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**WORLD 9**  
HOLLYWOOD HILLS FIRE BREAKS OUT AS DEADLY WILDFIRES BURN OUT OF CONTROL ACROSS LOS ANGELES

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## Cong cornered in INDIA bloc truck

MOHIT KHANDARI ■ JAMMU

Amid growing differences within the INDIA bloc, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Thursday dropped clear hints suggesting he was also on the verge of splitting ties with the opposition plank. Omar also demanded the INDIA bloc should be disbanded as the opposition parties were not on the same page in the run-up to the Delhi polls. Acerbic observations made by Omar, a close friend of Rahul Gandhi, have once again sparked speculation over the future of the Congress party in the INDIA bloc. While both AAP and the Congress are part of the INDIA bloc, the parties are contesting the Delhi polls separately.



Photo: PTI

Mamta Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress along with Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) and Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) have already announced their support to the Aam Aadmi Party in the Delhi elections leaving Congress party stranded in the multi-cornered poll battle. The subtle timing of Abdullah's remark, a day after Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav said the INDIA bloc had lost its significance and was formed specifically for the Lok Sabha polls, has also raised many eyebrows in the power corridors. "INDIA bloc was formed just for the Lok Sabha elections and to stop the victory march of the BJP. It has no significance now. The bickering between the

Congress and the AAP is not unexpected," the former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister said. Reacting to Abdullah's remark, Congress MP Manickam Tagore said the opinion of INDIA bloc allies was not binding on the party. "INDIA bloc allies will not decide what the Congress wants to do in Delhi," he said. Abdullah, whose National Conference is part of the INDIA bloc, Thursday said "It is unfortunate that no meeting of the INDIA bloc has taken place. Who will lead? What will be the agenda? How will the alliance move forward? There is no discussion on these issues. There is no clarity on whether we will remain united or not." "After the Assembly elections in Delhi, they (INDIA Bloc) should call all the alliance members for a meeting. If this

alliance was only for the parliamentary elections, it should be wound up, and we will work separately. But if it is also meant for Assembly elections, we will have to sit together and work collectively," Abdullah told reporters on the sidelines of a three-day long orientation programme of the newly elected legislators here in Jammu. In December 2024, When Trinamool Congress leaders started a campaign to aggressively push for West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to head the opposition alliance, the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi directed the party's Lok Sabha MPs not to react to comments of "middle-and-low-rung" leaders of INDIA bloc parties. Replying to another query on

increasing support for AAP ahead of next month's Delhi elections, Omar Abdullah said, "I cannot say anything about this at the moment because we have no involvement with Delhi polls. The Aam Aadmi Party, Congress, and other political parties on the ground will decide how to compete with the BJP strongly." Stating that AAP succeeded twice in Delhi previously, Abdullah said, "This time, we will have to wait and see what the people of Delhi decide." Meanwhile, National Conference President Dr Farooq Abdullah on Thursday said his party does not intend to "fight" New Delhi to collaborate with the central government to address the pressing issues of Jammu and Kashmir. Commenting on the unity within the INDIA bloc, Abdullah said the alliance is not just about contesting elections, but it is about strengthening India and eliminating hatred. "The alliance is permanent - it is for every day and every moment." "We don't want to fight New Delhi. We want to work together with Delhi to resolve the state's problems. We don't want to engage in battles. Those who want to fight can do so," the former chief minister told reporters here. Abdullah said the National Conference has nothing to do with the BJP, but it is the responsibility of the central government to support state governments in addressing local issues. "We are not with the BJP, nor do we have any connection with them," he said.

Continued on page 8

## Bijli, Paani free on BJP's poll platter?

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

What was once criticised as "free ki revri" and "freebies" has now become the central focus for the political parties as they vie for votes in the February 5 Delhi elections. In a bid to match the ruling AAP's raft of pre-poll promises in Delhi, the BJP is likely to announce free electricity of up to 300 units for household, free piped water, and a Ladli Behna-like scheme (financial assistance of Rs 2500 for eligible women) to woo the voters in its manifesto for the upcoming assembly polls. Along with this, the BJP is also planning to provide free electricity of up to 500 units to religious places like temples and gurudwaras. Top sources said these recommendations are expected to be part of the manifesto. The

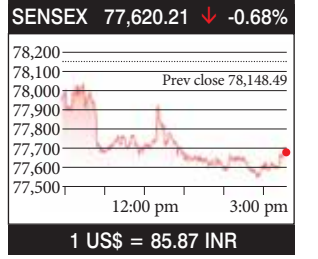


Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

recommendations have been sent to central leadership for approval. According to sources, the manifesto committee has also recommended not doing away with schemes currently in place in Delhi including free public bus travel for women, up to 20 kilolitres of free water per month to domestic consumers, and free electricity to households that consume less than 200 units a month.

The AAP-led Delhi government currently provides free electricity for up to 200 units a month. Under the existing free electricity scheme, the Delhi government provides free electricity to consumers with a monthly consumption of 200 units. Whereas, a 50 per cent subsidy is given to people with a consumption of 201-400 units of electricity. Continued on page 8

## MARKETS



## WEATHER

LUCKNOW  
MAX 20.2°C(+0.2)  
MIN 6.2°C(+0.9)

## GRAP III invoked in the Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Rising air pollution level has authorities to impose vehicle ban on BS 3 petrol and BS 4 diesel cars as the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for Delhi and its adjoining area has imposed the Stage-III ('Severe' Air Quality) measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for Delhi-NCR with immediate effect. The stage 3 also bans the entry of non-essential BS 4 diesel trucks into Delhi. The restrictions are not applicable for commercial vehicles involved in essential services "Persons with Disabilities shall be permitted to ply BS - III Petrol / BS - IV Diesel LMVs, provided that these are specifically adopted for them and are run only for their personal use," the CAQM said in a statement. GRAP Stage 3, which was revoked on Sunday, entails a ban on non-essential construction work. Continued on page 8

## Indian passport ranking slips

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Even as outbound travel from India continues to grow rapidly and a growing number of destinations try to woo Indian tourists, obtaining a visa for travel has become harder for Indian travelers, the global ranking of Indian passport dropped five spots to 85th in Henley Passport Index 2025 even as Singapore reclaimed the top spot and Japan takes the second position. According to a press statement, as per the Henley Passport Index 2025, India has slipped from 80th rank in



