a selfie point, daily cultural programmes, and a food court to engage visitors.

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**Public Notice**  
This is to inform the general public that Sri Ramesh Singh Rana is the owner of Flat No. 1, area 116.736 Sq. Mtr. & Flat No. 5, 1st floor, constructed on Plot No. D-97, area 90.7882 Sq. Mtr. situated at Rajaj Puram, Ward-1, Rajaj Puram, Tanak and District- Lucknow. Sri Ramesh Singh Rana is the owner of said Flats through Sale Deed i.e. Sale deed dated 21.07.2012 regd. as doc 8979 executed by Smt. Soram Dornbia in favour of Sri Ramesh Singh Rana. Subsequently, Mr. Bholu Kumar Gautam is in the process of mortgaging the said property IICI Home Finance Ltd. with. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 7 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 7-days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client.  
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# Over 1,200 night shelters to keep people warm

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/AYODHYA

No one will be forced to sleep under the open sky during the biting cold in Uttar Pradesh.

The state government has set up 1,240 night shelters and temporary accommodation facilities across the state, equipped with all the necessary resources to help people stay warm.

Additionally, over three lakh blankets have been distributed to those in need. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also stressed that no negligence will be tolerated in delivering blankets to the destitute.

The government is consistently improving the facilities at night shelters and temporary shelters. The goal is to shield every needy individual from the harsh winter and provide them with safe and dignified accommodation.

The chief minister has emphasised that the operation of these shelters should be carried out with utmost sensitivity and responsibility. Officials have been instructed to ensure that no person is compelled to sleep outdoors, on road dividers, at roadsides or in parks.

The safety and needs of women have been given special attention in the night shelters. These shelters are equipped with adequate lighting, cleanliness and heating arrangements to ensure that women feel safe and their needs are met.

Officials have been instructed to monitor the condition of the shelters and heating arrangements through technical means. A control room established in the relief commissioner's office directly monitors the status of shelters, heating and blanket distribution. Any shortcomings identified through feedback are addressed promptly.

The Yogi government has also directed the municipal corporations to inform the public about the available night shel-

## Dense fog envelopes Lko

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Dense fog enveloped the city, increasing the chill factor on Saturday as cold day conditions continued to prevail. The weather department has forecast slight relief on Sunday.

Lucknow recorded a minimum temperature of 8.6 degree Celsius, and the coldest in the state was Fursatganj, with a minimum temperature of 6 degree Celsius.

Senior scientist, Met Office, Mohammed Danish said that winds and moisture in the air resulted in dense fog conditions. "Fog will prevail on Sunday too, and cold day conditions will occur for the next two days in the major part of Uttar Pradesh," he said.

The weatherman added that a western disturbance was also present overhead Uttar Pradesh.

"In western Uttar Pradesh, there are chances of light rainfall tomorrow and the day



after, while eastern UP will not receive rainfall because it is a weak western disturbance, which will move to Uttarakhand and Nepal after arriving from Afghanistan and Pakistan. There will be no rains in Lucknow, and the sun will make its appearance for a

very brief period," he said. He mentioned that normal winter conditions would prevail for the remaining days of January. On Saturday, over a dozen flights were delayed because of the fog at the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport.

ters. Detailed lists of shelters are being displayed in each zone, and information is also provided on digital screens at bus stations and major locations. This ensures that people can easily find the nearest shelter.

In line with the chief minister's directives, adequate budget allocations have been made to address winter-related issues in all districts. District magistrates and municipal commissioners have been instructed to regularly inspect the night shelters and heating arrangements.

The district magistrates are also tasked with visiting shelters, talking to those in need, and taking corrective actions based on their experiences. They have been directed to ensure cleanliness and a dignified atmosphere at the shelters. Additionally, technical support is being used to monitor

the status of the bonfires set up at various locations.

### 'NO DEVOTEE SHOULD FACE INCONVENIENCE DURING COLD SEASON'

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday said that over 40-45 crore devotees were expected to attend the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh-2025, with many likely to visit Ayodhya as well. In Ayodhya, the devotees will visit prominent temples and sites, including Ram Lalla temple, Hanuman Garhi, and Suryakund. He instructed the local administration to ensure all preparations are complete, focusing on visitor safety, crowd management, worship arrangements and shelter facilities. Yogi held a review meeting with administrative officials after a meeting with BJP workers. He said, "No devotee

should face any inconvenience during the cold season. In addition to maintaining cleanliness, proper arrangements for bonfires and other necessities must be ensured."

In the auditorium of Acharya Narendra Dev Agricultural University, Kumarganj, the chief minister along with district senior officials gathered information about the security of devotees coming to Ayodhya during Maha Kumbh, crowd management, shelter and more. Divisional Commissioner Gaurav Dayal gave a presentation on the preparations in Ayodhya for Maha Kumbh-2025. The chief minister issued necessary instructions to the officials. The review meeting was attended by local administration officials, police personnel and senior district authorities.

## Kidnapped telecom company employee rescued after police encounter

Lucknow (PTI): The kidnapped manager of Jio Fiber posted in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras was rescued on Saturday after an encounter between the police and the abductors, one of whom was injured during the exchange of fire, an official said.

The operation was carried out in Moradabad by a joint team of the Noida unit of Uttar Pradesh STF (Special Task Force) and Hathras police.

Abhinav Bhardwaj was kidnapped for ransom in Hathras district on January 1 and a case was registered at Hathras Gate police station, said Additional Director General of Police (STF and Law & Order) Amitabh Yash. "On Saturday, a joint team of the Noida unit of UP STF and Hathras district police engaged in an encounter with the kidnapers in the Civil Lines police station area of Moradabad district, in which Bhardwaj was safely rescued. During the encounter, a miscreant named Vishal was shot near the neck," Yash said. Apart from Vishal, police arrested two more of his co-accused -- Sujal Kumar and Karan Bisht.

The car used in the crime, along with Rs 50,000 in cash and other items were recovered from the accused and the injured has been admitted to the hospital, police said.

### LEOPARD ATTACKS HUMANS, DIES AFTER BEING 'CAUGHT'

Maharajganj (PTI): A leopard who injured four people in an attack on Saturday died after being "caught" by the villagers. A forest officer said the leopard entered a mosque near Majhauri village of Sohagbarwa Wildlife Sanctuary and injured four people. He said the leopard, caught by some villagers, fainted in custody and died on the way to a hospital. Maharajganj Divisional Forest Officer Niranjan Surve said that an investigation was ordered to ascertain the exact cause of the leopard's death.

## Ultra-modern equipment to monitor security of Sangam

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Ensuring the safety of crores of devotees expected to participate in Maha Kumbh 2025, the Uttar Pradesh government has implemented robust security measures along the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, with a special focus on the Sangam area. To provide maximum protection, a large contingent of Water Police personnel has been deployed, equipped with state-of-the-art technology to monitor every inch of the sacred confluence. Advanced equipment, including underwater drones and sonar systems, are being utilised for round-the-clock surveillance of the Sangam area. Lifebuoys, FRP speed motor boats and other emergency response tools have also been introduced to ensure immediate action in case of emergencies. The well-trained Water Police personnel are fully prepared to handle any disaster or unforeseen situations during the event.

Around 2,500 Water Police personnel have already been deployed for shoreline security. To further strengthen safety measures, three dedicated Water Police stations have been established, functioning 24x7 to monitor the safety of devotees.

A central control room is monitoring security operations

across the Maha Kumbh area, supported by 17 sub-control rooms spread across the fair ground. The manpower will be further increased, with an additional 1,300 Water Police personnel joining the team before the fair officially begins. This will bring the total number of Water Police personnel to 3,800, ensuring extensive security coverage throughout the event.

The government has equipped the Water Police personnel with cutting-edge technology to secure the Ganga and Yamuna riverbanks. Deep-water barricading has been implemented along an 8-kilometre stretch, supported by two floating rescue stations, where specially trained personnel are stationed to respond swiftly to any incident.

Additionally, 11 FRP speed motor boats have been deployed for continuous patrolling of the Sangam area. The six-seater boats ensure constant vigilance and rapid response to emergencies. To provide immediate medical assistance, four water ambulances equipped with modern medical facilities have also been stationed at strategic points along the rivers.

Along with this, 25 rechargeable mobile remote area lighting systems have been installed. Furthermore, four Anaconda motorboats equipped with

changing rooms have been deployed.

The Water Police personnel have been equipped with a 2-km-long river line, significantly aiding in traffic control on the Yamuna river during Maha Kumbh 2025. To further strengthen safety and rescue operations, they have been provided with 100 diving kits, 440 lifebuoys, over 3,000 life jackets, 415 rescue tubes, 200 throw bags with ropes, 29 tower light systems, an underwater drone, and a sonar system. These advanced tools empower the Water Police to not only safeguard the riverbanks but also monitor and ensure security across all activities taking place in the water, enhancing preparedness for the grand event.

Inspector General of Police In-charge, PAC Eastern Zone, Prayagraj, Dr Rajiv Narayan Mishra said, "Maha Kumbh is a big opportunity for Uttar Pradesh Water Police, PAC and SDRF. The security and monitoring of Sangam and other areas is our collective responsibility."

He added, "For the safety of devotees, the government has equipped the Water Police and PAC with ultra-modern equipment and provided adequate manpower. Our goal is to ensure Maha Kumbh remains 100 per cent incident-free."

## Govt to showcase UP's tourism offerings at Madrid, Berlin fairs

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a major initiative to position Uttar Pradesh as a leading global tourism destination, the Yogi Adityanath government is set to showcase the state's tourism offerings at the International Tourism Trade Fairs in Madrid, Spain, and Berlin, Germany. During these global events, Maha Kumbh 2025, being held in Prayagraj, will be presented as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, highlighting its spiritual, historical and cultural significance.

Aligned with the vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Maha Kumbh 2025 stands out not only as a religious and spiritual event but also as a symbol of India's rich historical heritage. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department has meticulously prepared to present this grandeur on the global stage, ensuring maximum visibility at both international fairs. This global outreach will invite people from across the world to experience this magnificent event while also showcasing other diverse tourism offerings and special attractions of Uttar Pradesh. The tourism fairs will feature thematic grand pavilions focusing on Maha Kumbh 2025 and Uttar Pradesh's rich cultural legacy. A 40-square-metre

pavilion will be constructed at the International Tourism Trade Fair (FITUR), scheduled from January 24 to 28 in Madrid, Spain, displaying the tourism attractions of Uttar Pradesh.

Similarly, another 40-square-metre pavilion will be set up at the ITB Berlin Fair, which will take place from March 4 to 6, 2025, in Berlin, Germany. To maximise global engagement, VVIP lounges will be constructed at both fairs, facilitating B2B and B2C sessions. Promotional materials will be made available in multiple languages, including English and local European languages, to ensure wider outreach.

In addition to promoting Uttar Pradesh as 'Brand UP', the land of Buddha and Sanatan faith, discussions will be held with key stakeholders from major tourist sectors and prospective investors to attract foreign investment for the state's favourable environment. Engagement will also be established with various tourism sector representatives, including tour operators from host countries and neighbouring regions.

Furthermore, Uttar Pradesh's rich spiritual and cultural heritage will be highlighted alongside the promotion of ODOP items and other traditional products from the state.

## Over 10k people receive medical care at Maha Kumbh area

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): The Yogi Adityanath government is prioritising health and well-being of devotees at Maha Kumbh. On the instructions of the chief minister, the best possible medical care is being provided to devotees across the Maha Kumbh area. Over 10,000 patients have received medical care in Maha Kumbh Mela area so far. Doctors from the central hospital are working with full dedication, ensuring round-the-clock treatment. A sub-central hospital has also been established in Sector 24, Aaril. The hospital is now fully operational alongside the central hospital.

According to Dr Gaurav Dubey, Nodal Officer of the Maha Kumbh Medical Establishment, this initiative aligns with Chief Minister Yogi's vision of ensuring quality medical treatment for every devotee attending the Maha Kumbh. Specialist doctors have been deployed at the sub-central hospital, and formal treatment for patients from across the country and abroad has already commenced.

The 25-bed sub-central hospital in Aaril is equipped with advanced medical facilities, mirroring the infrastructure available at the central hospital. Dr Gaurav Dubey emphasised the ongoing efforts to prioritise health services, sharing that 900 patients were treated at the central hospital on the first day of the New Year alone.

## 'Sack Ashish Patel if he's guilty,' Rai challenges Yogi govt

Lucknow (PTI): Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai on Saturday challenged the Yogi Adityanath government to sack corruption-accused Technical Education Minister Ashish Patel. He also said that if Ashish Patel, a member of Apna Dal (Soneval), is innocent then he must break the alliance with the BJP.

Ashish Patel was accused by Pallavi Patel, an MLA from Sirathu representing the Samajwadi Party and a leader of the Apna Dal (Kameravadi), of corruption in the appointment of department heads in the Technical Education department. She accused officials of bypassing current service rules in favour of older ones to facilitate the appointments. Pallavi Patel is the elder sister of Apna Dal (Soneval) national president Anupriya Patel.

Rai, while talking to journalists at the Congress headquarters here, said, "If Ashish Patel has committed corruption, then Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath should show courage and dismiss him from his cabinet." He added, "If he is right and the government, STF and Information Department are harassing him together and if he has even a little self-respect, then he and Anupriya Patel should immediately leave this insulting BJP government." Ashish Patel had on Thursday alleged that he was under threat of an attack from the Special Task Force, a state police unit. "Those who are afraid and have done something wrong resign. Sack me, if you want but I will not resign," Patel had said. He also parried the corruption charges saying there was a "larger conspiracy" behind them.

Rai alleged that the Adityanath government has indulged in corruption ever since it came to power in the state. He said that there has been no investigation into the Ashish Patel matter is an indication of a cover-up. Anupriya Patel, Ashish Patel's wife, earlier said the party would fight the accusations.

## Govt initiative checks stubble burning, promotes sustainable farming

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a bid to combat stubble burning and promote sustainable farming practices, the Uttar Pradesh government has launched a ground-breaking initiative - 'Parali ke badle govansh khaad' (cow manure in exchange for stubble). This unique scheme aims to curb environmental pollution caused by stubble burning while providing direct benefits to farmers.

Over the past few years, the focused efforts of Uttar Pradesh have significantly reduced incidents of stubble burning, showcasing a commitment to both environmental preservation and agricultural welfare. Notably, the problem of stub-

ble burning intensifies every year in the state after crop harvesting, significantly worsening air pollution. To address this issue, the Yogi Adityanath government launched the 'Parali ke badle govansh khaad' campaign on October 28.

During the campaign, a total of 2,90,208.16 quintals of straw were collected across the state. In return, 1,55,380.25 quintals of cow manure were distributed to farmers, which is now being utilised in organic farming, enhancing soil fertility and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Several districts performed exceptionally well during the campaign, including Varanasi, Banda, Budaun, Jalaun, Bareilly, Amethi, Siddharthnagar and

Bahraich. Farmers in these regions collected straw on a large-scale and benefited from the distribution of cow manure. The campaign also emphasises the protection of destitute cows by facilitating the distribution of manure collected from cow shelters to farmers. This effort showcases the proactive and efficient functioning of the Animal Husbandry Department.

The Yogi government's initiative goes beyond being a temporary solution, reflecting a transparent and forward-thinking approach. While encouraging organic farming, it also helps reduce farmers' production costs and contributes significantly to environmental conservation. The 'Parali ke

badle govansh khaad' campaign stands as a crucial step for the welfare of farmers, environmental sustainability and society at large. By effectively curbing stubble burning and motivating farmers towards organic farming, this initiative marks a significant stride towards a greener revolution in the state.

Through prevention of stubble burning, instead of burning stubble, farmers are contributing to environmental protection by handing it over to the government, helping curb air pollution. Farmers receive natural manure in the form of cow manure, reducing dependency on chemical fertilisers while enhancing soil health and fertility.

## Akhilesh: Goal is to form 'PDA' govt in UP by winning assembly polls in 2027

Lucknow (PTI): Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in the state of corruption, saying his party's goal is to form a 'PDA' government by winning the Assembly elections due in 2027. 'PDA' is an acronym given by Yadav for 'picchde, Dalit, alp-sankhyak' (backwards, Dalits and minorities). According to a statement issued by the party, Yadav on Saturday addressed officials of national and state frontal organisations of Samajwadi Party (SP) at the party headquarters here, saying, "Our goal is to form a PDA government (in Uttar Pradesh) by winning the 2027 Assembly elections."