2024 to 85th in 2025. An Indian national can travel to 57 visa-free destinations around the world, it adds. The index is considered the standard reference tool for global citizens and sovereign states when assessing where a passport ranks on the global mobility spectrum, the

Henley & Partners said. As per the index for 2025, India stands at 85th while the ranking of Pakistan and Bangladesh stood at 103rd (101st in 2024) and 100th (97th in 2024), respectively. According to a data chart available on the firm's website, for the range of years from 2006-2025, India's rank was the lowest at 90th in 2021, while its best score was in 2006 when the country was ranked 71st. According to the passport index, the ranking of Pakistan and Bangladesh stood at 103rd (101st in 2024) and 100th (97th in 2024), respectively. Continued on page 8

## Naidu visits Tirupati stampede victims

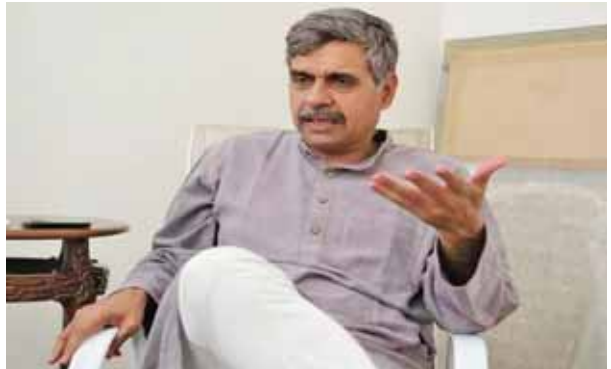
PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday visited the injured undergoing treatment in a hospital here following a stampede that left six people dead. Six devotees died and nearly 40 more were injured in the stampede at Bairagi Patteda near MGM School in Tirupati on Wednesday night as hundreds of them jostled for tickets for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam at Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple on Tirumala Hills. Hundreds of devotees turned up from across the country for the 10-day Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam commencing from January 10. Earlier, Naidu visited the accident site where the stampede claimed six lives and injured many. Continued on page 8

## Congress still relevant in Delhi: Sandeep Dikshit

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Congress candidate from the New Delhi assembly constituency and two-time East Delhi MP, Sandeep Dikshit, has accused the AAP of siphoning off Congress votes in other states, at a time when the ruling party has made serious allegation against him and his party for being in cahoots with BJP while dismissing AAP's claim of Centre hindering the Delhi government from functioning. The son of former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit is a widely known critique of AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, one of the reasons he stated for pitting him against Kejriwal in the upcoming elections. While the AAP has made several allegations against Dikshit and Congress for being hands in gloves with the BJP, Dikshit, in an interview with The Pioneer, shrugged them off claiming that the BJP is picking his criticisms rather than the other way around. "BJP is repeating what I am saying. They have never attacked Kejriwal on factual information. I have done that and I think it's good whoever is picking that up. Secondly, there is a critique and a criticism of AAP, which is not party-specific. Criticism is opposition-specific," he said. "If Yamuna is dirty, do you expect BJP to say something



else about Yamuna and us to say something else? We are in the opposition, we will attack you for all the things that you have not done. When they were in the opposition, AAP and BJP both called us corrupt in 2012-13. We could very easily say that you are saying exactly what BJP was saying. The role of the opposition is to criticize the government wherever it finds valid criticism," he said. He further raised questions on AAP fighting elections outside Delhi and claimed that they cut Congress votes to help the BJP. "They are really somebody who helps BJP win different elections and then they attack me," Dikshit alleged. Claiming that the AAP is afraid of Congress fighting the elections, he asked why the AAP is scared of him or AICC treasurer Ajay Maken when they say that Congress is not relevant in Delhi. "Their problem is that they are finding that the Congress is fighting full throttle and we are going to damage the prospects of both AAP and BJP very severely," Dikshit asserted. The senior Congress leader also asked for evidence from the ruling party for their allegations against the Central government for stopping their work. Remembering his mother's time, he said that the delay is obvious in Delhi where files have to be delivered to the Lieutenant Governor (LG) first for approval. However, he said that it is a matter of delay rather than denial. He claimed that the BJP has stopped the AAP from working where they believe they are indulging in corruption. "Otherwise, where is it that you've been stopped? Files will get delayed in Delhi because, unlike other states, where the Chief

Minister signs a file and it becomes policy, in Delhi's case, in many of the subjects, files have to go to the LG level," Dikshit added. While the AAP's narrative is centered around 'Phir layenge Kejriwal' (We will bring Kejriwal again), Kejriwal's rival said that even if he becomes one he will be in jail, or he will 'not do any work' because of the conditions put by the Supreme Court on his bail. "In the remote chance that AAP wins Delhi again, and you get elected as their leader, even if you get sworn in as Chief Minister, you cannot perform. Not even for a single day. This promise of Rs 2,100 he made to the women. In reality, if he signs that file, he'll go to jail. He'll break his bail conditions," the leader said, adding that AAP Convenor resigned from his Chief Ministerial post not as a sacrifice but because he knew that he cannot perform its duties. The Congress candidate also plans to remind people of the work his mother has done for Delhi and how Kejriwal has not been able to carry it on even in an 'average fashion'. Dikshit also claims that in case of any post-poll alliance, other parties will have to come to them and not the other way around as he is confident of a good performance by the Congress.

## SC to review JEE-Advanced attempt limit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine a plea against bringing down from three to two, the attempts given to Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)-Advanced aspirants. When the plea came up before a bench of Justices B R Gavi and Augustine George Masih, the petitioner's counsel said, "This matter pertains to the IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) admission entrance examination in which the number of attempts have been reduced from three to two." The lawyer said a similar plea was listed before the bench on January 10 following which the court directed both to be tagged. Continued on page 8

## Mann Ki Baat must for Goa babus

PNS ■ PANAJI

The BJP government in Goa has made it mandatory for heads of all its departments (HoDs) to tune into Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' monthly radio broadcast. In a circular issued on Thursday, Shreyas D'Silva, under secretary (general administration), asked all HoDs to tune into 'Maan Ki Baat' and draw inspiration from suggestions and best practices mentioned in the programme. Posting the circular on his social media handle, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said "Mann Ki Baat, the monthly interactive program by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi Ji, highlights the thoughts and ideas of citizens on Governance, as well as individual and collective efforts driving societal change." He said success stories and best practices shared during the programme can be adopted to improve governance. "All Heads of Government Departments in Goa are directed to actively tune in to #MaanKiBaat. It is encouraged to draw inspiration from success stories and best practices shared during the programme, which have brought positive change across the nation. These insights shall be appropriately considered for adoption to



improve governance and enhance service delivery in Goa," Sawant noted. The CM further said "Goa has been a pioneer in implementing progressive Governance practices that have been emulated at both state and national levels." He also talked about his government's vision of 'Swayampurna' (self-sufficient) and developed Goa. "It is essential to continually seek inspiration and adopt innovative practices from across India, be it from individuals, organizations, or state initiatives. This will further our efforts to promote Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business, propelling us toward achieving the vision of a Swayampurna, Viksit (developed) Goa," Sawant said. "Swayampurna Goa" is a government-led community level action plan to make each and every village and city in the state self-reliant.