"To form a Samajwadi Party government, the party organisation needs to be strengthened further at the booth level. Troubled by the BJP, people are ready to remove the party which is anti-democracy and anti-constitution from power in UP," Yadav said. "BJP's policies have brought nothing but destruction to the state. The party is full of mafias who are completely immersed in corrup-

tion," the SP leader alleged. Targeting Yogi, Yadav said, "It is the misfortune of the state that the Yogi Ji who is in power is not a real Yogi. He is a corrupt Yogi. He is not even honest."

"Law and order has been destroyed completely under the BJP rule. Inflation is at its peak. From farmers, youth, labourers to businessmen, teachers and advocates — all are troubled," he said. Yadav also reiterated that SP carries the legacy of Ram Manohar Lohia, Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideology, and the struggles of Mulayam Singh Yadav. "Only socialists have been fighting the battle for social justice and the struggle continues even today. Through caste census, proportional participation of everyone will be ensured," he said. The SP chief also claimed that the BJP wants to change the soul of democracy, which is the Constitution. Those present at the meeting included SP national general secretary Shivpal Yadav, leader of opposition in the state assembly Mata Prasad Pandey, leader of opposition in the legislative council Lal Bahari Yadav, SP national secretary Rajendra Chaudhary, etc.

## 2 killed, one injured in separate accidents

Mathura (PTI): Two persons were killed and one was injured in separate road accidents caused by low visibility due to fog in Mathura district, officials said on Saturday. SP (Rural) Trigun Bishen said that a person was hit by an unknown vehicle early on Saturday morning on the Yamuna Expressway. The vehicle driver managed to flee, officials said, adding that the injury was so severe that the face of the deceased was damaged beyond recognition. The identity of the deceased person is not yet known and his body has been sent for autopsy, Bishen said. In another accident on NH19 early on Saturday morning, a person was killed and another injured when the motorcycle they were travelling on collided head-on with a truck over a bridge as visibility due to dense fog was near zero, officials said. The truck driver managed to flee, police said. The deceased has been identified as RK Sharma (42), a resident of Mathura. Sharma's body has been sent for a post-mortem, while the injured person has been hospitalised, police added.

## NCR's first gaming zone ready at Prayagraj Jn

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Prayagraj Railway Division is leaving no stone unturned to ensure that Maha Kumbh 2025 is a truly divine and grand event. As part of its preparations, all stations within the division have undergone renovations. Additionally, special trains, shelters, ticket counters and various other amenities are being developed to cater to the needs of the devotees coming for the Maha Kumbh. Among these efforts, the division has introduced a gaming zone to enhance passengers' travel experience.

Notably, this is the first-ever gaming zone in the North Central Railway and will become operational at Prayagraj Junction ahead of Maha Kumbh. It promises to benefit devotees and travelers from across the country and abroad.

Playing a pivotal role in organising Maha Kumbh 2025, the North Central Railway has implemented numerous modern and advanced facilities across stations in the Prayagraj Division. A standout feature is the gaming zone near Platform 6 on the Civil Lines side of Prayagraj Junction. This state-of-the-art facility will include high-end



attractions such as a VR cricket box, motion theater, PC games, arcade games, jungle safaris, air hockey and VR experiences. Passengers can enjoy various entertainment options, from classic games to cutting-edge arcade experiences. The gaming zone, developed by Fun Space LLP, aims to deliver travelers a unique and mem-

orable entertainment experience. According to Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Himanshu Shukla, the gaming zone enhances the travel experience for passengers of all age groups, including children, adults and the elderly. He said, open 24x7, it would operate on a ticketed entry system with a

nominal fee. Modeled on gaming zones commonly found in malls, this initiative is part of Railway's Prayagraj Division's commitment to offering world-class, modern facilities to its passengers. The division has already introduced advanced amenities like an executive lounge and sleeping pods at Prayagraj Junction.



# Niranjani Akhara reaches Maha Kumbh Mela area



PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Peshwai (procession) of Niranjani Akhara was taken out for Maha Kumbh on Saturday. About 1000 saints and seers came out on elephants, horses, camels, and chariots. After the worship with rituals in Baghambari Math, the saints left for the Mela area, hoisting the Sanatan flag. The procession was monitored with drones. The 'Dharm Dhawja' was at the forefront of the procession. Behind it, the deity of the Akhara, Lord Kartikeya, was seated on a palanquin. Behind him was the Mahamandaleshwar of the Akhara. Artistes performed stunts to

the tune of a band and DJ. They were also seen performing 'tandava' with tridents. Thousands of people gathered on both sides of the road, welcoming the saints by showering flowers. The saints were led by Ravindra Puri Maharaj, president of the All India Akhara Parishad. Prominent saints included Niranjani Peethadheswar Mahamandaleshwar Kailash Nand Giri Maharaj, Anand Peethadheswar Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Balkanand. The saints reached the Mela area after covering a distance of about 10 km from Baghambari Math in Allahpur. Akhara Parishad president Mahant Ravindrapuri Maharaj said, "The saints associated

with the Akhara came from all over the country. Just like there is an army cantonment, similarly, there is a cantonment of Naga saints here. The Mela is being organised in a grand manner as per the wishes of the prime minister. People of all religions are welcome here." Meanwhile, Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar visited the Maha Kumbh Mela area on Saturday evening and took stock of the security arrangements. He checked the security at VIP Ghat, Sangam area, Police Lines, and other important places, including the Mela premises. He took information about CCTV, drones, and other security equipment set up in the

Mela area. The DGP said, "Keeping in mind the presence of crores of devotees and saints in the Maha Kumbh, strong security arrangements have been made. Security is our first priority here. The entire focus is on ensuring that the devotees do not face any inconvenience." The DGP instructed the security personnel to maintain coordination between VIPs and common devotees. While visiting the police lines, the DGP appreciated the preparations of the policemen and their dedication to duty. He said that they should be sensitive during their duty in the Mela area, behave politely towards the devotees, and take immediate action on any suspicious activity.

## Woman held for husband's murder

Prayagraj (PNS): A 30-year-old woman, accused of murdering her husband in the Naini area of Prayagraj, has been arrested, police said on Saturday. The police also recovered a pair of pliers and a dupatta, purportedly used for executing the murder. A case was registered against the accused on the complaint of the deceased's brother and she was sent to jail. As per reports, Pradeep Prajapati was strangled to death allegedly by his wife in Kanshiram Colony on December 27. On the complaint of the deceased's brother, Ambika Prasad Prajapati, the police registered a case. The police discovered that Pradeep's wife, Neha, was involved in the incident. Thereafter, the police took her into custody and interrogated her. Naini SHO Vaibhav Singh told mediapersons that Pradeep Prajapati (36), son of Mangala Prajapati, lived in the Shahganj locality. Ten years ago, he married a girl from another community who also lived in the same locality. After marriage, he started living in Kanshiram Colony, Naini, with his wife Neha. He died under mysterious circumstances on December 27. When people nearby gathered, his wife claimed that Pradeep had consumed a poisonous substance, which led to his death. The post-mortem revealed that he had died due to strangulation. When the police began investigating the case, Neha was picked up on the basis of suspicion. During interrogation, she told the police that Pradeep often came home in an inebriated state and would quarrel with her, which had made her fed up. On the night of December 26, while they were quarrelling, she strangled him with her dupatta, which resulted in his death. During this, their daughter was sleeping in the adjacent room.

## Dense fog paralyses normal life in Kashi



PNS ■ VARANASI

Dense fog engulfed this holy city, paralysing normal life on Saturday. According to the forecast, the weather conditions are likely remain the same in the next few days and after that the temperature may fall further. The minimum temperature has dropped to nine degree Celsius. The cold wave and foggy conditions have forced the tourists to keep themselves away from the internationally famous Ganga ghats especially Assi, Kedar, Panchganga, Dashashwamedh and Namoghat which witnessed thin attendance during the morning hours. The famous Ganga ghats, Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham and temples which witnessed a lot of activities since the beginning of the new year with about 30 lakh devotees offering prayers at one of the dwadasha jyotirlingas during the last four days, saw compar-

atively lesser rush during the day. District Magistrate S Rajalingam has already ordered closure of classes up to VIII till January 8 while District Inspector of Schools Awadh Kishore Singh ordered has change of timings for classes from IX to XII, which are being run only between 10 am and 2 pm. The dense foggy conditions affected the flight services badly due to very low visibility at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport at Babatpur. Foggy conditions also slowed down the wheels of trains and buses. According to information, flight number SG-945 from Delhi was cancelled while QP-1421 and 6E-897 from Bengaluru, 6E-450, QP-1633 and IX-2838 from Hyderabad, 6E-822 from Kolkata and QP-1498 from Mumbai and many others landed behind their scheduled time. Besides, several long distance trains arrived at Varanasi

Junction (Cantonment) and Banaras railway stations several hours behind their scheduled time. Even premier trains like Vande Bharat arrived late as 22436 from New Delhi departed six hours late and rescheduled from Varanadi at 8:30 pm instead of 3 pm. As most train services from northern states have been badly affected due to foggy conditions, the most popular train from New Delhi, 12560 Shiv Ganga Express arrived at Banaras station 8:29 hours late at 2:39 pm. Similarly, 12582 New Delhi-Banaras Superfast Express and 15128 Kashi Vishwanath Express arrived here over 10 and one hour late. Besides, 12562 Swatantrata Senani Express arrived nearly nine hours late, while over a dozen other trains by one to five hours behind their scheduled time. Road accidents have been reported from many adjoining districts of this belt of Purvanchal (eastern UP).



Peshwai (procession) of Niranjani Akhara taken out for Maha Kumbh on Saturday

## Min inaugurates athletics meet

Varanasi (PNS): Uttar Pradesh's Minister of State for Stamp and Court Registration Fees (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal inaugurated the 33rd Rananjay Singh Memorial Uttar Pradesh Masters Athletics Championship (Men and Women) at the playground of Uday Pratap College here on Saturday by lighting the lamp. People in the age group of 30 to 100 years are participating in this competition. Tilak Raj Kapoor participated at the age of 97 and won the gold medal. Speaking on this occasion, Jaiswal said that athletics was a sport that included many events like running, jumping, throwing or walking and it was commonly known as a track and field event. On this occasion, former MLC Chet Narayan Singh, Arvind Singh, Subhash Yadav, Nandlal Singh, KN Tiwari, PP Singh, B Singh, SK Singh, Dr Vinay Kumar Singh, Anurag Singh, Dinesh Jaiswal and all the participating players were present.



UP Minister Ravindra Jaiswal inaugurating the 33rd Rananjay Singh Memorial Uttar Pradesh Masters Athletics Championship

## Take public problems seriously: DM

Sampoorna Samadhan Diwas was organised on Saturday at all the tehsil headquarters of the district. District Magistrate S Rajalingam heard the problems of the people who came to this total solution day event at Sadar tehsil and gave necessary instructions to the officials concerned. On this occasion, a total of 171 cases related to revenue, police, medical, agriculture, fertiliser and logistics, Panchayati Raj, electricity, irrigation, PWD and other departments were reported and out of them four were resolved on the spot. Transferring the remaining cases to the officials of the departments concerned, the district magistrate directed to settle them within the time limit. He directed the officials to get the land dispute related cases settled by a joint team of police and revenue officials by visiting the spot and verifying the matter. Giving strict instructions to the officials, the district magistrate said that delay in resolving public problems would not be tolerated. He said the officials should take public problems seriously otherwise be ready for action. He said that the solution of every person's problem with full commitment and transparency was the top priority of the government and administration and any kind of laxity or negligence would not be tolerated in this. On the problems related to

reach of health facilities and provides them free OPD facility, medical consultation, quality medicines, blood pressure and blood sugar test, referral service and health awareness at their doorstep. Ten camps are also organised every week. The district magistrate also observed the Network Operation cum Monitoring Centre set up in the office to collect consumer and consumption data and PuVVNL Managing Director Shambhu Kumar gave information regarding data collection from smart meters. He said this would help in preventing power theft. On this occasion, officials of the electricity department and Chief Medical Officer Dr Sandeep Chaudhary along with other officials were also present.



DM S Rajalingam, along with PuVVNL MD Shambhu Kumar, flagging off MMU van in Varanasi on Saturday

## Constable on Maha Kumbh duty dies in road mishap

Prayagraj (PNS): A 30-year-old constable, Anup Kumar Singh, who had come for duty at the Maha Kumbh, died in a road accident late on Friday night, police said. An unidentified vehicle struck Anup Singh's bike on GT Road in Bikapur, in the Sarai Inayat police station area of Gangapur. The constable was admitted to hospital in critical condition, where he died during treatment, the police said. Policemen from all over the state are on duty at the Maha Kumbh. Constable Anup Kumar Singh, posted in Sonbhadra, was also on duty. After completing his Mela duties, Anup was riding his bike home to Sarai

Rangrooppur police station, Sarai Inayat. An unknown vehicle collided with his bike in Bikapur, Sarai Inayat, causing serious injuries to Anup. The police took the constable to a private hospital in Bikapur, where he died late on Friday night. The police have sent the body for post-mortem. SHO of Sarai Inayat police station, Sanjay Prasad Gupta, said that Anup had been posted in Sonbhadra. He was the eldest of two brothers. In another incident, the condition of a 25-year-old man became critical due to the cold in Kahli village, under Bahria police station in Prayagraj. The family rushed him to a private hospital, where doctors referred him to the district hospital. They were preparing

to take him to the district hospital when the youth died. The family is inconsolable due to the loss. Bhola Prajapati, a resident of Kahli village in the Bahria block of Phulpur, is a farmer who supports his family through farming. His deceased son was identified as Sonu Prajapati. Sonu's health suddenly deteriorated at around 10 pm. The family immediately took him to the nearest hospital in Donaiya. Seeing his critical condition, the doctor advised them to take him to Prayagraj. The family was preparing to take him to the city hospital when Sonu succumbed at around 11:30 pm on Friday. Police said that the cause of death was the cold.

## Bahujan Samta Party will contest Delhi, Bihar assembly polls

Varanasi (PNS): An important meeting of the Bahujan Samta Party executive was held at Parade Kothi under the chairmanship of party's national president Rajesh Azad here on Saturday. In the meeting, the participants discussed measures to accelerate the membership campaign for strengthening and expansion of the party organisation. In a unanimous resolution passed in the executive meeting, it has been decided to field party candidates from five assembly constituencies each in Delhi and Bihar in their upcoming assembly elections. Azad said that the party, adopting the message of social harmony and development of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, would make contemporary burning and sensitive issues of public interest its election manifesto. He further said that to decide the strategy for the elections and to decide on the names of

the candidates, important meetings would be held on January 28 at Connaught Place in Delhi and on February 10 at a restaurant in Gopalganj market in Bihar. The meeting was conducted by party national vice-president Dr Rashmi Agarwal. Rekha Srivastava, Ritu Sahni, Neeta Dhar, Sunil Srivastava, Asif, Mohan Srivastava, Omkar Nath Srivastava and others were present in the meeting.

## Gang of ganja smugglers busted; 2 held

Prayagraj (PNS): The Anti-Narcotics Task Force, Prayagraj operational unit, claimed to have busted a gang of ganja smugglers on Saturday. The team arrested two smugglers and recovered 47 kg of ganja from them. Its value has been estimated at Rs 24 lakh. The ganja was being transport-

ed in an Innova. On the instructions of the Anti-Narcotics Task Force Headquarters in Lucknow, the Prayagraj unit arrested Raju Anuragi, son of Shriram Prakash, a resident of New Basti Sichaoli, Maudha police station, Hamirpur, and Rohit Kumar, son of Vijay Kumar, a resident of Lukatra, Jamalpur police station, Banda.

The arrested smugglers told the police during interrogation that they used to transport ganja by hiding it in a specially made box in the trunk of the car. The ganja was brought from Odisha and was to be supplied in other districts, including Prayagraj. The team, including Inspector Satyendra Pradhan, made the arrest.



# Delhi polls: BJP attacks AAP Govt over financial mismanagement, rising debt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi dubbed AAP an "aapda (disaster)" for Delhi, the BJP on Saturday said it would highlight daily the crisis the city government had inflicted on different sectors, and began with its alleged financial mismanagement. BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said Delhi used to be considered one of the better states and Union Territories in terms of its financial health but its budget was now likely to report overall losses under the AAP

government. Delhi had a budget surplus of 1.56 per cent in 2015-16, which has been falling since then and is now headed into the negative, he said. The city government has also been seeking more and more debt and has now proposed to take a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund, he claimed. Trivedi said the grant-in aid by the Centre to Delhi had also risen three times to 1.53 per cent of its GDP and accused former chief minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal of setting a record in looting and emptying the treasury.

The BJP spokesperson said the city's revenue collection had seen a steady fall from 5.4 per cent of GDP to 3.9 per cent during AAP's 10-year rule, adding that the national average stood at 6.27 per cent. AAP is all about financial irregularities and mismanagement of taxpayers' contribution, Trivedi alleged, claiming that things were in a bad shape in AAP-ruled Punjab as well. He noted that AAP claimed to have spent a lot of money in education and health sectors and questioned the output. If AAP comes to power again, there will be no money left, Trivedi said, adding that the



challenge for a BJP government, if elected to power, would be how to repair the damage caused by the Kejriwal-led party's rule. He said the central government led by Prime Minister Modi had shown how to provide electricity by creating a framework for solar power for domestic use. It will also cause no damage to the environment, he added. He also expressed confidence that voters would take the lead in ridding Delhi of this "aapda". Targeting Kejriwal after he questioned the BJP over its face for the Delhi polls, expected next month, Trivedi

said what was "amusing and peculiar" was that AAP had a chief minister in Atishi who was not its face for the chief minister's (CM) post. People are wise enough to know what AAP's face is and what its mask is, he said, taking a "super CM" jibe at Kejriwal. The BJP has not had a chief minister in Delhi since 1998, Trivedi said. Kejriwal, he added, made claims driven by political experience, noting that the AAP leader had sought pictures of Lord Ganesh and Goddess Lakshmi on currency notes during the Gujarat Assembly polls in

2022 and then forgot about it. People will take out their anger on AAP this time, he said. Trivedi, who was quizzed about the murder of a journalist in Chhattisgarh, said the state government would put out all the facts transparently and was handling the issue with sensitivity and alacrity. Three people have been detained in connection with the murder of a 33-year-old journalist whose body was found in a septic tank on a local contractor's property in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Saturday.

## Some people trying to disturb peace in name of caste politics, says PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said some people are trying to disturb peace in the name of caste politics and called for thwarting such designs to preserve the social harmony in rural parts of the country. Inaugurating the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, the Prime Minister exuded confidence that villages will play a key role in pushing forward the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047.



Without mentioning any names, Modi said certain people are trying to disturb peace by spreading the venom of caste politics. "We have to work to strengthen the heritage of peace and harmony of villages," he said. Recalling the steps taken by the NDA government since 2014, for rural development, Modi, quoting an SBI research report, said poverty in rural India came down to below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. He said the previous government had neglected the people living in rural India, and even after decades of independence, villages

were deprived of basic necessities. But his government is empowering villages, and focusing on those who were neglected before, the Prime Minister said. Speaking on the occasion, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said banks have undertaken saturation drive for 16 government schemes, including Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, PM Mudra and PM SVANidhi. The Mahotsav, through

various discussions, workshops and masterclasses, aims to enhance rural infrastructure, create self-reliant economies, and foster innovation within rural communities. Its objectives include promoting economic stability and financial security among rural populations, with a special focus on North-East India, by addressing financial inclusion and supporting sustainable agricultural practices.

## Govt's draft protection rules create balance between regulation and innovation while completely protecting citizen rights: Ashwini Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The draft protection rules released by the government create a balance between regulation and innovation while completely protecting citizen rights, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Saturday. The Government issued draft rules for the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act on Friday for public consultation till February 18. "Rules have to be within four walls of the Act. It is within the ambit of the Act passed by Parliament. These rules have been framed to ensure a balance between regulation and innovation while completely safeguarding the rights of citizens," Vaishnaw told PTI in an interview. The minister said earlier there was only one template available to the world -- the European data protection rule with a high level of regulation. However, Indian rules have attempted to balance the regulation with innovation to safeguard the boom in the innovation ecosystem developing among startups in the country. He said extensive consultations have been held



with the industry and systems such as complaint registration, their handling and distribution, interaction with digital platforms, have been put in place. The minister said the final rules will be placed before Parliament in the monsoon session for approval and all entities handling data digitally will get two years to calibrate their systems as per the law. "All the entities covered under the Act will have to review existing consent within two years after the rules are in place," Vaishnaw said. He said the rules will be improvised based on the experience of the new data

government", as per the draft rules. "We have also kept graded punishments to protect the interests of micro, small and medium enterprises. It is to save businesses who may be running their business using a single computer. However, Big Techs have higher obligations under the rules. Minor breaches will attract small penalties and big breaches will lead to higher penalties," Vaishnaw said. He said the penal provision will be implemented as per the Act and the rules prescribe the way to implement them. The Act has the provision to impose penalty of up to Rs 250 crore on data fiduciaries. "There is a provision on voluntary undertaking under the Act where an entity can voluntarily disclose any breach to authorities and the Data Protection Board (DPB) will deal with it as per Act," Vaishnaw said. As per the DPDP Act, the acceptance of the voluntary undertaking by the Board will protect an entity from proceedings under the provisions of this Act. However, the protection will be subject to the approval of the DPB.

If a person fails to adhere to any term of the voluntary undertaking accepted by the DPB, it shall be deemed a breach of the provisions of the Act and the board after giving an opportunity of being heard to the person may proceed to act as per the penal provisions. The minister said utmost precaution has been taken to protect small businesses as per the basic principle laid down in the Act. Vaishnaw said the rules for data processing overseas will be implemented while keeping in mind citizen rights and national interests. "The country should be able to take benefit of all the new opportunities that are emerging out of the digital economy," Vaishnaw said. The rules will not have an impact on existing rules under which news media operate, he said, adding, "Media rights will continue to remain as it is. Press will continue to function as per the current framework." Digital platforms will also have to be informed and they will need to take consent of people in English or official languages as mentioned in the Constitution, Vaishnaw added.

## Fresh violence erupts in Manipur

From page 1

The SP is "fine now and presently leading the joint security forces in tackling the situation", it added. A few protesters, who sustained injuries during the clashes, were also admitted to hospital, officials said. Kuki organisations have been protesting against central forces after women of the community were allegedly bated-charged on December 31 for blocking their way. Locals claimed that several people were injured in the action by the security forces that happened in Saibol village in Twiching, which is located in the so-called 'buffer zone' between the Kuki-held Hills and Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley. They said that the local women had gathered to protest what they described as the "forceful occupation" of

community bunkers by security personnel. The security forces had conducted the operation at the village and its peripheral areas following gunfights between armed groups, which injured four people, including a police personnel. Protesting the December 31 action by security forces, the Kangpokpi-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) blocked the critical transportation route of National Highway 2, disrupting the movement of goods to the Imphal Valley where the Meiteis live. Meanwhile, the security forces recovered a large cache of arms and ammunition from the Loibol Khunou area of the district on Friday. Among the items recovered were a modified 7.62 mm sniper rifle, an improvised long-range mortar, locally called 'pumpi', three 9mm

pistols with magazines, a 12 bore Gun, an SBBL gun, 10 live rounds of ammunition, three hand grenades, three picket grenades, two tear smoke grenades and a wireless set, police said. The Governor directed the state DGP to prioritize the safety and security of the people and urged officers from the Army and paramilitary forces to extend their fullest cooperation to the administration in maintaining law and order in the state. Security Advisor to Manipur government, Kuldieep Singh, DGP Rajiv Singh, IGAR (South) Maj Gen Ravroop Singh and senior officers of CRPF and BSF attended the security meeting, it said. Bhalla, a former Union Home secretary, took oath as the 19th governor of Manipur on Friday. After the violence erupted, Congress hit out at

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said he could not escape the constitutional culpability of not following "rajdharna". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the BJP had some vested interest in keeping the border state on the boil. "The BJP is the matchstick which burnt Manipur!" he said in a social media post. Kharge said fresh violence was witnessed recently when a mob attacked the Kangpokpi district superintendent of police, resulting in injuries. "Your incompetent and shameless chief minister has expressed regret but has conveniently brazened out your absence in the state," he alleged. Even the Supreme Court has said it was the primary responsibility of the Union and the state governments to ensure peace and normalcy, the Congress president noted.

## Verma, Bhiduri vs Kejriwal, Atishi: High stakes polls in Delhi

From page 1

Chauhan will run from the reserved Mangolpuri constituency. He was minister in the erstwhile Sheila Dikshit government. Raaj Kumar Anand, who resigned as a minister and quit AAP earlier this year, was fielded from the Patel Nagar seat. Chhatrapur MLA Kartar Singh, who also switched to the saffron party from AAP, has been fielded from the same seat. ND Sharma, another former AAP MLA, will contest as a BJP candidate from Badarpur. The BJP has fielded its national office-bearers

Dushyant Kumar Gautam and Ashish Sood from the Karol Bagh and the Janakpuri seats, respectively. BJP national secretary Manjinder Singh Sirsa will contest from Rajouri Garden, which he had won in the 2015 elections. Former Congress councillor Kumari Rinku is the BJP's candidate from Seemapuri. The BJP also retained incumbent MLAs OP Sharma (Vishwas Nagar), Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Vijender Gupta (Rohini), Ajay Mahawar (Ghonda) and Jitendra Mahajan (Rohtash Nagar). The party has not yet announced its candidates for the two other seats it won in

the 2020 polls -- Laxmi Nagar and the Karawal Nagar. Former Delhi BJP president Satish Upadhyay will contest from Malviya Nagar. The party has fielded former MLA Manoj Shokeen against Delhi minister Raghuvinder Shokeen from the Nangloi Jat seat. The BJP's city unit chief Virendra Sachdeva said in a statement that the party had fielded "strong" candidates who would act as "catalysts" for change. Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due next month. After the list was released, Bidhuri expressed his confidence to defeat Atishi, saying "I thank the BJP

leadership for showing trust in me to reclaim the Kalkaji assembly seat. Delhi is suffering because of Arvind Kejriwal. The people of Kalkaji have also faced 'aapda' under CM Atishi..." The BJP is pulling out all the stops to end AAP's hold on power in the city since 2013, except for a brief period when Delhi was under President's rule. The upcoming elections are being viewed as a fiercely contested battle between the BJP and AAP. The Congress, which was in power in Delhi for 15 straight years, has not been able to win any seat in the last two editions of the Delhi polls.

## Nagaland CM Calls for End to Factionalism in Naga Talks

From page 1

However, the persistent demand for a separate Naga flag and constitution, as well as the integration of Naga-inhabited areas spread across four states-Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland-and the neighboring country of Myanmar, has not been accepted by the Centre, thus delaying the final solution. Nonetheless, the WC NNPGs have declared their acceptance of the solution and

continue talks for the remaining demands. But, the final solution remains elusive. The deputy CM appealed to everyone to spread the message of peace and unity among the Naga society, irrespective of tribe, clan, or region, for the progress and prosperity of the state and for the posterity. Expressing concern over the existence of around 28 underground factions claiming to fight for a common Naga solution, the minister said, "Not every

faction is engaged in negotiations with the Centre as some are involved in anti-social activities, including extortion and illegal taxation from the public." "It is sad to see that our political movement is broken into pieces with about 28 factions running parallel governments today, marred with illegal taxations and extortions, making life difficult for our Naga people and hindering any progressive and sustainable activities," he said.

"We need a strong and cohesive society for the growth and progress of the state," Patton said, adding that the state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, has formed an opposition-less government, bringing all sixty elected MLAs together under one umbrella, irrespective of political party affiliations, with the aim to bring unity among Naga society and work towards a permanent solution to the protracted Naga political issue.

## Kejriwal Promises Water Bill Waivers Post-Polls

From page 1

The DJB is estimated to incur a loss of Rs 854.86 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal. The DJB had incurred a loss of Rs 344.05 crore in 2019-20, which rose to Rs 770.87 crore in the next fiscal and then to Rs 1,196.22 crore in the 2021-22 fiscal. Slamming the surge in charges during his absence, Kejriwal assured residents that no one would need to pay erroneous bills under an AAP government. In a press conference, Kejriwal said that people were "distressed" due to water bills worth thousands and lakhs of rupees being sent to them by the Delhi Jal Board. He alleged that the inflated water bills started arriving after he went to jail and urged

people not to pay those bills. "I have said this earlier, but today I am making a formal announcement: when AAP comes back to power after the assembly polls, these inflated bills will be waived. Those who think their bills are incorrect need not pay them," the former Delhi chief minister said. The AAP government provides free 20,000 liters of water per month and over 12 lakh households in the city have benefitted from the scheme, he added. In a veiled attack on AAP led Delhi government, BJP leader Vijender Gupta revealed that the Chief Secretary of Delhi had prepared a report on financial irregularities in DJB detailing DJB's massive debt of Rs 73,000 crore and several

instances of financial mismanagement. According to the report, from 2015 to 2024, ₹28,500 crore was allocated to DJB for various projects, but there is no record of how this money was spent. On December 10, Kejriwal announced his first guarantee for auto drivers in Delhi, making five promises which include marriage assistance of Rs one lakh for the marriage of an auto driver's daughter, uniform allowance of Rs 2500 twice a year for new uniforms for auto drivers, Insurance of Rs 10 lakh life insurance and Rs 5 lakh accidental insurance for every auto driver, government sponsored coaching fees for children and Poocho App for them. Kejriwal announced Dr Ambedkar Samman

Scholarship which will offers full financial assistance to children from the Dalit community for pursuing higher education abroad. Once admitted to a foreign university, the Delhi government will cover all expenses, including tuition, travel, accommodation, and study-related costs. To empower women, Kejriwal announced Mahila Samman Yojna, a monthly honorarium of Rs 2,100 for all women aged 18 and above who are residents of Delhi and listed on the voter roll. Women working in government jobs, serving as MPs, MLAs, councillors, or receiving pensions will not be eligible. Under Sanjeevani Yojana, free treatment to senior citizens aged 60 and above.

## Fog Causes Major Disruptions at Delhi Airport

From page 1

The Northern Railway said a total of 59 trains were running late by up to six hours and 22 by around eight hours. With the the maximum temperature in the city settled at 20 degrees Celsius, 0.7 notch above average and the minimum temperature was recorded at 7.8 degrees Celsius, 0.9 notch above the normal, according to the

India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Ayanagar recorded 7.2 degree Celsius, coldest area in the national capital. In a related development, the air quality in the national capital remained in the 'very poor' category. Delhi's 24-hour average AQI was recorded at 378, according to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). This is despite the fact that

stage three of the Graded Response Action Plan has been reinvoked in Delhi and the neighbouring states. Transport is the key source of air pollution in the national capital. The weather department has predicted dense fog conditions likely to continue over parts of North India from late night of Saturday to morning hours of Sunday and improve thereafter.

## Delhi Man Scams 700 Women Using Fake Dating Profiles

From page 1

"The situation escalated when the accused sent her a private video she had shared, and demanded money. Pressured, the victim made small payments, citing her financial constraints. However, the relentless demands drove her to inform her family and lodge a complaint," the DCP said. After registering an FIR, a

special team was formed which identified Bisht as the perpetrator and tracked him to Shakarpur in east Delhi. A raid was conducted, leading to his arrest, the statement said. Revealing the modus operandi, the DCP said during interrogation, Bisht admitted to using a virtual international mobile number for over two years, which he obtained through an app. Using this number,

he registered on dating and chatting platforms, projecting himself as a glamorous model. His fake profiles included fabricated stories and photographs to make them appear authentic. Once he established connection with his victims, he persuaded them to share intimate content. "Initially, he did this for amusement but later he turned it into a calculated

scheme to extort money. He confessed to possessing private content of numerous women and blackmailing several of them for financial gains," Vichitra Veer said in the statement. Bisht hails from a middle-class family based out of Shakarpur. His father works as a private driver, his mother is a homemaker, while his sister is employed in Gurugram. A graduate with a BBA

degree, Bisht was working as a technical recruiter at a Noida-based private firm for the past three years. Police said the investigation has uncovered chats with more than 60 women from Delhi and nearby areas. Two bank accounts linked to the accused have also been identified, one of which showed multiple transactions from victims, while details of the second account are awaited.