## CRPF launches online platform to adopt retired K9s for second life

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CRPF has launched a first-ever online service that allows common people to adopt retired sniffer and assault dogs from the country's largest paramilitary force to give these four-legged soldiers a comfortable second life. This is probably the first time that any security force has decided to offer their trained dogs for public adoption, as this move was always fraught with the dangers of misuse of these highly-skilled and motivated dogs by anti-national elements. Till now, the central forces and state police were handing over their retired dogs to registered NGOs or reputed organisations for their care. More than 30 canines from four

breeds — Belgian Shepherd Malinois, German Shepherd, Labrador and the indigenous Mudhol Hound — can now be adopted through a rigorous process that will be monitored by the CRPF's specialised Dog Breeding and Training School (DBTS) near Bengaluru. These canines, aged 8-12 years, have undertaken hundreds of operations in the anti-Naxal, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism theatres across the country, saving lives of numerous troops from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and deadly ambushes laid by Maoists or terrorists, a senior officer told PTI. Baloo, Sweety, Veeru, Moby, Coco, Stroll and their colleagues have been trained in various sniffer and combat streams such as explosive

detection and tracking, infantry patrol and assault, etc. The officer said the adoption is free and the adopter can check the force's website to gather basic details and pictures of the dogs up for adoption, fill up a form stating their "motivation and intent" for adopting a retired police K9, and state how they plan to engage the canine -- like a companion, guard or a therapy dog — along with details of the proposed accommodation for the adopted dog. "A compatibility meeting between the adopter and the dog will be organised at a designated camp where the retired canine is housed. We have also got these selected canines groomed by dog behaviour experts so that they can adjust in a homely environment,"

the officer said. A brief profile, picture and citation of these "soldier buddies" have been hosted on the CRPF portal, making it clear

shall take care of the "K9 hero with dignity, due diligence and compassion". The force, as part of this adoption process, will sign a "legally-

binding" agreement with the adopter and will provide a KCI (Kennel Club of India) registration certificate, medical and vaccination records, and other vital documents of these canines. "Initiating public adoption of our retired dogs is an effort to ensure a happy second life for our canine soldiers," CRPF Deputy Inspector General Moses Dhinakaran told PTI. It has been made clear in the terms and conditions of the adoption process that there shall be no "abuse or ill-treatment" of the K9 and that they should not be sold, used for any purpose to earn money, or deployed against any person. The guidelines state that CRPF officers should be allowed for "periodic verification" of the

adopted dogs, including regular communication with their handlers through short videos and live videoconferencing. "The adopter shall give emotional support if the K9 is found in distress, and extend all therapeutic care as required for a geriatric dog," the guidelines state. The force hopes that these brave loyal soldiers get a good home and family as it writes about Zina, a female Belgian Shepherd Malinois, how she is "loyal with a balanced temperament, making her an ideal companion for families looking for a protective yet gentle dog." With about 3.25 lakh personnel in its ranks, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is the leading internal security force of the country which functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.





# Police seek public's help in tracking down co-accused

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Eight days after the murder of five family members in Lucknow, police on Wednesday released a poster of Mohammed Badruddin, also known as Badar, the co-accused in the case. The victims included Badar's wife and four daughters, who

## MASS MURDER

were killed allegedly by him and his son Mohammed Arshad (24), in a hotel in the Naka area on the night of December 31, 2024. Arshad had surrendered at the police station the following morning. The poster urged the public to

assist in locating Badar. "Help the police in the search for Badar, who is accused of brutally killing five people, including his wife and daughters. If you have any information, immediately contact the numbers given below. The identity of the informer will be kept confidential, and a suitable reward will be given," the message read.

The poster includes two pictures of Badar, along with details such as his height, complexion, and age. He is a resident of 183 Islamnagar, Tedhi Bagiya, Post Kuberpur, Police Station Trans Yamuna, Agra. "The gruesome incident came to light on January 1, when police discovered five bodies in a Naka hotel room. The victims, including Arshad's mother and his four sisters, had been brutally murdered. According to the police, Arshad initially confessed to committing the murders with his father's assistance. He claimed the killings were triggered by alleged harassment over a land dispute with neighbours in Agra, as revealed in a video statement.

Police confirmed on January 7 that a non-bailable warrant has been issued against Badar. Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Police (ADCP), Central, Manisha Singh, stated that efforts were underway to apprehend the accused, who remains on the run.

# CRPF jawan shoots self

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic incident, a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) constable posted on duty in the Ashiyana area of Lucknow allegedly died by suicide on Thursday morning, police said here. Identified as Upendra Kumar Singh (36), the constable was part of the 93rd Battalion of the CRPF.

According to Inspector, Ashiyana, Chhatrapal Singh, the incident occurred at around 8:45 am when Upendra shot himself in the head with his service rifle while on sentry duty at morcha (front) number eight. Colleagues rushed to the spot upon hearing the gunshot and found him lying in a pool of blood. Upendra was initially taken to Lok Bandhu Hospital by CRPF personnel, where doctors referred him to the KGMU Trauma Centre. However, he succumbed to injuries.

Sources claimed that Upendra was on a video call with his wife, Ruby Singh, when the incident occurred. He had been transferred to Lucknow from the 36th Battalion in Arunachal Pradesh two years ago and had arrived at the 93rd Battalion's Alpha Unit in Para locality two days before the incident. No suicide note was found at the scene. A forensic team conducted an inspection, and further investigations are underway. The police have informed Upendra's family, who hail from Lakhpurwa

Rasulpur in Chhapra, Bihar. Preliminary investigations suggest no immediate reason for the suicide. Police are awaiting statements from the family and colleagues to determine the motive.