# Judge sets Trump's sentencing in hush money case for Jan 10

AP ■ NEW YORK

In an extraordinary turn, a judge Friday set President-elect Donald Trump's sentencing in his hush money case for January 10 — little over a week before he's due to return to the White House — but indicated he wouldn't be jailed. The development nevertheless leaves Trump on course to be the first president to take office convicted of felony crimes. Judge Juan M. Merchan, who presided over Trump's trial, signalled in a written decision that he'd sentence the former and future president to what's known as a conditional discharge, in which a case gets dismissed if a defendant avoids rearrest. Merchan rejected Trump's push to dismiss the verdict and throw out the case on presidential immunity grounds and because of his impending return to the White House. The judge said he found "no legal impediment to sentencing" Trump and that it was "incumbent" on him to sentence Trump prior to his swearing in on January 20. "Only by bringing finality to this matter" will the interests of justice be served, Merchan

wrote. Trump was convicted in May of 34 counts of falsifying business records. They involved an alleged scheme to hide a hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in the last weeks of Trump's first campaign in 2016. The payout was made to keep her from publicising claims she'd had sex with the married Trump years earlier. He says that her story is false and that he did nothing wrong. After Trump's November 5 election, Merchan halted proceedings and indefinitely postponed the sentencing so the defense and prosecution could weigh in on the future of the case. Trump's lawyers urged Merchan to toss it. They said it would otherwise pose unconstitutional "disruptions" to the incoming president's ability to run the country. Prosecutors acknowledged there should be some accommodation for his upcoming presidency, but they insisted the conviction should stand. They suggested various options, such as freezing the case during his term or guaranteeing him a no-jail sentence. They also proposed closing

the case while formally noting both his conviction and his undecided appeal — a novel idea drawn from what some state courts do when criminal defendants die while appealing their cases. Trump takes office January 20 as the first former president to be convicted of a crime and the first convicted criminal to be elected to the office. His conviction left the 78-year-old facing the possibility of punishment ranging from a fine or probation to up to four years in prison. The case centered on how Trump accounted for reimbursing his personal attorney for the Daniels payment. The lawyer, Michael Cohen, fronted the money. He later recouped it through a series of payments that Trump's company logged as legal expenses. Trump, by then in the White House, signed most of the checks himself. Prosecutors said the designation was meant to cloak the true purpose of the payments and help cover up a broader effort to keep voters from hearing unflattering claims about the Republican during his first campaign. Trump said that Cohen was

legitimately paid for legal services, and that Daniels' story was suppressed to avoid embarrassing Trump's family, not to influence the electorate. Trump was a private citizen — campaigning for president, but neither elected nor sworn in — when Cohen paid Daniels in October 2016. He was president when Cohen was reimbursed, and Cohen testified that they discussed the repayment arrangement in the Oval Office. Trump, a Republican, has decried the verdict as the "rigged, disgraceful" result of a "witch hunt" pursued by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat. Before Trump's November election, his lawyers sought to reverse his conviction for a different reason: a US Supreme Court decision in July that gave presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution. That request was still pending when the election raised new issues. While urging Merchan to nix the conviction, Trump also sought to move the case to federal court, where he could also assert immunity. A federal judge repeatedly said no, but Trump appealed.

## Japanese woman, world's oldest person, has died

AP ■ TOKYO

Tomiko Itooka, a Japanese woman who was the world's oldest person according to Guinness World Records, has died, an Ashiya city official said Saturday. She was 116. Yoshitsugu Nagata, an official in charge of elderly policies, said Itooka died on December 29 at a care home in Ashiya, Hyogo Prefecture, central Japan. Itooka, who loved bananas and a yogurt-flavoured Japanese drink called Calpis, was born on May 23, 1908. She became the oldest person last year following the death of 117-year-old Maria Branyas, according to the Gerontology Research Group. When she was told she was at the top of the World Supercentenarian Rankings List, she simply replied, "Thank you." When Itooka celebrated her birthday last year, she received flowers, a cake and a card from the mayor. Born in Osaka, Itooka was a volleyball player in high school, and long had a reputation for a sprightly spirit, Nagata said. She climbed the 3,067-metre (10,062-foot) Mount Ontake twice.

# Mike Johnson re-elected as US House Speaker

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Republican Congressman Mike Johnson on Friday was re-elected as Speaker of the US House of Representatives with a narrow victory margin of three votes. The Republican Party has 219 seats in the House against Democrat's 215 seats, the smallest majority in nearly a century. After some tense moments Johnson, 52, who represents the fourth Congressional District of Louisiana, received 218 votes against 215 votes that went to Hakeem Jeffries of the Democratic Party. President-elect Donald Trump congratulated Johnson on his re-election. "Congratulations to Speaker Mike Johnson for receiving an unprecedented Vote of Confidence in Congress. Mike will be a great Speaker, and our country will be the beneficiary," he said. "The People of America have waited four years for common sense, strength, and leadership. They'll get it now, and America will be greater than ever before!" said Trump, who will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20. The US Congress on January 6 would formally certify the November 5th presidential elections that was won by Trump. Outgoing Vice President Kamala Harris will preside over a joint session of Congress to certify that Trump defeated her. This would make her only the third vice president to do so in the past century. In his acceptance speech, Johnson extended his full support to Trump. "It is the great honour of my life. This is a momentous time in our history," the Speaker said after his re-election. Soon thereafter he swore-in the members of the 119th



Congress. "Our people do not deserve to be ruled by millions of bureaucrats they never voted for, never met, and can't hold accountable," he said. "The American people have called on us to reject business as usual and throw out the status quo. We must and we will heed their call," he added. "In a democracy, there is a time to campaign and a time to govern. The election is over. This is a new Congress. The American people need us as their elected representatives in this season to put down our partisan swords and pick up bipartisan plowshares. Working together, we have the potential to be one of the most consequential Congresses in the history of this great nation," Johnson said. House Minority Leader Jeffries congratulated Johnson on his re-election.

# Soldier who blew up Tesla at Trump hotel left note, called it 'wake up call' for US

AP ■ LAS VEGAS

A highly decorated Army soldier who fatally shot himself in a Tesla Cybertruck just before it blew up outside the Trump hotel in Las Vegas left notes saying the New Year's Day explosion was a stunt to serve as a "wake up call" for the country's ills, investigators said Friday. Matthew Livelsberger, a 37-year-old Green Beret from Colorado Springs, Colorado, also wrote in notes he left on his cellphone that he needed to "cleanse" his mind "of the brothers I've lost and relieve myself of the burden of the lives I took." Livelsberger served in the Army since 2006 and deployed twice to Afghanistan. "This was not a terrorist attack, it was a wake up call. Americans only pay attention to spectacles and violence. What better way to get my point across than a stunt with fireworks and explosives," Livelsberger wrote in one letter found by authorities and released Friday. The explosion caused minor injuries to seven people but virtually no damage to the Trump



International Hotel. Authorities said that Livelsberger acted alone. Livelsberger's letters covered a range of topics including political grievances, societal problems and both domestic and international issues, including the war in Ukraine. He said in one letter that the U.S. was "terminally ill and headed toward collapse." Tesla engineers, meanwhile, helped extract data from the Cybertruck for investigators, including Livelsberger's path between charging stations from Colorado through New Mexico and Arizona and on to Las Vegas, according to Assistant

Sheriff Dori Koren. "We still have a large volume of data to go through," Koren said Friday. "There's thousands if not millions of videos and photos and documents and web history and all of those things that need to be analyzed." The new details came as investigators were still trying to determine whether Livelsberger sought to make a political point with the Tesla and the hotel bearing the president-elect's name. Livelsberger harbored no ill will toward President-elect Donald Trump, law enforcement officials said. In one of the notes he

left, he said the country needed to "rally around" Trump and Tesla CEO Elon Musk. Musk has recently become a member of Trump's inner circle. Neither Trump nor Musk was in Las Vegas on Wednesday, the day of the explosion. Both had attended Trump's New Year's Eve party at his South Florida estate. "Although this incident is more public and more sensational than usual, it ultimately appears to be a tragic case of suicide involving a heavily decorated combat veteran who was struggling with PTSD and other issues," Spencer Evans, the FBI special agent in charge in Las Vegas, said Friday. Livelsberger died of a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. Investigators have not yet explained how Livelsberger shot himself inside the Cybertruck while simultaneously igniting fireworks and camp fuel packed inside, causing the explosion. Among the charred items found inside were a handgun at Livelsberger's feet, another firearm, fireworks, a passport, a military ID, credit cards, an iPhone and a smartwatch.

# Biden to present Presidential Medal of Freedom to Hillary Clinton, George Soros and Lionel Messi

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden has named former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, fashion designer Ralph Lauren, football superstar Lionel Messi, former Defence Secretary late Ashton Carter, and controversial investor George Soros, along with 14 others for the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom. The Presidential Medal of Freedom, which is the Nation's highest civilian honour, would be presented to the awardees at a White House ceremony by Biden Saturday afternoon. The prestigious award is presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavours, the White House said Saturday. Biden believes great leaders keep the faith, give everyone a fair shot, and put decency above all else. These nineteen individuals are great leaders who have made America and the world a better place. They are great leaders because they are good people who have

made extraordinary contributions to their country and the world, the White House said. Clinton made history many times over decades in public service, including as the first First Lady elected to the US Senate. After serving as Secretary of State, she became the first woman nominated for president by a major US political party, the White House said. Soros is an investor, philanthropist, and founder of the Open Society Foundations. "Through his network of foundations, partners and projects in more than 120 countries, Soros has focused on global initiatives that strengthen democracy, human rights, education, and social justice," the White House said. Soros, 94, in the recent past has spoken openly against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The ruling BJP believe that he tried to interfere in Indian elections. In the last session of Parliament, the BJP raised the issue of alleged "links" of Congress leaders with Soros-backed outfits involved in "anti-India" activities, triggering vociferous protests from the opposition.

Congress, however, trashed these allegations. In 2020, Soros slammed the Modi government while addressing an event at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, saying nationalism was making headway and the "biggest setback" was seen in India. "Lionel Messi is the most decorated player in the history of professional soccer. He supports healthcare and education programmes for children around the world through the Leo Messi Foundation and serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador," the White House said. Fannie Lou Hamer, who transformed the struggle for racial justice in America, and Ashton Carter, who served as the 25th Secretary of Defence and devoted his career to making the nation safer for all, are being awarded the Medal of Freedom posthumously. Robert Francis Kennedy is remembered as an Attorney General who fiercely combated racial segregation, and as a United States Senator who sought to address poverty and inequality in the country and George W Romney, a businessman who served as the chair-

man and president of American Motors Corporation, are also being awarded posthumously. Jose Andres, renowned Spanish-American culinary innovator who popularised tapas in the United States; Bono the frontman for legendary rock band U2 and a pioneering activist against AIDS and poverty; Michael J. Fox, an actor who has won five Emmy Awards, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, and a Grammy Award; and Tim Gill, a visionary entrepreneur whose work has advanced LGBTQI rights and equality, are other recipients of the award. Other awardees are Jane Goodall, a world-renowned ethologist and conservationist; Earvin "Magic" Johnson, a legendary retired basketball player who led the Los Angeles Lakers to five championships; and Ralph Lauren, a fashion designer who redefined the fashion industry with a lifestyle brand that embodies timeless elegance and American tradition. William Sanford Nye inspired and influenced generations of American students as "Bill Nye the Science Guy."

# Imran Khan claims he was given chance to leave country on exile for 3 years

AP ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has claimed that he was offered a chance to leave the country on exile for three years but he declined. In a post on X on Friday, the 72-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician said, "I was offered the opportunity of a three-year exile while I was in Attock Jail, but I will live and die in Pakistan." In conversation with media persons at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail where he is incarcerated since August 2023, Khan said he has been "indirectly approached" with an offer to transfer him to his Bani Gala residence in Islamabad. However, he said on X that he refused the offer. "My stance is clear: release my detained workers and leaders first. Only then will I consider discussing my personal situation." The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder further said that he believes Pakistan's decisions should be made within the country. "However, when it comes to basic human rights, voices will naturally rise globally. Institutions like the United Nations exist for this purpose. Enlightened people all over the world raise their voices against violation of basic rights." Khan said during this "authoritarian era", the breach of personal freedoms, violation of fundamental legal rights, and destruction of institutions have



not only disrupted the country's social and political systems but also its legal and economic frameworks. "The absurd manner in which Khalid Khurshid (former Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister) was sentenced to 34 years in prison demonstrates that there is no rule of law in our country any more, and a terrible undeclared dictatorship prevails," he said. "Even in Musharraf's era, we criticised military interference but never faced such oppression and fascism," he said. On reports that the incoming Donald Trump administration will pressure the Shehbaz Sharif government for his release, he said: "I expect Trump to remain neutral, unlike Biden who, as the world knows, influenced by General Bajwa, played a role in ousting our government through a vote of no confidence, which was blatant interference." Regarding his party talks with the government, Khan said: "Our negotiation committee is engaging with the government. Our demands are legitimate — formation of a judicial commis-

sion on November 26, 2024 and May 9, 2023 incidents, release of political prisoners." On May 9, 2023, Khan's party supporters allegedly attacked several military installations, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi and the ISI building in Faisalabad, to vent their anger against the arrest of their party founder in a corruption case. He also said the statements by the Director General ISPR (media wing of army) about the events of May 9 are untrue. "Whoever stole the CCTV footage had orchestrated the May 9 events (attack of state and military installations). Verdicts in these cases were obtained from military courts because no one was going to demand the CCTV footage there. Our people were directly shot at and martyred on November 26. The entire truth will be revealed when transparent investigations of these two incidents are conducted. "We have given the government a deadline of January 31. Meanwhile, our campaign to boycott remittances continues alongside negotiations. The boycott campaign can be reconsidered if the government shows that they are serious about addressing our demands," Khan declared. The second round of talks between the government and PTI 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.

# Senior official of Pak's Kurram district injured in firing

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

The Deputy Commissioner of northwest Pakistan's restive Kurram district was injured when assailants fired on his convoy on Saturday, days after a peace agreement was reached between two warring parties in the sectarian-violence-hit district. According to sources, the incident took place in the Kojalai Baba village near Bagan, when residents opened fire on military vehicles, injuring Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kurram Javedullah Mehsud and three security personnel. Mehsud was in the area to review arrangements for an aid convoy to take food items to the district after the main Peshawar-Sadda-Thall-Parachinar road's opening after 85 days of closure. Sources said that the firing took place during negotiations between government officials and the protesters who had blocked the main road. Mehsud was shot thrice and was rushed to a hospital in the Lower Alizai tehsil for treatment. Three protesters were also injured, official sources said. "We suspect that local spoilers are involved in the attack," said a military official. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government spokesperson Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that the situation in Kurram is "under control". He said all travel and security-

related arrangements were in place for the protection of the convoy. "The DC is undergoing surgery but his condition is out of danger," said Barrister Saif, who was present at the scene along with the Kohat Commissioner and Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and provincial Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the firing and sought a report on the incident from senior officials. He wished those injured in the firing a speedy recovery. "Such an incident after the Kurram peace agreement is highly regrettable and condemnable," said Gandapur. "The incident is a deliberate and malicious but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to sabotage the government's efforts for peace in Kurram," he said, adding that those involved in the firing will face strict legal action. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Kundi also condemned the incident. "I pray for the speedy recovery of Deputy Commissioner Kurram Javed Mehsud and others injured," Kundi said. "The recurrence of firing incidents on the main highway in Lower Kurram is deeply concerning," he said, adding that it was a "heinous conspiracy" to sabotage the peace efforts made by the Peace Jirga (council) for lasting harmony in the district.

# Myanmar releases thousands of prisoners to mark Independence Day

AP ■ BANGKOK

Myanmar's military government has released more than 6,000 prisoners and has reduced other inmates' sentences as part of a mass amnesty marking the 77th anniversary of independence from Britain on Saturday. They included just a small proportion of hundreds of political detainees jailed for opposing army rule since the military seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. That takeover was met with massive nonviolent resistance, which has since become a widespread armed struggle. State-run MRTV television reported that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, granted

amnesties covering 5,864 prisoners from Myanmar, as well as 180 foreigners who will be deported. Mass prisoner releases are common on holidays and other significant occasions in Myanmar. The terms of release warn that if the freed detainees violate the law again, they will have to serve the remainder of their original sentences in addition to any new sentence. In a separate report, it said Min Aung Hlaing had commuted the life sentences of 144 prisoners to 15 years' imprisonment. The report provided no details about them. The report also said that all other prisoners will have their sentences reduced by one sixth, except those convicted under the Explosive Substances Act, the Unlawful

Associations Act, the Arms Act and the Counterterrorism Law, all laws which are often used against opponents of military rule. Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, the spokesperson for the military government, said in an audio note to journalists that those being released included about 600 prisoners who were prosecuted under Section 505(A) of Myanmar's penal code, which makes it a crime to spread comments that create public unrest or fear or spread false news. He said Khet Aung, a former chief minister of the southern Kachin state, was among those freed. Khet Aung was arrested soon after the army takeover and was sentenced in April 2022 to 12 years in prison on corruption charges.

# German chancellor 'keeping cool' against critical personal comments by Elon Musk

AP ■ BERLIN

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says he's staying "cool" against critical personal comments made by Elon Musk but finds it worrying that the US billionaire makes the effort to get involved in Germany's general election by endorsing the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Scholz was reacting after Musk, a close aide to US President-elect Donald Trump, called

the chancellor a "fool" after his coalition government collapsed in November and later backed the AfD in an opinion piece he wrote for a major newspaper in Germany. Scholz, head of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), told German magazine Stern on Saturday there is "nothing new" in criticism by "rich media entrepreneurs who do not appreciate social democratic politics and do not hold back with their opinions." "You have to stay cool," Scholz

told Stern. "I find it much more worrying than such insults that Musk is supporting a party like the AfD, which is in parts right-wing extremist, which preaches rapprochement with Putin's Russia and wants to weaken transatlantic relations," Scholz said. The AfD is monitored by Germany's domestic intelligence service on suspicion of being right-wing extremist and has already been recognised as such in some individual German states.



# India 141-6 at stumps, lead by 145 runs against Australia in fifth Test

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Staying true to his aggressive style of play, generational talent Rishabh Pant conjured up a spectacular 33-ball-61 to somehow keep India afloat even as Australia remained in driver's seat in the fifth Test, which is poised for an intriguing finish. It was largely due to Pant's breathtaking knock that India finished the second day at 141 for 6 for an overall lead of 145. Pant entrained the packed SCG with four monstrous sixes and six boundaries. His back-to-back sixes off Mitchell Starc into the heritage Ladies Members Stands were for posterity. Pant's knock prevented Indian second innings from falling apart with the visitors top and lower order struggling to negotiate Aussie attack on a track that was aided seam and bounce. This was after unheralded bowling duo of Prasad Krishna (3/42) and Nitish Reddy (2/32) complemented Mohammed Siraj

(3/51) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/33) to shoot Australia out for 181. On a difficult track, Virat Kohli (6) and his top-order colleagues found Scott Boland (3/38) too hot to handle. Kohli lost his wicket on outside the off stump line for the eighth successive time in this series. The match is certain to end on the third day but if India will be able to defend the total will very much depend on whether skipper Jasprit Bumrah is fit to bowl full tilt. Bumrah underwent precautionary scans for an unspecified injury after he left the field in the post-lunch session in which he bowled just one over. If even a half-fit Bumrah bowls, it won't be easy for Australia to chase even a 175-run target on a track with variable bounce and widening cracks. **Pant Power** Having curbed his natural instinct to attack during a sedate 40 in the first essay after being torn to shreds by the most important member of the Indian coaching staff for indiscreet shot selection



at the MCG, Pant perhaps cleared his mind about what he needed to do. He came in at a time when not just

Boland but even debutant Beau Webster was getting the ball to move a proverbial mile off the deck.

There was steep bounce available at the Randwick End (far end) where Kohli got out. Boland pitched it on hard length and got

both seam and bounce. The result was a now familiar dab towards slips as Kohli's future beyond 123 Tests looks doubtful. This was after both KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal got a couple of rippers. However once Pant came out, he was a man-on-a-mission as the first ball disappeared into the long-on stand. The fallen pull shot also came out of the closet. It was exhilarating stuff. Pant rode on bounce and hit Webster over point but the two sixes off Starc do take the cake. It was understood that Pant was mentally not in frame due to unsolicited sermons from a coaching staff member, who despite knowing the dashing southpaw's game told him to play otherwise. At one point, a clueless Pat Cummins was forced to put six fielders near the boundary ropes. The skipper himself who saw the back of Pant, inducing edge from a ball that rose. Indian and Australian fans gave a standing ovation to the diminutive

southpaw. **Third pacer steps up** In the post lunch session, Prasad and Reddy more than made up for skipper Bumrah's absence as India took 51 overs to bowl out the hosts. Steve Smith's (33) dismissal off Prasad just before lunch disturbed Australia's rhythm. Post lunch, Prasad came from round the wicket from the Paddington End and removed Alex Carey (21) with an angled-in delivery. Carey was looking good but once Karnataka speedster found his length, he was literally unplayable. Debutant Webster (57) justified his selection with a half-century but it was Reddy, coming for his second spell, sparked a collapse with wickets of Cummins and Mitchell Starc, both done in by subtle movement off the surface. The final blow was dealt by Prasad. He used the uneven bounce and cracks off the surface to get one bounce awkwardly at Webster and Jaiswal snaffled the catch.



## Enough variable bounce to keep us in the game: Prasidh Krishna

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India's overall lead is not even close to the 200-run mark but pacer Prasidh Krishna says the unpredictable nature of the SCG track will keep them in the hunt since batting won't be easy for Australia in the fourth innings because of the variable bounce. India ended the second day at 141 for six for an overall lead of 145. A win in the Sydney Test will ensure that India retain the Border Gavaskar Trophy. "It is getting difficult in some areas. The ball is keeping low sometimes but there is enough bounce for us to be in the game and look for those edges. Try and beat them on either side of the bat," Prasidh said during the media interaction. He didn't put a number on what would be a defendable total for the visitors. "There is no particular number in mind but then as many runs as we score would be great. We are ready to bowl them out for whatever," the Karnataka speedster, who got the prized scalp of Steve Smith in the first innings, said. Prasidh got Smith at the stroke of lunch but during his spell in the first session, he was guilty of missing his length. He either went too full or too short. "The difference was when I got back from lunch, I actually looked at where I was bowling. I sat with the analyst and we had a better idea of what my reference point is. When I came in to bowl next, that really helped." Prasidh came to Australia at least three weeks earlier

compared to the senior team and played in the India A games. He looked good at MCG against Australia A. "I did get a bit of confidence bowling in Australia and having played some red ball cricket previously in the Dulip Trophy I was in good rhythm. "When I got the ball in hand, obviously there was a bit of nerves when I started off, the first over went well, the next few didn't go really well. But then I have enough people in the team who I can actually go to sit down and discuss what went wrong, what could have been better." Prasidh thanked bowling coach Morne Morkel for helping him with his bowling plans. "Morne and myself, we kind of have a lot of discussions about what has to be done and things are going well for now." The last Test that he played was in Cape Town in January 2024 and it has been a ride fraught with ups and downs for the lanky speedster, who had to undergo a back surgery in New Zealand. Asked what changes he has brought in his bowling, he spoke about the mental shift from opening the bowling with Red SG Test for Karnataka and then coming one change for the national team where he got a semi-old Kookaburra with suppressed seam. "That was a really good learning curve for me because every time I played for my state I was bowling with a new ball, coming here having to bowl one change, I looked at what everybody in the world does when they are bowling one change.

## McDonald surprised by Pant's subdued play in first innings

PTI ■ SYDNEY

It was not at all surprising that Rishabh Pant bulldozed the Australian attack with his stroke-play in the second innings but his ultra-defensive approach on the opening day indeed was, Australia head coach Andrew McDonald said on Saturday. Pant had laboured to 40 off 98 balls, taking multiple blows on his body during his 149-minute stay on the wicket. Pant had said that he was not in a frame of mind to attack. Pant, though, changed the gears effortlessly in the second innings, hitting Mitchell Starc for two massive sixes. Scott Boland and Beau Webster were not spared either as they too were lofted for a six each. "First of all, it's not surprising, the way he plays. We were in fact a little bit surprised in the first innings, the way he went about his work. He's got an incredible ability to put pressure back on to bowlers," McDonald said, doffing his hat to India's biggest match-winner in Test cricket in recent years. However, Australia didn't allow Pant to completely walk



away as Pat Cummins dismissed him just when things looked like getting out of hand. "We're planning for that though, we'll plan leading into the summer. We bounced in and out of a few plans there and clearly kept taking on the boundary riders and was getting away with it and no, it was an innings that you would say was right for that time." Boland has been difficult match-up for Kohli. Virat Kohli has been out eight times in his nine innings while fishing at deliveries on or outside the off-stump and

Australia head coach praised his bowlers, especially Scott Boland, who sent back the India stalwart four times in five Tests. Does it seem easy to get Kohli out? "No, it's never easy to get Virat out," McDonald, trying to contain his smile of satisfaction. "I give full credit to the bowlers and the execution of the plan. It's one thing to have a plan, but then to be able to execute is another thing. It's put him (Kohli) under immense pressure. And, look, he's tried some things."

"He's tried walking out of his crease. He's tried different tactics as well. But clearly that relentless nature of our bowlers, in particular, Scottie (Boland), the 'match-up' has been incredibly difficult for him to combat. But he's never an easy wicket, no." This is a pitch for even contests The traditional SCG wicket is usually a batting paradise and also helps the spinners towards the end but the ongoing Test has unfolded on a green top with variable bounce on offer. McDonald did not hide his appreciation for the ground staff for preparing a fair track. "The ground staff have done an incredible job in terms of, creating a wicket with something in it. Traditionally here it's quite benign and we've had a lot of draws, so a lot of people have been talking about the draws, so you're damned if you do it and damned if you don't. So this game's sped up. "I think he's trying to produce an even contest between bat and ball. There's no doubt about that. It's made for interesting cricket."



## I am not going anywhere, I just stood down from this Test: Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Senior India batter Rohit Sharma on Saturday firmly dismissed his retirement rumours, saying he is "not going anywhere" and offered poor form as the reason for him "standing down" from the ongoing Sydney Test against Australia. Grappling with modest form, Rohit "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test, handing over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah, sparking widespread speculations about his future. "I have not retired. I stood down, that is what I would say. Basically the chat that I had with the coach and the selector was very simple. I am not able to score runs, there is no form, it is an important match and we need a player with form," Rohit told Star Sports. "As it is, in our batting, the form of the boys is not that good. So you cannot carry a lot of out of form players in the team. This simple thing was going on in my mind. I am not going anywhere," he added. The 37-year-old said the team management and selectors backed his decision. "I wanted to tell the coach and the selector that this is what is going on in my mind. They backed my decision. They said that you have been playing for so many years. You know what you are doing. "So for me, it was difficult to take this decision. But if everything is kept in front, then this decision was sensible, I will not think much further," he added. In Rohit's absence, Shubman Gill was included in the India eleven for the crucial fifth match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as India is trailing 1-2. The Mumbaier endured a tough time in Test cricket in

2024, accumulating just 619 runs in 26 innings across 14 matches averaging 24.76. Before standing down, he had scored just 31 runs across five innings in three Tests in this series after joining the team following the Perth Test. Rohit's bold call triggered speculations that he might pull the plug on his Test career after this series. "This is not a retirement decision. I am not going to leave the game. There is no such decision. But I am out of this game because the bat is not working. "But there is no guarantee that the bat will not work after 5 months. There is no guarantee that the bat will not work after two months or six months down the line," Rohit said. He hoped for a turnaround in his fortunes sooner than later. "We have seen a lot in cricket. Every minute, every second, every day life changes. So, I have a belief that things will change. "But, at the same time, I have to be realistic as well. So, if a person has a mic inside, or a laptop, or a pen, what he writes, what he says, it does not change our life. We have played this game for so many years. "So, these people cannot decide when we should go or when we should not play. I am a sensible man. I am a mature man. I am the father of two children. So, I have a little brain to decide what I want in life," he noted. Asked if he took this decision after the Melbourne Test defeat, Rohit said: "No, I took this decision after coming to Sydney. Because after the match, we had only two days in between. And one day was New Year's eve. So on New Year's, I did not want to tell this to the coach and the selector.

## Novak Djokovic beaten by big-serving Reilly Opelka in quarterfinals of Brisbane International

AP ■ BRISBANE

Novak Djokovic was beaten 7-6 (6), 6-3 by big-serving Reilly Opelka in the Brisbane International quarterfinals. The 37-year-old Djokovic was playing his first tournament of the year. The 24-time Grand Slam champion is preparing for the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 12 and which he has won 10 times. "Amazing tennis, Reilly. Absolutely deserved," Djokovic wrote on Instagram. Opelka served 16 aces — including one to finish off each set — to earn one of the biggest wins of the American's career. "I was just focused on my



spots," Opelka said. "If I hit them, it's hard to get them back. If there's anyone that can, it's him. "We have nothing to lose coming in against him. He's the greatest player ever," Opelka added. "So you end up playing more free and you

take a lot more risk. If you play your normal level or even above a normal level, he's going to win every time. So it's tough in his position because he gets guys that are good players that they roll the dice. And on a day like this when a lot of things go

my way that's how it works out." New coach Andy Murray will join Djokovic in Melbourne. Opelka achieved a career-high ranking of No. 17 in Feb. 2022 before undergoing hip surgery later that year to remove a benign tumor. He's now No. 293. "It was tough. A lot of uncertainty, a lot of doubt," Opelka said. In the semifinals, Opelka will face Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, who beat Jakob Mensik 7-5, 7-6 (5). The other semifinal will feature Jiri Lehecka against Grigor Dimitrov. Lehecka beat Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 6-4 and Dimitrov advanced when Jordan Thompson retired while Dimitrov was ahead 6-1, 2-1.

## It's an answer to all those who made fun of me: Para shuttler Nithya on Arjuna Award

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paralympic bronze medalist and Arjuna Award winner Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan still remembers those tearful days at school when relentless bullying left her devastated and depressed. Now a successful shuttler, the 19-year-old believes the prestigious award has come as a just reward for those days of turmoil. "When I was in 6th or 7th standard, there was not much growth in me. In schools, there was bullying. I used to be very sad. I used to cry for every small thing. So, yeah, it's kind of an answer to them that I can also do something and achieve big," Nithya told PTI. Reflecting on her

achievements, she added, "I have seen so many of my co-athletes who are winning awards and are achievers. So, getting one of the national awards is something very prestigious. "It is a proud moment for me. All the medals and awards are like a gift for me — a recognition of my hard work, dedication to the game, practicing every day, following everything, and being disciplined." Born and raised in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, Nithya had lost her mother when she was just one year old. Her father and grandmother became her unwavering support system, with her brother standing by her side as a constant companion. "I used to stay inside the house a lot, So just to get me

out, my dad was continuously pushing me to play. Badminton has helped me. I feel really free now. Before taking up badminton, I actually wouldn't speak much. Now, I'm able to speak to many people," said Nithya, who won three bronze medals at the 2022 Asian Para Games. Her father, an avid sports enthusiast, and her brother, who played cricket at the district level, introduced Nithya to the world of sports. Cricket was initially her first love. "My dad used to play cricket with a big team every Sunday, and I would go with him to watch. My brother was a district player, and I also accompanied him to his academy. Sometimes, we played cricket on the street.



However, when I considered taking up cricket, there were no female athletes," said Nithya.

She watched badminton for the first time during the Rio Olympics, and everything changed. The racquet sport

soon became her chosen sport, turning into an all-consuming passion. "My brother took up badminton for fitness, and I joined him. Watching Sindhu in 2016 inspired me, and my friends and I started playing badminton in the streets. This sparked my interest in training, and I started practicing twice a week, gradually increasing to daily sessions. "When COVID hit, I couldn't train, but once it was over, I resumed and discovered Para badminton. That's when I moved to Lucknow (under Gaurav Khanna, Head Coach of Team India) for training," added Nithya, who has recently started training at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy

(PPBA) due to its proximity to her hometown. A fan of Chinese legend Lin Dan, Nithya discovered the world of Para-Badminton in 2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19 and started competing in international events from 2021. "Looking ahead to 2025, the Asian Championship will be one of the key Paralympic events this year. Next year, we have the World Championship. My target is to peak by 2028 Los Angeles Games, so there are no shorter goals now—only focusing on the World Championship each year leading up to 2028," said Nithya. Recently, there was a controversy when two-time Paris bronze medalist shooter Manu Bhaker's name

didn't figure in the initial list of nomination for the national award due to lapses in applying on time. Asked about her opinion, Nithya said the government should recognise them without athletes having to apply. "When I got a call from my team telling me I had to apply for a national award, I was surprised. I didn't know that athletes had to apply themselves. I always thought the government would recognise and honour athletes directly. "Government supports us a lot, and they must be aware of our achievements. They back us in tournaments and training, so I believe they should recognise athletes without us having to apply," she signed off.





# Phool Khilein Hai Gulshan Gulshan

"Flowers are the music of the ground, from Earth's lips they speak" — Edwin Curran

Delhi's winter gardens bloom with vibrant colours, offering a peaceful, rejuvenating escape amid chilly mornings, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

As winter settles in, Delhi transforms into a canvas painted with nature's brightest colours. In January and February, the city bursts into bloom, with vibrant flowers filling the air with fragrance and painting the streets in shades of red, pink, white and yellow.