Upendra joined the CRPF in 2010 and was due for a promotion to head constable, with training scheduled in Ajmer. He is survived by wife Ruby and two sons, Rishikesh Kumar Singh (14) and Ujjwal Kumar Singh (11).

A police spokesperson confirmed the incident, stating: "At approximately 8:45 am on January 9, Constable Upendra Kumar Singh (36), posted with the 93rd Battalion CRPF in Ashiyana, shot himself with his service rifle. He was immediately rushed to Lok Bandhu Hospital and later referred to the KGMU Trauma Centre, where he died during treatment."

Senior officers, including the assistant police commissioner (Cantonment) and the Ashiyana station incharge, inspected the scene. The body has been sent for a post-mortem and further investigations are underway.

## NSA AGAINST GAJANAND

Lucknow police on Wednesday invoked the National Security Act (NSA) 1980 against the main accused, Gajananand Dubey, in the kidnapping and murder case of e-commerce delivery executive Bharat Kumar, which occurred in September 2024.

A statement from the Lucknow police said the action was taken after sufficient evidence was found against Dubey following the filing of charges in court.

"The accused is currently lodged in Barabanki district jail. In view of the severity of the incident, evidence indicating public order disruption was gathered, and Section 3(2) of the NSA 1980 was approved by the district magistrate of Lucknow. Gajananand was served the detention notice through the jail superintendent on January 8 (Wednesday)," Chinhaat SHO Bharat Pathak said. "A copy of the NSA was provided to the jail superintendent," he added.

Adarsh Koshta, the head incharge of the e-commerce company on Satrikh Road, and Bharat's brother Prem Kumar filed a missing report on September 25, 2024 after Bharat disappeared.

Investigations later revealed that Gajananand had ordered mobile phones via the Flipkart app, which were delivered by Bharat to the location specified by the accused. Along with his accomplice, Dubey kidnapped the delivery boy with the intent to rob him, before brutally strangling him with a laptop charger wire in their rented house. Bharat's body was then stuffed into his own delivery bag and dumped in the Indira Canal. An FIR was filed under multiple sections, including kidnapping and murder. The first accused, Akash, was arrested within days of the crime.

# 60-yr-old woman first suspected case of HMPV in Lucknow

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 60-year-old woman admitted to Balrampur Hospital on Thursday became the first suspected case of the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Lucknow.

Director of Balrampur Hospital, Dr Sushil Prakash, said that they have sent the woman's samples to King George's Medical University (KGMU) for testing, and any confirmation of whether the woman has contracted the HMPV virus can only be made once the test results are received. He stated that the woman has no travel history and is a resident of Rajendra Nagar, Mawaiya.

"She was brought to the emergency department of Balrampur Hospital because she was suffering from breathlessness and also had a cold. She is suffering from diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, kidney disease, and is a previous patient of TB," Dr Prakash said.

He added that the woman has been admitted to the isolation ward of the hospital. They carried out testing for HMPV because the referral letter from Charak Hospital, from where the woman had been transferred, stated that she was HMPV positive.

"For this reason, we have sent the sample to KGMU for confirmation," he added.

KGMU spokesperson Dr Sudhir Singh said that they had received the samples of the woman in question, and the report would be processed within the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Chief Medical Officer, Lucknow, Dr NB Singh, said that there had been no reported case of HMPV in the Lucknow district until now. "If the report from the woman admitted to Balrampur Hospital comes back positive, necessary steps will be taken," he said. He added that there was no need to panic and no need to pay attention to the rumours circulating on social media.

A senior health official mentioned that the director general of Medical Health had already given directions to allocate ten beds in government hospitals for HMPV patients, and all precautions typically followed for such viruses are to be implemented. Experts maintain that there is no need to panic, as the virus is not fatal. Sources, however, said that the case has raised concern, given the large congregation of people expected at Prayagraj for Maha Kumbh from January 13.



### NOTICE

I have changed my name from Ankit to ANKIT CHAUDHARY S/o Kali Shankar R/o Naya Khara Semri Lalganj Rae Bareilly for all future purpose.

### NOTICE

This is to inform to all that my name has been erroneously written as Azeem in my passport No. R6196505 whereas my correct name is Mo. Azeem. The correct name also registered in my Aadhaar card. Mo. Azeem R/o 3/19/25 Gaurapatti Police Station Kotwali Nagar Cantt District Ayodhya

### NOTICE

It is notified that I Satish Kumar Sharma son of Surendra Prasad have changed my name to Satish Ambekar son of Surendra Prasad. From today I should be known as Satish Ambekar and should be recorded in all records. Both the names belong to the same person. Satish Ambekar 47 Bijnor Near CRPF Group Centre, Lucknow.

### NOTICE

I, No. 9424794W Rank HAV Name SUMAN RAI S/o Suk Bahadur Rai Unit-6/11 GR, hereby declare that in my service records inadvertently my father's SUK BAHADUR RAI and mother's SATYAWATI RAI Date of Birth is mentioned as 29.01.1958 and 12.03.1963 respectively while my father's and mother's correct Date of Birth is 21.09.1955 and 15.08.1961 respectively.

### NOTICE

Shaurya Mishra S/o Late Vikas Mishra R/o 69-A, Vikas Nagar, Kanpur 208024, have change my name from Shaurya Misra to Shaurya Mishra for all future purpose.

### NOTICE

Service number -2687293N, HAV Jitendra bahadur singh the Grenadiers my daughter name khushi is wrongly written in my service record, when the right name is khushi singh. Address- Village/Post -Rauta Pur, Thana-Sareni, Lalganj, Raebareilly-229216

### NOTICE

I, Prakhar Shukla, S/o Uma Kant Shukla, residing at 159 Karmchari Nagar, 37- PAC Road, Kanpur Nagar, have lost my 12th Standard ICSE Certificate, Index No. 5596554, Year 2015, issued by Virendra Swaroop Public School, Cantt, Kanpur Nagar.

### NOTICE

I, Sayema Quadri, D/o-SM Parwaiz Quadri, R/o-Park View Apartment Flat No. 104 First Floor Salimpur, Ahara, Near IMA Hall, Kadamkuan, Patna, Bihar 800003. I have changed my previous name from Sayema Quadri to Trinetri, hence in future I will be known by this name on all forms.