The cold breeze brushes against your face, but it's the sight of flowers scattered across parks, streets and gardens that brings warmth to the season. Wrapped in woolen layers, people venture out, eager to experience the charm of Delhi's winter gardens. The city, known for its bustling streets and busy markets, becomes a space of natural beauty, offering a tranquil escape for those who wish to experience the quieter side of life.

The streets are alive with flower vendors, their carts brimming with bright blossoms. The colours of the flowers stand out against the grey of the streets, giving a joyful touch to the city's landscape. From *Daisies to roses*, every flower seems to tell its own story, contributing to the lively atmosphere. Parks and gardens are filled with families, children and friends, all taking time to marvel at nature's work.

Among the many spots where Delhiites gather, the *Brics Friendship Rose Garden* stands out. Its endless varieties of roses, red, pink, white, and yellow, fill the garden with their elegance. A walk through this garden feels like stepping into a painting, where every bloom is carefully placed to create a masterpiece. The roses, with their soft petals and vibrant colours, seem to tell the story of the



season, a season of beauty, growth, and renewal. Not far from here, *Lodi Garden* offers its own magic. The soft winter sunlight filters through the trees, casting long shadows on the ground while highlighting bursts of colour from the flowers below. *Daisies*, with their cheerful white petals, brighten up garden beds, adding a light touch to the winter gloom. *Poppies* sway gently in the breeze, their bold red petals creating a striking contrast against the muted backdrop. *Dianthus barbatus*, with its detailed patterns, draws curious gazes from those who pass by. It's a place that invites

you to pause and appreciate the little things, like the texture of a flower's petals or the way the wind makes them dance. The quiet hum of the park, combined with the gentle presence of flowers, creates an atmosphere of calm, offering a break from the city's constant rush. One of the highlights of the season is *Amrit Udyan*, formerly known as the *Mughal Gardens*, at *Rashttrapati Bhavan*. Open to the public for a brief period at the end of January and the beginning of February, the garden offers a breathtaking experience. The garden, with its grand pathways and symmetrical design, is home to a variety of

flowers, each more stunning than the last. *Hyacinths*, with their soft pastel shades and soothing fragrance, line the walkways, offering a moment of tranquillity in the midst of the garden's grandeur. The roses - *carosine*, *bonica* and *bush roses*, stand out as the garden's crown jewels. Their delicate petals, in varying shades of red, pink, and white, add an elegant touch to the space. The golden blooms of the *yellow sibiriana* trees brighten the garden, their cheerful colour lighting up even the quietest corners. Together, these flowers create a space where nature takes centre

stage, inviting visitors to slow down and immerse themselves in the beauty around them.

The flowers in *Amrit Udyan* and other gardens around the city don't just beautify the landscape, they also bring a sense of togetherness. Families walk hand in hand, children run along flower-lined paths, their laughter echoing through the air. Couples sit on benches, quietly enjoying the view, while elderly visitors bask in the warmth of the sun. The flowers provide a peaceful backdrop for these moments, adding a sense of calm to the busy lives of the city's inhabitants. It's a time when Delhi feels slower, gentler, and more inviting, with nature offering its own reminder to take a break from the fast pace of modern life.

Even in the busiest corners of Delhi, there are small moments of beauty to be found. Flower vendors, with their colourful carts, brighten up the busiest streets. Roundabouts are dotted with flower beds, each one a small oasis of colour in the midst of the traffic. Trees adorned with golden flowers seem to lift everyone's spirits, their bright blooms creating a cheerful atmosphere even in the most crowded areas. These small touches of nature add an unexpected layer of beauty to the city, offering a gentle reminder of the season's charm.

While Delhi's streets can often feel chaotic, its gardens offer a peaceful reprieve. Whether you're in the *Brics Friendship Rose Garden*, *Lodi Garden* or *Amrit Udyan*, the flowers remind you to slow down, to appreciate the beauty around you and to find moments of stillness in the hustle of everyday life.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



## SUGGESTED BINGES



**AVICII - I'M TIM**  
IMDB Rating: 8/10  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: Henrik Burman  
Cast: Tim Bergling, Chris Martin



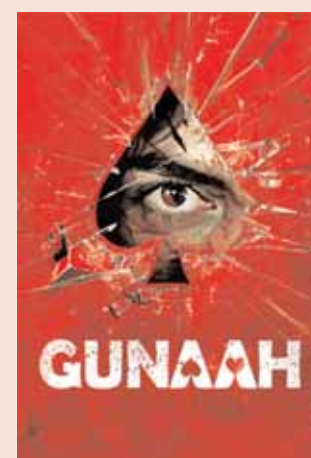
**CUNK ON LIFE**  
IMDB Rating: 7.9/10  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: Al Campbell  
Cast: Diane Morgan, Michelle Greenidge, Charles Aitken



**STAR WARS: SKELETON CREW**  
IMDB Rating: 7.2/10  
OTT: Disney+ Hotstar  
Cast: Jude Law, Robert Timothy Smith, Ryan Kiera Armstrong, Dominic Burgess, Tunde Adebimpe



**MISSING YOU**  
IMDB Rating: 6.3/10  
OTT: Netflix  
Director: Sean Spencer  
Cast: Rosalind Eleazar, Ashley Walters, Richard Armitage, Charlie Hamblett



**GUNAAH SEASON 2**  
IMDB Rating: 7/10  
OTT: Disney+ Hotstar  
Director: Anil Senior  
Cast: Gashmeer Mahajani, Tanmay Nagar, Surbhi Jyoti

## IN KHOJ OF THRILL

*Khoj - Parchaiyo Ke Uss Paar* falls bland in the mystery and thriller genre despite commendable performances, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**



In 1989, the movie *Khoj* brought together *Naseeruddin Shah* and *Rishi Kapoor* in a suspenseful tale of deceit and mystery. The story revolved around a man whose wife mysteriously vanished, only to have another woman claim to be his wife. While the film's climax fell flat, its premise remained exciting.

Fast forward to the present, and *Khoj - Parchaiyo Ke Uss Paar* attempts to reimagine the suspense in a web series format. Directed by *Prabal Baruah* and produced by *Juggernaut*, this *Zee5* thriller stars *Sharib Hashmi*, *Anupriya Goenka*, and *Aamir Dalvi* in pivotal roles. Unfortunately, it struggles to deliver the nail-biting tension audiences expect from such a genre. The story follows *Ved* played by *Sharib Hashmi*, a man desperately searching for his missing wife, *Meera*, played by *Anupriya Goenka*. As he goes deeper into her disappearance, *Ved* encounters bizarre events and clues that challenge his grip on reality. A sceptical police officer complicates matters, questioning *Ved's* narrative and leaving him to prove that the woman posing as *Meera* is not, in fact, his wife.

While the first three episodes, particularly *Aar Ya Paar*, maintain a semblance of intrigue, the series begins to lose steam soon after. The narrative

feels unnecessarily stretched, adding little value to the plot. Despite a strong performance by *Sharib Hashmi* in a rare lead role, and *Anupriya Goenka's* stellar portrayal, the storyline fails to capitalise on its potential. The biggest letdown is the predictability of the plot. The absence of genuine twists and an underwhelming climax detract from what could have been an interesting watch. The final episode abruptly resolves the mystery, leaving viewers dissatisfied. Moreover, the police inspector's role is underdeveloped, adding little to the progression of the narrative.

Another notable drawback is the lack of an impactful background score, which could have significantly enhanced the suspense. The awkward cliffhanger endings to each episode feel forced, especially for a series with a mere 140-minute runtime, which would have been better suited as a film. Despite its flaws, the performances by *Sharib Hashmi* and *Anupriya Goenka* are the saving grace of the series, making it a tolerable one-time watch. However, the lack of originality and engaging drama keeps it from standing out.

Rating: 2/5

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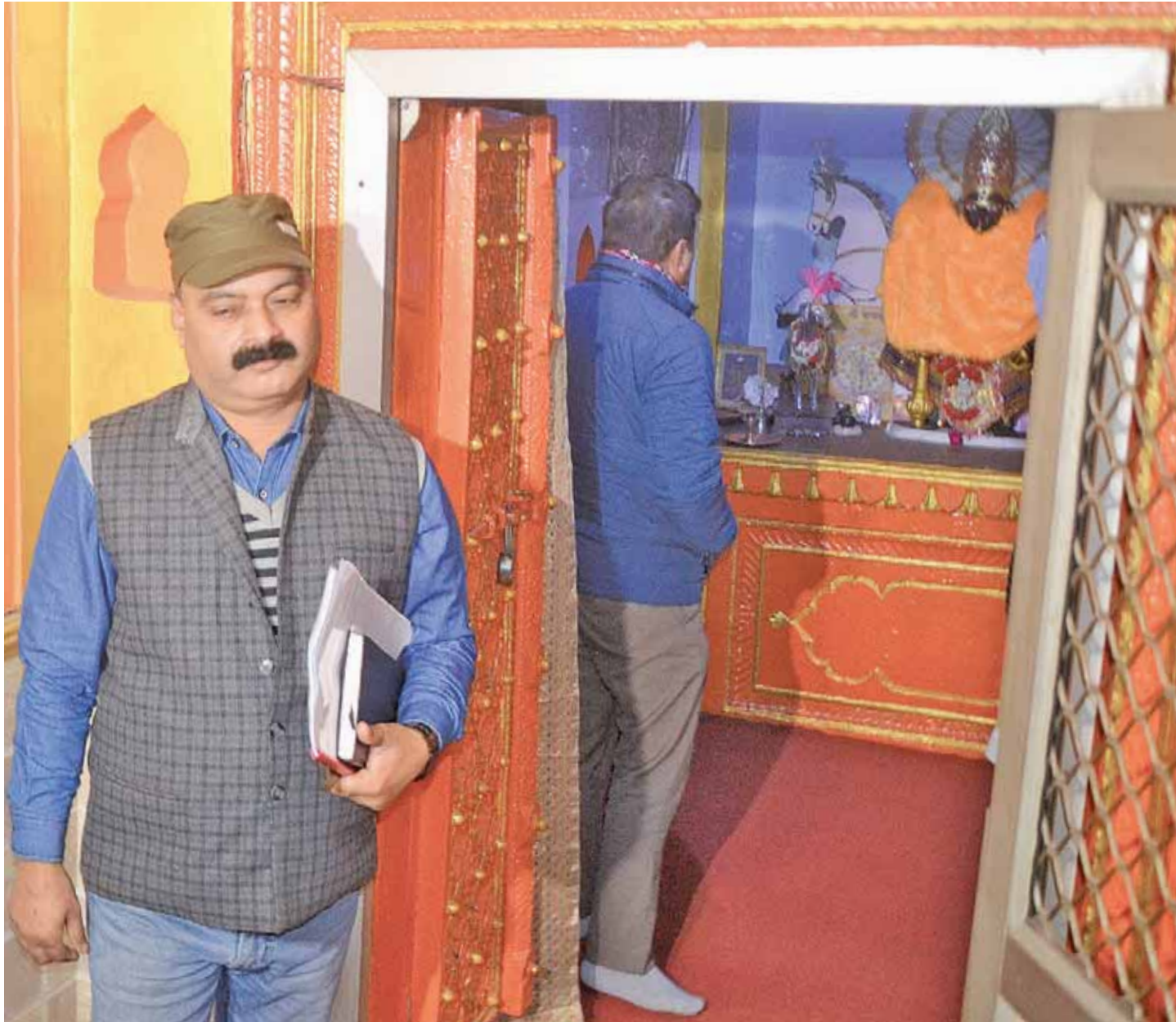
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"If you want to understand today you have to search yesterday"

— Pearl S. Buck



## DISCOVERY IN SAMBHAL: UNEARTHING ANCIENT TEMPLES AND WELLS

A historic discovery in Sambhal reveals ancient temples, wells, and stepwells, offering valuable insights into the region's cultural heritage, says **BISWAJEET BANERJEE** and **SAJID KHAN**

What began as a routine inspection by district officials to check noise levels from loudspeakers and illegal electricity connections in the Muslim-dominated *Khaggu Sarai* area of Sambhal has turned into a historic archaeological discovery. On 14 December, a team led by the District Magistrate (DM) and Superintendent of Police (SP) stumbled upon a locked structure. Breaking open its doors revealed not just an abandoned Shiva temple but also a wealth of history hidden beneath layers of soil and silt. The discovery of the temple, which had been locked for 46 years, has prompted a flurry of activity, including surveys by the *Archaeological Survey of India* (ASI). Early reports suggest the temple, and other relics unearthed nearby, may date back several centuries, providing invaluable insights into Sambhal's rich cultural and religious history.

### Locked Temple, Unlocked History

Dr. *Rajendra Pansiya* recalled the unexpected nature of the find. "This discovery was purely accidental. We were investigating noise and electricity issues near a mosque, but what we found behind the locked doors was remarkable," he said. The temple, which had been shut since the 1978 communal riots, housed a Shiva idol and a statue of Hanuman. Nearby, a well contained three additional statues that were uncovered during excavation. The riots of 1978, which displaced many from the local Hindu community, had led to the temple being abandoned. "Local accounts suggest the temple is over 500 years old," Dr. *Pansiya* added. To confirm its antiquity, the district administration reached out to the ASI for carbon dating and further investigation.

### The ASI Steps In

Following the DM's request, a four-member ASI team from Meerut and Delhi conducted an extensive eight-hour survey of the site last week. The team examined the temple, the adjacent well, and five other pilgrimage sites, including *Bhadrak Ashram*, *Swargdeep*, and *Chakrapani*. During their survey, they documented their findings through photography and collected evidence for further analysis.



In addition to the temple, the ASI team identified 19 wells, including the historically significant *Chaturmukh Koop*, *Moksha Koop*, and *Dharma Koop*. The ASI's investigation aims to establish the historical and cultural significance of these sites. Dr. *Pansiya* expressed optimism about the findings. "Once we have the ASI's report, we will have a clearer picture of the historical importance of these sites. Based on their recommendations, we will prepare a plan for their preservation and development," he said.

### The Stepwell of Laxman Ganj

Adding to the list of discoveries, a 250-foot-deep stepwell, believed to date back to the First War of Independence in



ONCE WE HAVE THE ASI'S REPORT, WE WILL HAVE A CLEARER PICTURE OF THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THESE SITES. BASED ON THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS, WE WILL PREPARE A PLAN FOR THEIR PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
— DR. PANSIYA



1857, was unearthed in Sambhal's *Laxman Ganj* area last week. Named *Rani ki Bawdi*, the stepwell came to light after the ruins of an ancient *Banke Bihari* temple were discovered earlier this month. *Kaushal Kishore*, the state publicity chief of the *Sanatan Sevak Sangh*, had written to the DM, pointing out the historical significance of the site. "The stepwell and the ruins are remnants of the royal family of Sahaspur. These finds are a testament to our history," Kishore said. The excavation, which involved two bulldozers, also revealed a two-storey structure near the stepwell. Work at the site is ongoing, with authorities halting operations at night due to visibility issues. "Encroachments on the site have been identified, and notices will be issued to families occupying the land illegally," Dr. *Pansiya* said, adding that the administration is committed to restoring and beautifying the area. The discovery of the ancient stepwell, or *Bawdi*, in Sambhal has brought to light the rich history of the region, linked to the erstwhile royal family of *Sahaspur State in Bilari*. Official records list the *Bawdi* as a pond spanning 400 square metres. However, recent excavations have revealed much more—a well-preserved three-storey structure featuring intricate architecture and significant historical relevance. "The *Bawdi* was constructed during the reign of the king of Bilari and is believed to be approximately 150 years old," Dr. *Pansiya* said. The structure includes two marble floors and one brick floor, along with a well and four rooms, all part of an elaborate underground complex. Signs of encroachment on the site have also been identified, and the

administration plans to address this issue promptly. The site, once a vital part of the *Sahaspur State*, served as a rest stop for soldiers and the royal family during their travels. *Shipra Gera*, a relative of the royal family, recounted the historical importance of the *Bawdi*. "This place was a strategic stopover for soldiers travelling from *Sahaspur (Bilari)* to villages under the State's control, which now fall in the *Badaun* district. The royal family also used the underground complex during their journeys to escape the scorching summer heat," she said. The *Bawdi's* corridors were manned by soldiers, and the site served both functional and leisure purposes. The underground chambers provided a cool retreat for the royals, while the stepwell itself ensured a steady water supply for their needs. As restoration and research continue, the *Bawdi* and its surrounding structures are set to become a beacon of Sambhal's historical legacy, offering locals and visitors alike a chance to reconnect with the region's storied past.

### A Shared History Unearthed

The discoveries in Sambhal are a poignant reminder of the region's layered history, which is often obscured by present-day tensions. The proximity of the temple to the *Shahi Jama Masjid*, where violence had erupted during a protest against a court-ordered survey, underscores the intertwined histories of communities that have lived together for centuries. Local historian and archaeologist *Dr. Arvind Sharma* highlighted the significance of the finds. "These discoveries provide a window into the past, showcasing Sambhal's role as a cultural and religious hub. The preservation of these sites is not just about protecting relics but also about understanding our shared heritage," he said. The district administration, in collaboration with the ASI, is now focused on ensuring that these historical sites are preserved and developed responsibly. Plans include creating tourist-friendly infrastructure while maintaining the integrity of the sites. The discoveries have sparked excitement and curiosity among locals. "We've always heard stories about these places, but seeing them come to light is incredible. It feels like a part of our history has been revived," said *Sunil Kumar*, a Sambhal resident. As excavation and research continue, the findings in Sambhal are expected to shed more light on the region's past, offering lessons for the present and inspiration for the future. The accidental unearthing of the Shiva temple and subsequent discoveries serve as a reminder of the hidden treasures that lie buried beneath the surface, waiting to be rediscovered and celebrated.



# EXQUISITE DINING WITH A VIEW

When it comes to food that excites the senses, *Resaca* in the heart of Central Delhi offers an experience that perfectly balances sophistication with flavour. This newly opened 12,000 square-foot space is a culinary palace where every dish is designed to captivate both the eyes and the taste buds. Whether you're craving an intimate dinner or a lively gathering with friends, *Resaca* has it all.

The indoor dining area, affectionately known as the "Resaca Playground," is a chic and stylish setting, offering sleek, modern furniture that's both practical and comfortable. With spacious tables thoughtfully arranged to cater to different dining styles, guests can enjoy private, intimate meals or social gatherings with equal ease. Each corner of the restaurant is designed to create a relaxed yet refined atmosphere, perfect for any occasion.

However, what truly sets *Resaca* apart is its stunning rooftop - "Resaca Aero." This rooftop has quickly become the talk of the town, offering guests panoramic views of the Delhi skyline. Whether you're dining in the golden light of day or under the twinkling stars at night, the experience is nothing short of magical. The breathtaking views and elegant atmosphere create the perfect setting for a memorable dining experience.

Behind this visionary space is *Mayank Sehgal*, a renowned menswear designer who has brought his creative flair to the world of fine dining. As the creative director, *Mayank's* attention to detail and aesthetic sensibilities are reflected in every aspect of *Resaca*, from the décor to the curated dining

A sophisticated dining experience with flavours, stunning views and elegant ambiance for every occasion, says **TEAM AGENDA**

experience. *Resaca* is a destination where food lovers can indulge in both culinary delights and a beautiful atmosphere.

When it comes to the food, *Resaca* excels in offering an array of innovative and mouthwatering options. For those who enjoy small plates, the *Kataifi Dahi Kebab* (spiced yoghurt and crispy kataifi kebab) is a must-try. The *Magnum Kebab*, featuring panko crumbed assorted veggies with warm tomato chutney, promises a delightful burst of flavours. If you're a fan of rich and smoky flavours, try the *Lababdar Paneer Tikka*, silky chunks of cottage cheese served with house-special gravy and fried shallots. For a lighter yet equally satisfying option, the *Stuffed Mushrooms*, served with roasted red pepper coulis, are divine.

The menu also includes delectable platters for sharing. The *Arabic Mezze* is a fantastic choice for anyone who loves Mediterranean flavours, with an assortment of *falafel*, *hummus*, *baba ganoush* and warm *pita bread*. For a meatier version, the *Arabic Platter* with *chicken shish tawook* and *lamb fatayer* is equally tempting.

No meal at *Resaca* is complete without indulging in their sweet offerings. The *Rum-Based Tiramisu*, a no-bake dessert soaked in rum, offers a rich, indulgent finish to your meal. Other fan favourites include the *Mango Cheesecake*, *Banoffee Pie* and the innovative *Kunafa Cheesecake*, which combines the best of both worlds.

Of course, no visit to *Resaca* is complete without sampling their signature cocktails, such as the *Katana*, made with vodka, coconut and matcha or the refreshing *Green Park*, which features Hendricks Gin, celery infusion, and elderflower syrup.

*Resaca* offers an experience that goes beyond a meal. From its stunning interiors to its carefully crafted cocktails and mouthwatering dishes, this restaurant has quickly become a go-to destination for those looking to indulge in style.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



## FROM THE ITALIAN FEASTS

At *Toscana*, traditional flavours and premium ingredients transport you to Tuscany, writes **Team Agenda**



With its gates in the centre of Saket's Select City Walk Mall, *Toscana* welcomes you on a Tuscan food adventure. *Toscana* offers a genuine dining experience that satisfies the sophisticated palates of its esteemed patrons by fusing traditional culinary methods with premium, fresh ingredients and unusual cheeses.

*Toscana* offers a warm and inviting atmosphere, where handcrafted pastas, carefully selected wines, and dishes inspired by Italy's heritage take the centre tables. The cosy setting is uplifted by soft yellow lighting, a striking wine wall, and painted patterned walls, creating the perfect backdrop to savour delightful moments with your loved ones.

You can initiate the tasty food by starting with the *Antipasti*, the small plates menu offering you *Arancini e Mozzarella Fritta* (Arborio rice balls & fried mozzarella) that has golden fried mozzarella, carrots, zucchini, broccoli and haricot verts served with arrabiata sauce as they melt in your mouth, enticing you to consume an increasing amount. Also, in *Bruschetta* you can go forward with *Pomodoro Classico* made out of fresh tomatoes, olive oil, basil & parmesan cheese.

From the *Insalata*, the salad menu, *Insalata di Quattro Fagioli con Cereali* (four bean salad with mixed grains) with selection of four beans, mixed grains, roasted pumpkin, cherry

tomatoes, red onion, romaine lettuce, roasted pumpkin seeds, feta cheese & sweet balsamic dressing to keep up with your fitness and taste. In the *Pane all'aglio*, the garlic breads menu you can go for *Classic Baguette Garlic Bread* with melting mozzarella cheese and *Rosemary Bread* with rosemary, pesto, olive oil made with rock salt pizza bread.

For pasta lovers, the *Artisan & Signature Special Pasta* menu is a feast of flavours that will leave you craving more. A recommendation is the *Ravioli di Spinaci e Ricotta*, featuring handmade spinach and ricotta ravioli, served in a fragrant basil-flavoured tomato sauce with olives, melting deliciously in every bite.

The *Dolce* (Dessert) menu at *Toscana* is a paradise for dessert lovers. The highlights include the *Classic Tiramisu*, perfectly paired with coffee ice cream, and the indulgent 55% *Couverture Chocolate Hazelnut Brownie*, served warm with creamy vanilla ice cream. Saving the best for last, the *Signature Chocolate Kahlua Mousse*, complemented by a delicate almond tuile and velvety *crème anglaise*, promises to be an unforgettable treat for your taste buds.

### FACTSHEET

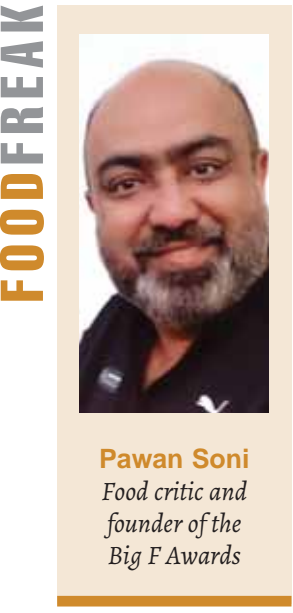
**Restaurant Name:** Toscana  
**Address:** S-44, 2nd Floor, Nexus Select City Walk, MGF Saket Driveway, Saket, New Delhi.  
**Price for 2:** Approx. ₹1800

### FACTSHEET

**Restaurant Name:** Resaca  
**Address:** No. 7, 3rd Floor, Building, Pusa Rd, Block 11, WEA, Karol Bagh, Delhi, 110005  
**Price for 2:** Approx. ₹2000  
**Cuisine:** Multi-cuisine (Indian, Mediterranean, International)  
**Dining Experience:** Indoor and Rooftop seating



## SMALL PLATES LEAD THE WAY



FOODFREAK

**Pawan Soni**  
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards



When it comes to dining out, bigger isn't always better. In a world where restaurants compete to offer a vast array of dishes, there's something uniquely charming and rewarding about *small eateries* that focus on just one or two specialties. They may lack the glitz of fine dining or the variety of a multi-page menu, but what they offer goes far deeper. Here's why these unassuming establishments are not only worth visiting but may also offer a far superior dining experience.

**MASTERY OVER MIEDOCRITY:** The biggest problem with an expansive menu is that it's almost impossible to do every dish justice. When a kitchen has to juggle diverse cuisines or multiple complex recipes, something inevitably gets lost in translation. Food often becomes standardised, stripped of any distinct personality, and made to cater to the average palate. Conversely, *small eateries* that specialise in a single dish or a couple of items have the luxury of focusing all their energy and skill on perfecting those few offerings. Each plate becomes a labor of love, honed through years of repetition and refinement.

**THE ART OF FRESHNESS:** *Small menus* often mean fresher ingredients. When a kitchen isn't overwhelmed with a long list of ingredients for a sprawling menu, there's

more attention on the quality and less temptation to rely on pre-made or frozen components. *Small eateries* usually shop locally and in small quantities, ensuring that what you eat was likely bought that very morning.

It's not uncommon to see these modest eateries sourcing their produce from the local market, even chatting with their vendors to get the best pick. This personal touch translates directly to the plate, where each ingredient retains its flavour, offering a sensory experience.

**CONSISTENT FLAVOURS, EVERY TIME:** In smaller places, it's usually the same set of hands working in the kitchen day in and day out. There's no confusion, no passing the recipe from one chef to another. The cook knows exactly how much salt to sprinkle or how long to simmer the gravy. There's a sense of reliability, a promise that every time you visit, the dish will taste exactly as you remembered it. This consistency is one of the hardest things to achieve in a large restaurant where new chefs or cooks are frequently cycling in and out.

**THE PRICE OF CONVENIENCE: QUALITY VS. QUICK FIXES:** In *large eateries*, the pressure to churn out diverse dishes at a rapid pace often means sacrificing freshness and authenticity. Many big restaurants, in an effort to streamline operations and manage



such extensive menus, have begun to rely on pre-made sauces and packaged ingredients laced with preservatives. These shortcuts may save time, but they take a serious toll on both flavour and nutritional value. A *small eatery*, with its focus on fresh, daily-prepared dishes, naturally provides a far more nourishing experience than the one that supports both health and taste without compromising quality.

**A PERSONAL TOUCH THAT'S HARD TO FIND:** Eating at a *small eatery* often means connecting with the person behind the food. They take pride in their craft, in the stories that accompany each dish, and in the relationships they build with regular customers. The proprietor might greet you by name, share the origins of a recipe, or remember just how spicy you like your curry. This connection adds a personal dimension to dining that large restaurants struggle to offer.

When you order from a restaurant with a lengthy menu, there's a transactional air to it. You're just another customer, another order to be fulfilled. But at a small, specialised eatery, you're part of a community, one of the lucky few who get to experience the authenticity that food can bring.

**A UNIQUE DINING ADVENTURE:** In an age where everyone seems to crave variety, the idea of returning to a place for the same

dish can seem limiting. But there's joy in simplicity. Knowing you're about to eat a dish that's the pride and focus of an establishment, there's an unspoken promise of quality.

**SMALL IS THE NEW BIG:** As the trend toward slow, intentional dining gains momentum, *small eateries* with limited menus are emerging as champions of true culinary craftsmanship. These spots may lack the expansive spaces and curated ambience, but they don't need it. They deliver exactly what matters: real, unforgettable food, born from expertise and commitment, served with the kind of warmth you can't find on any restaurant's oversized menu.

In the end, it's about quality over quantity, simplicity over spectacle. And maybe, just maybe, finding the heart in what's on the plate over the number of options in a menu.







By AKANKSHA DEAN

Imagine stepping back in time without sacrificing an ounce of modern comfort. At *Hotel Neri*, nestled in a 17th-century mansion and the only *Relais & Chateaux* property in Barcelona, my stay was a delightful blend of history and luxury. Picture this: a 17th-century mansion turned chic boutique hotel with just 22 rooms. This is *Hotel Neri*, where each corner oozes charm and every stay feels like a time-travelling adventure. This

enchanted 12th-century palace-turned-hotel, located beside the quaint *Placa de Sant Felipe Neri*, retains its historical charm with stone walls and archways that whisk you back in time. Though it lacks a gym, its distinct style and unbeatable location make up for it tenfold. The terrace overlooking a quaint, atmospheric square and the lush rooftop bar are just a couple of quirky touches you'll love. Given its quiet pedestrian street setting, you might have a slight hassle with heavy luggage, but don't let that deter you—this serene

# MEDIEVAL MARVEL IN BARCELONA



sanctuary is worth the extra steps. Inside, the décor has evolved from vibrant, bold palettes and plush velvets to a soothing symphony of creams and greys adorned with elegant black and white photos. My lucky pick was an Apartment with a breath-taking medieval ambience and charming views of the cobbled street buzzing with tapas bars. Talk about living the fairy tale! The room's ambience, a mix of sophisticated neutrals and delicate fabrics, made the stay luxuriously cosy. The sleep preferences menu—offering sheets in cotton, satin, or linen, and a variety of pillows—felt like a dreamy personal touch. And the bathroom! A peaceful oasis with both a bathtub and rain shower, mood lighting, and Molton Brown products.

## HISTORICAL CHARM AWAITS

Strolling through the *Gothic Quarter*, where the Romans once settled, feels like stepping into a storybook. Winding cobblestone streets lined with cosy shops, cafes, and residences lead to hidden plazas, each more picturesque than the last. *Hotel Neri's* central location is a dream for explorers. Just around the corner, the bells of the *Barcelona Cathedral* serenaded us from our room. Within a 5–10-minute stroll, we reached *Placa de Sant Jaume* and the iconic churches of *Santa Maria Del Mar* and *Santa Maria Del Pi*, famously featured in *Tom Holland's* 'Uncharted.' The waterfront and the bustling *Las Ramblas* were also close by, ensuring we never missed a beat of the city's vibrant life. Hop on the metro, only five minutes

away, and the rest of Barcelona unfolds at your feet. And for those with a sweet tooth, a quick five-minute amble took us to *Calle Petritxol*, a pedestrian haven brimming with chocolate and churro shops, including the famed *La Granja Dulcinea*. It is not just a place to stay; it's a historical adventure waiting to be experienced.

## THE LITTLE LUXURIES

Dining at the *A Restaurant* was a gastronomic delight. The menu, brimming with Catalan dishes and global influences, featured gems like the 'fougasse and Rum Baba.' It was a true feast for the senses. The rooftop, *Roba Estesa*, transformed into a romantically lit, lush retreat, was the perfect spot to unwind under the stars. Living in a medieval castle, even for a short while, feels like a vibrant, whimsical dream. *Relais & Chateaux* boasts nearly 600 luxury hotels and fine dining restaurants worldwide, renowned for unique accommodations, exquisite cuisine, and impeccable service. President Laurent Gardinier aptly described them as paragons of 'excellence, food, experience, and culture.' After the delight of staying in *Hotel Neri*, I can confirm this commitment is nothing short of remarkable. If you crave a unique and romantic historical refuge in the lively heart of Barcelona, *Hotel Neri* is your match. Though it comes with a boutique five-star price tag, the magical experience it offers is simply priceless. It's the little things that elevate a hotel stay from pleasant to unforgettable. At



*Hotel Neri*, these thoughtful touches were on par with the world's finest hotels, such as the *Ritz Carlton*, *Four Seasons*, and *Six Senses*. From the cosy throw blanket on the bed—so handy when we left the heat off—to the fresh clementines awaiting us upon check-in, each detail made our stay special. Turn-down service with chocolates, and our stylish glass water pitcher refilled twice daily, all contributed to a feeling of home away from home. Though our next visit to Barcelona might be a few years away, *Hotel Neri* will be my go-to choice. I

wholeheartedly recommend this gem—and any *Relais & Chateaux* property—to fellow travellers seeking a truly memorable experience.