### NOTICE

I, No. 9425626K Rank HAV Name DEEPAK KUMAR KHARAKA S/o Kishan Singh Kharka Unit-6/11 GR hereby declare that in my service records my name is mentioned as DEEPAK KUMAR KHARAKA inadvertently while my correct name is DEEPAK KUMAR KHARAKA.

### NOTICE

In my service record (EME), name of my wife has been wrongly mentioned as Anju Devi. Her correct name is Varsha Devi which will be recorded in my service (EME record). Arunesh Kumar S/o Ramesh Chandra, Vill. Tauns, Post Semarjhal, Kanpur Nagar.

### NOTICE

I, No. 9424813W Rank HAV Name REWARD RAI S/o Rup Narayan Rai Unit-6/11 GR, hereby declare that in my service records inadvertently my father's RUP NARAYAN RAI and mother's GITA RAI Date of Birth is mentioned as 06.12.1952 and 11.04.1951 respectively while my father's and mother's correct Date of Birth is 16.12.1952 and 01.01.1958 respectively.

### NOTICE

I, Prakhar Shukla, S/o Uma Kant Shukla, residing at 159 Karmchari Nagar, 37- PAC Road, Kanpur Nagar, have lost my 10th Standard ICSE Certificate, Index No. T/5274/027, Year 2013, issued by St. Mary's Orthodox School, Krishna Puram, Kanpur.

### NOTICE

I, No. 9423826F Rank HAV Name PHULESHWAR PASWAN S/o Damodar Paswan Unit-1/11 GR, hereby declare that in my service records my father's DAMODAR PASWAN Date of Birth is mentioned as 14.02.1941 inadvertently my father's correct Date of Birth of deponent's father is 01.01.1955.

### NOTICE

I have changed my name from Arvind Agnihotri to Arvind Kumar Agnihotri to be known as Arvind Kumar Agnihotri in all future references. Arvind Kumar Agnihotri, Add.- 694 w-2 block, basant Vihar Naubasta, Kanpur

### NOTICE

We, Archana Singh wife of Pushpraj Singh and Pushpraj Singh son of Raj Baharon Singh resident of Villa No. 120, Sector-A Eldeco City, IIM Road, Lucknow hereby inform the general public that my original allotment letter and chain deed of Villa No. 120, Eldeco City, IIM Road, original chain deed, sale deed executed on 27.05.2014 and registered at serial number 7694 in book number 1, volume number 6755 page number 335 to 402, has fallen somewhere on 09/01/2025 and if anyone finds it, please return it to our address within 7 days of this notice.

### NOTICE

I have changed my name Mohammad Ajmal Sheikh to Sheikh Mohammad Ajmal S/o Wazir Mohammad Qureshi for future purpose. 90/239 Iftikharabad Kanpur Nagar.

### आवश्यकता है

श्री शंकर भगवान इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ टेक्नोलॉजी मऊ-चित्रकूट, उत्तर प्रदेश

### NOTICE

I would like to inform that my name is recorded as Shikhar Singh with DOB 01.01.2006 on my Aadhaar, which is incorrect. My correct name as per my marksheet is Mridul Singh with DOB 29.10.2006. Mridul Singh, S/o Shrawan Singh, R/o-Alok Nagar, Kalyanpur, Lucknow.

### NOTICE

My army number is 15440526 P, rank Naik DVR Akhilesh Kumar son of Shri Devnandan Pandey Unit 336 Field Hospital C/O- 56 APO Lucknow, in my service record my daughter's name has been mistakenly written as ANU SRI whereas her real name is ANNU SHREE which should be recorded in my service record

# 32 candidates accused of committing fraud in 2016 auditor exam

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Candidates had allegedly committed fraud in the Assistant Accountant and Auditor Recruitment Examination held in Uttar Pradesh in 2016. This was revealed eight years later during document verification, officials said here.

As a result, the director of the Internal Accounts and Audit has filed an FIR against 32 candidates at Mahanagar police station. The Directorate of Internal Accounts and Audit, under the Finance department of the UP government, New Hyderabad, had conducted a recruitment examination for the post of Assistant Accountant in the Uttar Pradesh Government Department Subordinate Accounts Cadre in 2016. It has been alleged that the educational documents of 842 selected candidates were cross-examined/matched by the department as per standard procedure. In this process, the

educational documents of 32 candidates/assistant accountants were found to be fake. According to the police, appointment letters had been issued to 28 of the 32 selected candidates who committed fraud. However, Brijesh Kumar, Hashir Ahmed, Pradeep Kumar, and Vikas Agarwal were not given appointment letters, as the fraud was revealed during the probe. The complainant alleged that after the fraud was revealed, the appointments of all the selected candidates who had submitted fake documents were cancelled.

The department informed the police that the documents were matched after the appointments, and following this, a report was sought from the institute concerned regarding the documents submitted by the candidates. In this report, the O-level certificates of 32 individuals were found to be fake. Following this, action was taken after a departmental inquiry based on the report of the recruiting institute.

# Second phase of Green Corridor from Jan 13

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The second phase of the Green Corridor project is set to begin on January 13. This phase will be the third part of the plan to connect Piparghat with Shaheed Path, covering a stretch of 5.80 kilometres. The development includes constructing an embankment along both sides of the Gomti river, building a bridge across the river, and establishing a six-lane road to link the two areas. The project will be a joint venture between the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA)

and army authorities. LDA Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar made the announcement on Thursday, stating that the dispute between the army and development authority had been resolved amicably. The project received clearance after approval from military authorities in New Delhi. Civil work, which had been delayed for eight months due to administrative complications, is set to resume. Kumar explained that 2.8 kilometres of land falls under the jurisdiction of the defence estate, while the remainder belongs to the LDA. The dispute was settled following several joint inspections.



### NOTICE

This is to inform that Original sale deeds bearing document no. 1675, 1676, dated 19/02/2016 & document no. 10229, dated 03/11/2009, regarding the property khasra no. 3542, Old no. 4947/2, Situated at Village Amaisai, Pargana Bijnour, Tehsil Sarojani Nagar, District Lucknow, which were duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar Lucknow, were lost on 05/01/2025, with my client namely Mr. Saurabh Agarwal S/O Mr. Pawan Kumar Agarwal R/O House no. 68B, Singar Nagar, Alambagh, Lucknow. If any person has any claim or objection over it, kindly inform within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and after the completion of above time period, no claim of any kind will be considered. B.N. Tripathi Advocate, Res: C-15, Nehru Vihar, Kalyanpur, Lucknow, Mob: 9336127853

# New 700 MT/day capacity fresh waste processing plant inaugurated

Lucknow (PNS): Mayor Sushma Kharakwal and senior BJP leader Neeraj Singh inaugurated the new 700 MT/day capacity fresh waste processing plant of Lucknow Municipal Corporation on Thursday. Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh said that this new fresh waste processing plant will work in conjunction with the previously established 700 MT capacity plant.



"The total capacity of both the plants will be 1400 metric tonnes per day. This will ensure the scientific processing of 70 per cent of the total 2000 metric tonnes of waste generated in the city," he said. He mentioned that the new fresh waste processing plant has been equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. The modern machinery installed in this new plant will process the waste in a scientific manner. Keeping in mind the safety of

the environment, an environment-friendly processing system has been installed. For better use of waste, modern facilities have been provided for the production of manure and energy from it. For proper disposal of waste, an automatic separation system has been installed, which will

separate the waste according to its nature. An odour control system has also been installed to keep the environment clean. Additionally, a modern laboratory has also been set up in the plant, which will continuously check the quality of processing and ensure work is carried out

according to the standards. "This plant has been set up as per international standards. This will not only protect the environment but will also reduce the pressure on landfill sites. The organic manure obtained from the plant will be useful in agricultural work, and the energy produced will help in power supply. This project will create new employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly, and will also give a boost to the related industries. This plant will prove to be helpful in making Lucknow a leader in the Swachh Bharat Mission," Singh said. He added that the municipal corporation plans to ensure the scientific processing of 100% of the waste generated in the city every day in the near future. For this, additional capacity will also be expanded as required.

# Forest team digs pit to trap stray tiger

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In its efforts to trap the stray tiger at Rehmankhara, the Forest department has dug a pit near the railway track, which is camouflaged by natural vegetation. This 10x10 feet pit is vertical, with no slanting walls, so that the tiger cannot climb back out after falling into it. Meanwhile, the tiger's movement was noticed in Zone 1, where fresh pug marks were found on Thursday. The tiger came near the bait it killed but did not eat it. Chief Wildlife Warden Anuradha Vemuri said that the tiger has become accustomed to the local terrain. "The tiger has become familiar with the local terrain, which is highly suitable for it. We put out the bait and hoped that the

tiger would come to eat its kill, but it did not. The tiger is capable of sensing who is around," she said. She added that among the other strategies they were using was digging a pit near the railway track so that the tiger might fall into it. "Cages, camera traps, elephants - we are trying everything. The area has been divided into three zones, and there are teams and sub-teams out to trap the tiger and search for pug marks in the surrounding areas and the Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture (CISH) campus," she said. She pointed out that foggy conditions were hampering their efforts to rescue the tiger. "The fog persists until noon and is quite dense. With the thermal drones, we can sense human and tiger presence, but

we are unable to pinpoint the location of the stray tiger," she said. She said that the elephants were able to sense the presence of the tiger, and they were relying on them to locate it. "At one point, we had localised the tiger, but when the elephants moved in so that the big cat could be darted, it was nowhere to be found. The tiger keeps changing its position, and sometimes the strategy we employ doesn't work," she added. She said they needed to be patient, as in 2012, a tiger was trapped after three months. District Forest Officer (DFO), Awadh, Sitanshu Pandey, said: "We are carrying out combing operations in the nearby villages from which we are receiving information. We want the

combing to be carried out near human habitation so that the tiger does not approach these areas," he said. He mentioned that they had constructed a pit, which is an old mechanism for trapping animals. "The trap was set in a location where frequent movement of the tiger has been detected through the camera trap," he said. He added that over 50 staff members from the Forest department were working day and night to trap the tiger. He also mentioned that the recording of the sound of a tigress and the urine of a tigress would be used to attract the big cat. "DFO, Sitapur, who was previously posted at the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, has also arrived at the site to assist in rescuing the tiger," Pandey said.

# Lock-jawed for 14 years, teen back to normal after complex surgery

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A rare and complex surgical procedure at Apollomedics Super Speciality Hospital here brought relief to a patient who had been unable to open his mouth for the past 14 years. Since the age of 5 or 6, Aditya, now 19, from Sant Kabir Nagar in Uttar Pradesh had been suffering from a locked jaw due to a childhood injury. This condition prevented him from eating solid food or speaking for over a decade, severely affecting his growth and quality of life. The challenging procedure was performed by Dr Sumit Malhotra, Director and head of the department of plastic, cosmetic & reconstructive surgery, alongside Dr Saurabh Mohindru, consultant in the same department.

Dr Malhotra explained that Aditya had consulted numerous doctors over the years but could not find a satisfactory solution. When he visited Apollomedics, it was discovered that the injury had damaged his temporomandibular joint, which had caused the jaw to lock. After a thorough diagnosis, the patient was referred to the plastic surgery department for treatment. The surgical team used a specialised 'muscle flap' technique to restore jaw function, ensuring that the jaw joint would not fuse again by attaching muscles with an active blood supply. This intricate surgery, rarely performed in northern India, was a success, allowing Aditya's jaw to function normally without the risk of future complications. Dr Saurabh Mohindru highlighted the remarkable out-

come, saying, "After the surgery, the patient could eat solid food, including roti, for the first time in 14 years. His ability to open his mouth has significantly improved, restoring vital functions like eating and speaking." Dr Amita Agarwal, head of the department of dental sciences, said that the recovery process would involve 2-3 weeks of physiotherapy. Dr Mayank Somani, Managing Director and CEO of Apollomedics, said: "This surgery has not only restored functionality but also confidence, allowing Aditya to lead a normal life once again. It's a proud achievement for our team and reflects our hospital's commitment to providing innovative, compassionate care for even the most challenging cases."