— She is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at *Osteria Francescana*, in *Modena, Italy*, rated as the world's best restaurant in the *World's 50 Best Restaurants*, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the *Best of The Best Category*

## WINTER WONDERS OF DARJEELING



Darjeeling's misty mountains, scenic bus ride, and cosy Radhakunj Homestay offered the perfect winter escape amidst nature's charm, writes VISHESH SHUKLA



In winter, the mountains are always beautiful, and hill stations are also enjoyable. So, I decided to visit one of the most beautiful hill stations in India, *Darjeeling, West Bengal*. I boarded the *Falaknema Express* from *Cuttack to Howrah*, and then I changed trains to the *Paharia Express*, heading to *New Jalpaiguri (NJP)*. The weather was very humid in nature, and for a moment, I thought I had chosen the wrong time to come to *Darjeeling*. But *Darjeeling* proved me wrong—cold waves and fog made me feel at ease. I took an auto to the *Siliguri* bus stand for ₹50, then boarded a bus to *Darjeeling* for ₹105. The 4-hour bus journey, with its beautiful views and

winding turns, made my heart swell with excitement. Finally, I deboarded and headed to my homestay, which was near *Batasia Loop*. I checked in at *Radha Kunj Homestay*, which offered very cheap accommodation, ₹4500 for three nights. The rooms were beautiful, and the window view in the morning, with *Kanchenjunga* in the distance, was nothing short of breathtaking. It was around 5 PM, so I decided to visit *Mall Road*. I took a taxi for ₹50 and went to explore the beautiful area. First, I roamed around the market, soaking in the lively atmosphere. Then, I visited the very famous *Glenary's Bakery* and enjoyed some delicious snacks



there. Coincidentally, the *Darjeeling Melotea Fest 2024* was happening nearby. I got to enjoy some amazing music by the famous singer *Girish Chand*. After that, I had dinner at a local restaurant near *Mall Road*. The meal was simple and tasty, costing me around ₹200. Feeling satisfied, I took a taxi back to my homestay for ₹100. Once I reached, I had a good sleep, ready and excited for the adventures the next day would bring.

## MIRIK'S SERENE SHORES

On Day 2, I woke up early in the morning and rented a scooty from 'Bike Wale Bhैया' for ₹1500 for two days. I planned to visit *Mirik*, 34 km away,

to see the famous *Sumendu Lake*. However, I missed the main route and ended up taking a secondary road, which stretched the distance to 50 km and took me around 4 hours to reach. The ride was not wasted, though, as I passed through beautiful tea gardens and stopped at a viewpoint called *Lepchajagat*.

Finally, I reached *Mirik Lake*, spent some peaceful time there, and then started my journey back to *Darjeeling*. On the way, I also visited the Nepal border at *Pashupati Nagar* and enjoyed a quiet dinner before returning to my homestay.

## DARJEELING'S ICONIC LANDMARKS

Day 3 was all about sightseeing in *Darjeeling*. I started my day at *Tiger Hill* to witness the stunning view of *Kanchenjunga*. Next, I visited the serene *Ghoom Monastery* and felt the peaceful vibes of Buddhism. After that, I stopped by the *Peace Pagoda*, built to promote harmony, and had my lunch. My next destination was the *Rock Garden*, located 3000 ft below the main road, which had some dangerous turns but was worth the experience. Finally, I ended my sightseeing with a visit to *Batasia Loop* to watch the toy train and the *Zoological Park*, which had some unique animals. In the evening, I did some shopping at *Mall Road*, treated myself to ice cream at *Keventer's*, and enjoyed delicious momos. I returned the scooty to the shop and headed back to my homestay to pack my bags because it was time to leave for home.

On the last day, I took a shared taxi for ₹400 to *NJP*. From there, I boarded the *New Delhi Poorvottar Sampark Kranti Express to Kanpur*. The 17-hour journey brought me back home, and I ended my vacation with empty pockets but a heart full of beautiful and tremendous memories





**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week presents numerous opportunities for joy, with financial gains expected from various endeavors. You may find yourself busy, perhaps with work-related travel, which could lead to some stress. Midweek brings sudden shifts that might challenge your current plans or expectations. It's a crucial time to release any unproductive bonds, clearing the path for a more meaningful existence. As the week progresses, you may feel a strong pull towards acquiring material possessions, which could lead to unrealistic expectations. Caution is advised against starting new projects or making impulsive decisions, as these could lead to setbacks. Maintaining a positive outlook will be challenging, yet essential to navigate this period effectively.

Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Green  
Lucky day Tuesday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This period promises to be exceptionally favorable, marked by a profound sense of blessing and personal achievement. You'll find yourself at the center of your universe, reveling in a phase rich with joy, amazement, and rejuvenation. A harmonious alignment of mind, spirit, and body will emerge, enhancing your social standing. This time will usher in newfound bravery and inspiration, leaving you relieved as certain challenges conclude. Expect transformative shifts in your perspectives and plans, paving the way for a brighter future. Changes may include adopting a new routine, dietary adjustments, or exciting career opportunities. Fresh beginnings are indicated, perhaps in personal commitments or professional partnerships, bringing a refreshing change to your life's narrative. As the week closes, familial happiness will increase, and a feeling of complete fulfillment will envelop you emotionally and spiritually.

Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Sky Blue  
Lucky day Thursday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week centers on inner resilience rather than physical prowess. Your strength will stem from a disciplined approach to your emotions and desires, grounded in a firm moral backbone. This foundational inner strength will navigate you through deceptive circumstances to clarity. You may find inspiration and guidance from a notable woman known for her deep understanding and intuition. Considering her advice or emulating her approach could be pivotal in shaping your life's direction. An urgent call to action encourages you to embrace spirituality—engage in meditation, practice yoga, and connect with your spiritual beliefs. It's a time to move away from idle fantasies and ground yourself in reality, letting go of unproductive daydreams to focus on what truly matters.

Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Magenta  
Lucky day Monday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, those who are naturally resourceful will find themselves thriving financially through their inventive abilities. You possess the strength to transform your visions into reality. Choices made during this time are likely to lead to beneficial outcomes. Gifted with a flair for articulation, your words will captivate and persuade those around you, marking an exceptionally successful week. However, midweek may present some challenges with potential delays. Despite these obstacles, your perseverance and resolve will guide you through, ensuring you meet your objectives. Expect communication from afar that could influence your financial and emotional stability positively. This period promises both security and satisfaction as you navigate through the highs and lows with grace.

Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Yellow  
Lucky day Saturday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week begins with decisive actions on both personal and work-related fronts, reflecting your resilient nature as you navigate life's challenges with courage. Expect some confrontations and issues arising from stubborn attitudes, necessitating a thoughtful and tactful approach. Embracing new perspectives and letting go of outdated beliefs will be crucial. Changes could unfold in various areas, such as your job, living situation, and close relationships, and you might encounter health challenges that could lead to feeling overwhelmed. Despite these struggles, the latter part of the week heralds a shift toward positivity, bringing a sense of relaxation, improved well-being, and financial satisfaction. You will find yourself in a position to indulge in life's comforts and will likely extend your support to those in need due to your compassionate nature.

Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Orange  
Lucky day Wednesday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week promises to be a whirlwind, touching every facet of your life—from personal finance and home life to social and professional engagements. It begins with a focus on household matters, and for those not currently in a partnership, significant life changes such as marriage may be on the horizon. Midweek, travel could play a role, adding variety to your routine. Professionally, expect to dive deep, as a drive for excellence pushes you to refine your abilities and commit fully to your projects, often extending your work into the night. Joyful family news, such as the arrival of a new member, may also grace the week. As the days progress, the fruits of your labor will become apparent, notably through substantial financial gains. Opportunities for career advancement are likely to emerge, featuring appealing terms.

Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Rose  
Lucky day Tuesday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week, individuals born under Gemini will find numerous reasons to smile. An aura of optimism surrounds you, illuminating your path and attracting positive vibes in all your endeavors. Your ability to highlight the positive aspects of life makes you a beacon of warmth, drawing others towards you. However, midweek might bring a few challenges that could disrupt your peace temporarily. Despite this, rest assured that this phase will pass swiftly, paving the way for abundant blessings and a sense of fulfillment. Your efforts toward your goals are bearing fruit, marking significant strides towards completing your success cycle. You'll likely notice substantial improvements in ongoing projects and may find opportunities for recognition, public acclaim, or international connections.

Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour White  
Lucky day Sunday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week brims with opportunities and inventive energy, marking a period of great enthusiasm and readiness to embrace new challenges. An inspiring new concept may captivate your imagination, reinforcing that you're following the right path. You'll find yourself adeptly handling both personal and professional responsibilities. Midweek brings family gatherings and celebrations, possibly related to home-related milestones, children's achievements, or exciting career developments. These events will add to the joyous atmosphere around you. As the week concludes, your resolve and tenacity serve as an inspiring testament to others, showcasing the foundation of your accomplishments. Enjoy this vibrant period, as it promises both fulfillment and success and remain open to the unexpected joys it may bring.

Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Teal  
Lucky day Friday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

This week, individuals born under the Aquarius sign can expect a vibrant period filled with personal satisfaction and grandeur. There will be significant progress in business ventures, accompanied by generous expenditures that not only meet family expectations but also bring joy. This generosity extends to caring for others, demonstrating a warm and compassionate nature. Relationship dynamics, especially with a partner, may involve some heightened demands, yet responses will be heartfelt and giving. Children are likely to bring joy into the household, with possible achievements in academics or career advancements for a son. However, there's a note of caution for Aquarian women to attend to their health, as they might face some challenges related to emotional well-being or other physiological concerns, which could affect their mood during this period.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Purple  
Lucky day Sunday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

During this pivotal period, the actions you take will lay the foundation for future developments. Although progress may seem gradual, your perseverance will ensure that significant strides are made. Energize yourself to tackle necessary tasks effectively, as your hard work is likely to gain recognition and yield rewards. Utilize your diverse skills optimally this week, as your resolve and tenacity will leave a lasting impression on those around you. Your role as an inspirational figure will uplift others. Effective communication will enhance your relationships with both superiors and colleagues. As the week closes, a fresh burst of innovative thinking will illuminate your projects. Your productivity will soar in your chosen field, accompanied by vibrant energy and a zest for life. This is a time to relish and optimize the joyful moments.

Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Brown  
Lucky day Monday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

Despite your significant efforts across various sectors to secure employment, the outcomes you've anticipated have not yet materialized. Your dedication and zeal are commendable; however, financial gains may be challenging to come by this week. Fortunately, as the week unfolds, promising opportunities are likely to emerge, potentially leading to substantial achievements. Supportive figures in your life, such as father figures or mentors, are keen to see you succeed and will play a crucial role in your progress. Remember, patience will be your greatest ally during this period. Building on a solid foundation will inevitably lead to favorable results. Remain steadfast, as you are on the verge of a breakthrough, where success promises to be significant and enduring.

Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Golden  
Lucky day Saturday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

This week heralds a period of financial growth and satisfaction. You'll find yourself drawn towards seeking inner peace through practices like yoga, meditation, and chanting. Expect to feel compelled to arrange spiritually uplifting events at home, enhancing the serene atmosphere. However, midweek might present challenges in your personal relationships, possibly leading to misunderstandings or disagreements with a partner. Such conflicts may lead you to reflect on your deeper desires and life goals. Remember, your perspective may lean towards seeing the negative rather than appreciating what you have. This inclination could lead to a sense of being overwhelmed by negativity. It's crucial during these times to stay resilient and confront these challenges with courage rather than succumbing to despair.

Lucky number 16 | Lucky colour Mint  
Lucky day Friday

Madhu Kotiya is a tarot card reader, spiritual healer, and Founder, MShezaim Institute of Tarot and Divination. Contact details: madhu@indiatarot.com, www.indiatarot.com, M: 9873283331

THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

*The interplay between karma and dharma is like a dance. To align with our life's purpose, we must first understand the karmic lessons presented to us*

There are moments in life when the usual rhythm of existence comes to a halt—moments when a deep, unshakable question emerges from within: "Why am I here?" This question often arises not during our triumphs but in the quiet aftermath of loss, failure, or self-reflection. It is as though the universe gently nudges us to look beyond the surface of our achievements and disappointments and seek a deeper truth. Ancient Vedic wisdom holds that the answer lies not in chasing fleeting goals but in understanding and aligning with our karma and dharma, our cosmic purpose and the path uniquely meant for us. Through this alignment, we embark on the sacred journey of discovering the true purpose of life. Karma, often misunderstood as mere cause and effect, is a deeper law of action and reaction. It is not just about the actions we perform but the intentions and energy behind them. Our karmic blueprint, shaped over lifetimes, serves as both a map and a mirror. It reflects the lessons we are here to learn and the experiences we must navigate to grow spiritually.

The challenges we face are whether in relationships, health, or career, are not random but karmic threads woven into the fabric of our existence. They are opportunities to confront our shadows, resolve past debts, and refine our souls. Recognising this truth transforms our perspective. Pain becomes a teacher, and every obstacle, a stepping stone to self-realisation. While karma represents the lessons we carry, dharma is the unique path we are meant to walk in this lifetime. Derived from the Sanskrit root "dhri," meaning to sustain, dharma is that which upholds the harmony of the universe. It is our duty, our responsibility, and our spiritual calling. Dharma is not a rigid set of rules but a dynamic expression of our truest self. For one, it may manifest as nurturing a family; for another, it may mean creating art that inspires the world. When we align with our dharma, life feels purposeful and fulfilling. We experience a flow where our actions serve not just personal gain but contribute to the greater good. The interplay between karma and dharma is like a dance. To align with our life's purpose, we must

# Discovering the Purpose of Life



first understand the karmic lessons presented to us. This requires deep introspection, self-awareness, and a willingness to confront our fears and patterns. Astrology, a profound tool rooted in Vedic wisdom, offers a roadmap to our karmic imprints. The positions of the planets at the time of our birth reveal the energies influencing our journey and the areas of life that demand growth. For instance, Saturn often points to the karmic debts we must repay, while Jupiter illuminates the areas where dharma can flourish. Once we identify our karmic lessons, the next step is to align with dharma. This alignment is not an overnight process but a

journey of gradual awakening. Meditation, gratitude journaling, and practices like EFT tapping can help clear the emotional and mental clutter that obscures our path. Aligning with dharma requires inner work. It demands peeling back the layers of societal expectations, inherited fears, and self-imposed limitations. Practices such as chakra balancing and mindfulness allow us to connect with our authentic selves. For example, the throat chakra governs communication and self-expression. If this chakra is blocked due to past wounds, one may struggle to voice their truth, hindering alignment with their dharma. Healing this energy

centre through affirmations and meditation can restore balance and clarity. Similarly, gratitude is a powerful practice in this journey. When we appreciate life's blessings, no matter how small we shift our focus from lack to abundance. This shift creates a fertile ground for dharma to emerge, as we are no longer trapped in the narrative of unworthiness or scarcity. Discovering life's purpose begins with self-reflection. Journaling about one's strengths, passions, and the activities that bring joy can provide valuable insights. Reflecting on recurring challenges and patterns often points to unresolved karma. Meditation and silence are equally crucial. Quieting the mind allows one to hear the whispers of the soul. Tools like astrology or guidance from spiritual mentors can illuminate karmic lessons and dharmic paths. Acts of service also play a vital role. Serving something larger than oneself connects one with the universal rhythm of love and abundance. Trusting the process is perhaps the most vital step. Life's purpose is not a destination but a journey. Every experience, even the challenging ones, is part of this

unfolding story. Ultimately, the purpose of life transcends personal success or happiness. It is about contributing to the greater cosmic order, uplifting others, and leaving the world better than we found it. When we align with our dharma, we become instruments of divine will, radiating love, compassion, and wisdom. Every soul's journey is unique, yet interconnected. Your alignment with your karmic path and dharma not only brings you peace but also creates ripples of positivity in the collective consciousness. In this way, the purpose of life becomes a shared endeavour that is a dance of individual and universal harmony. Discovering the purpose of life is not about seeking answers but about aligning with the divine rhythm within us. By understanding our karma and embracing our dharma, we transcend the superficial and connect with the infinite. Life, then, becomes not just a series of events but a sacred journey that is a dance of the soul with the cosmos. And in that dance, we find not only purpose but also the deepest joy of simply being. — She is a Life Coach and Founder of Soulful Wellness

Now you can write to us at [agendapioneer@gmail.com](mailto:agendapioneer@gmail.com)