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT  
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE No.  
AD/OE/IGL-65/2016(PL/II)/2788 Dtd.31.12.2024  
Name of the work:- "Service contract for office management and allied works in various departments / divisions and operational areas of PPA". Estimated cost put to tender ₹4,15,09,160.00 (excluding GST @ 18% & Contractor's Commission). The last date & time of submission of bid is 20.01.2025 upto 1700 Hrs. For details please refer our website: [www.paradipport.gov.in/](http://www.paradipport.gov.in/) <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.  
Sd/- Asst. Secretary (Admin.),  
Paradip Port Authority  
PPA/PR/56/2024-2025 dtd.09.01.2025

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT  
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE No.  
AD/OE/IGL-07/13(Vol. VI)/2787 Dtd.31.12.2024  
Name of the work:- "Providing Secretarial and other assistance for official works of Administrative Department". Estimated cost put to tender ₹ 1,95,50,947.00 (excluding GST @ 18% & Contractor's Commission). The last date & time of submission of bid is 20.01.2025 upto 1700 Hrs. For details please refer our website: [www.paradipport.gov.in/](http://www.paradipport.gov.in/) <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.  
Sd/- Asst. Secretary (Admin.),  
Paradip Port Authority  
PPA/PR/57/2024-2025  
09/01/2025



# Shankaracharyas join grand confluence of faith

## MAHA KUMBH 2025

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

After the grand presence of the Akharas, the revered Shankaracharyas have now graced the Mahakumbh Nagar. In a significant spiritual event, a grand procession marked the entry of Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Ji of the Jyotishpeeth into the Kumbh region. The event witnessed the enthusiastic participation of thousands of saints, adding to the divine aura of the Maha Kumbh.

Following the grand entry of the akharas, the most significant attraction of public faith at the Maha Kumbh, the process of entry of Shankaracharyas of all four Peeths has also begun. A grand procession for Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Ji of the Jyotish Peeth started from Ram Bagh in the city. The procession, which began from Patharchatti Ram Bagh, saw thousands of saints, sadhus, and Ved Bantuk Brahmacharis

from various Akharas participating. Leading the procession was the religious flag of the Shankaracharya, followed by a majestic chariot carrying Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, with monks, mahants and saints from various monasteries and directions accompanying him. The grand procession of Shankaracharya brought to life the rich cultural heritage of India. The procession showcased glimpses of folk culture and music from all directions — north, south, east, and west. Artists from Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Karnataka performed traditional dance forms and music, adding to the vibrancy of the event. The local drum bands from South India and Maharashtra captured everyone's attention. The Shiva Dhol Band from Maharashtra, with dozens of drums playing together, resonated through the surroundings, creating an electrifying atmosphere. Devotees in the procession also danced joyfully to the rhythm of the Damru dance.

The grand procession was warmly welcomed by the local citizens with flowers at 108 locations across the city. The procession began at Patharchatti, passing through Malaka, Sabzi Mandi, Moti Mahal Chauraha, Chameliba Dharmashala, Jansenganj, Chowk Ghantaghar, Bahadur Ganj, and Keetganj, before entering the Kumbh Mela site via the dam road, ultimately reaching the Shankaracharya camp. Swami Satyanand Giri of Bodh Gaya Math shared that through this event, a message is being conveyed to the public: to unite in the cause of declaring the cow as the national mother. Posters expressing this commitment were placed on several chariots throughout the procession.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Juna Akhara's Mahant Hari Giri ahead of the Maha Kumbh, at Sangam in Prayagraj on Thursday

# Ayodhya gears up for consecration anniversary

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Preparations for the first anniversary of Ram Lalla's 'pran pratishtha' in the grand temple in Ayodhya this weekend. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust and the district administration are actively gearing up for the ceremony, set to begin on January 11. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will inaugurate the programme and perform the abhishek of Ram Lalla. Ram Lalla will be dressed in a Pitambari on the first day of Pratishtha Dwadashi. It is being prepared in Delhi. It is being weaved and embroidered with gold and silver threads and will reach Ayodhya on Friday and Ram Lalla will wear it on January 11 and give darshan.

The festival will be held from January 11 to 13, with January 11 being especially important. The ceremony will begin with the abhishek of Ram Lalla. The worship and abhishek of Ram Lalla will start from 10 am. On the same lines as the abhishek of Ram Lalla was done in the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony, Ram Lalla will be anointed with 'panchamrit', Saryu water etc. on Pratishtha Dwadashi. After abhishek-pujan, Ram Lalla's maha aarti will be held at exactly 12:20 pm. According to Shri Ram Mandir Trust, about 110 VIPs will participate in the ceremony.

At the same time, a German hangar tent has been set up at the Angad Tila site, and it can host up to 5,000 people. Common people will get an opportunity to see grand programmes, including classical cultural performances, rituals and Ram katha discourses organised daily in the mandap and yajnashala. Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai said, "The trust has decided to invite common people, who could not attend the consecration ceremony last year. They will be allowed to attend the events on all three days at Angad Tila." According to the temple trust, decoration and preparations for the celebrations are in full swing at the yajnashala site. The mandap and the yajnashala will be the main venues for these celebrations. This will be a rare opportunity for common people to be a part of the Ram Mandir celebrations. The trust has already sent invitations to saints and devotees from across the country. The Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on January 22, 2024, a landmark event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Lakhs of people watched the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony on television at their homes and in neighbourhood temples, savouring the historic moment.

# NE's cultural essence to enliven Pragjyotishpur

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

This year's Maha Kumbh is showcasing the widespread presence and cultural influence of the northeastern states, with a special focus on the tradition of Satradhikars in Assam, where rituals will be conducted based on the Assamese Namghar culture. The northeastern satras are participating in the Maha Kumbh for the first time this year. To honour their significance, the Yogi Adityanath government has extended a special invitation to the saints from the northeastern region, granting them the status of state guests. Special preparations are underway in the Pragjyotishpur area of the Maha Kumbh complex to accommodate these cultural events, which will begin on January 12. Mahant Mahamandaleswar Swami Shri Keshav Das Ji Maharaj of Yogashram Bihalingini Assam, shared that a Namghar is being built in the Pragjyotishpur area of the Maha Kumbh, marking the first time this is happening at the Kumbh. The Satradhikars will stay here and participate in the Shahi Snan. Religious gather-

ings will be held, and an uninterrupted Bhagwat Katha will take place, running for 168 hours over seven days, from January 21 to January 27. An exhibition showcasing the cultures of all seven northeastern states will also be held, offering a complete picture of their society, culture and religion. Artists have already arrived to prepare for it, and the exhibition will be inaugurated on January 12, he informed. He further shared that the event will feature a performance by Ram Vijay Bhavana, which will be staged in the style of Ramlila. Additionally, there will be a Manipuri dance performance and a Satrik dance. A Bamboo Dance from Nagaland and an Apsara dance will also be showcased, all falling under the Satrik culture. Devotees will display their artistic skills at the Mati Akhada, a unique tradition of yoga practice with its own distinct form. A model of Kamakhya will be set up, and the sacred water from Kamakhya will be distributed among the devotees. Regarding the arrangements at the fair, he mentioned that the arrangements are excellent. The fair administration is

making efforts to ensure that all the saints and sages are satisfied and have the necessary facilities. "The kind of arrangements made by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have deeply impressed, satisfied and excited them. Yogi has invited 125 saints from the Northeast, giving them the status of state guests, and they are receiving calls from the chief minister's office. Their accommodations will be arranged in our own Khalsa," he remarked. Padma Shri awarded Chitta Maharaj of Tripura, along with ancient satras like Dakshin Pad Satra, Gadmur Satra, many satradhikars will come and participate in the Shahi Snan. This is the first time that the satradhikars will be participating in the royal bath at the Kumbh and staying there. The akharas will honour them, and there will be dialogues with the saint community here. The Prag Jyotishpur camp is set to be inaugurated on January 12, with programmes commencing shortly after. Chief Minister Yogi's efforts in organising the Maha Kumbh have generated significant awareness across the Northeast, sparking excitement among the people.

# B'khand transformation to be showcased at Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Over 40-45 crore devotees from across the globe attending Maha Kumbh 2025 will witness the remarkable transformation of Uttar Pradesh's villages through the concept of 'Swachh Sujal Gaon' (clean and water-secure villages). Under the visionary guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Jal Jeevan Mission has revolutionised water accessibility, bringing tap water to every household in Bundelkhand. This narrative of progress showcases Bundelkhand's journey from despair before 2017 to its remarkable transformation thereafter. Set across 40,000 square feet, the exhibition will present a vivid picture of a prosperous Uttar Pradesh, highlighting initiatives such as PM Awas, CM Awas, gram panchayat development, and village solar energy adoption. The government aims to emphasise the state's new and inspiring identity through the exhibition. A digital corner will also give citizens real-time information about their villages' water, taps and supply status. Under the Yogi government, the Rural Water Supply and Namami

Gange Department has created this 'Swachh Sujal Gaon' to be showcased from January 10 to February 26, 2025. Themed 'Solution to Drinking Water: New Identity of My Village', the initiative highlights how Bundelkhand, once synonymous with water scarcity, now stands as a symbol of success in resolving the drinking water crisis. The 47-day event will feature numerous programmes, offering a platform for rural women of Bundelkhand to share their stories of change. These include life-altering experiences such as villages in Banda, Jhansi and Chitrakoot now witnessing weddings, which were previously impossible due to water shortages. Women from Lalitpur and Mahoba will recount how access to clean water has improved their lives, even addressing severe health impacts like hair loss caused by carrying heavy water loads. The exhibit will provide multilingual accessibility, with information in Hindi, English, Bengali, Telugu and Marathi, ensuring inclusivity for a diverse audience. The Rural Water Supply and Namami Gange Department will establish a 'Jal Mandir' (Water Temple) at Maha Kumbh 2025, offering a unique spiritual and environmental

experience. In this temple, the sacred Ganga will symbolically flow from the locks of Lord Shiva, emphasising the message that water is a divine blessing, a life-giving resource to be cherished and conserved. Morning and evening jal aarti ceremonies will further amplify this message, integrating the story of the Jal Jeevan Mission and advocating for water conservation. India's tradition of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (Guest is God) will be celebrated as Namami Gange and the Rural Water Supply Department honour visitors to the 'Swachh Sujal Gaon'. Guests will receive 'jal prasad' in eco-friendly jute-cloth bags containing sacred water from the Sangam, a diary on the Jal Jeevan Mission, and study material showcasing success stories of transformation through water initiatives. The 'Swachh Sujal Gaon' will also feature a Digital Corner with interactive elements such as a digital screen and a gaming zone. Visitors can engage in fun and educational games highlighting the benefits of clean drinking water and the risks of consuming contaminated water. These activities aim to raise awareness about the importance of water conservation in an engaging manner.

# Govt steps up efforts to protect cows in shelters from cold

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid cold wave conditions in Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi Adityanath government has stepped up efforts to protect destitute cows lodged in cow shelters across the state. On Chief Minister Yogi's instructions to ensure no cow succumbs to the cold, shelters across the state are being equipped with tarpaulins, bonfires, fodder, water and other necessary facilities. Veterinary officers have been directed to visit cow shelters regularly, ensuring proper health check-ups, treatment, medication and care for the cows. It has also been mandated that caretakers remain at the cow shelters overnight to ensure uninterrupted care and support for the bovine. Chief Minister Yogi has further instructed district nodal officers to conduct regular inspections of cow shelters, ensuring there is no shortage of fodder, straw, water, lighting and other essentials. Additionally, priority has been placed on expediting the establishment of cow protection centres to create a safe environment for destitute cows. The government has tasked the Rural Development Department and other allied departments with coordinating efforts for effective cow protection. Clear instructions have also been issued to free pasture lands from illegal occupation and ensure the cultivation of both perennial and seasonal fodder through the MGNREGA scheme. The Yogi government has instructed that all infrastructure-related works be completed by February 25, 2025. Implementing agencies have been directed to ensure high-quality construction in accordance with the specified standards and layout. Structures such as cow sheds, drinking water facilities, must be built in a strong and organised manner. The government has also mandated immediate corrective action in cow shelters where any form of mismanagement or complaints related to cow care are reported. Currently, 12,35,700 destitute cows are being sheltered in 7,696 cow shelters across Uttar Pradesh. The government aims to further strengthen the quality and management of these shelters. The chief minister has emphasised prioritising tarpaulins, bonfires and other essential measures to protect cows from the cold. The Yogi government has stressed that these efforts should be undertaken with utmost seriousness and sensitivity at all levels. These measures will not only safeguard cows during the harsh winter but also reinforce the state's longstanding tradition of cow protection.

# RLD keen to contest Delhi assembly polls

PRABHA SHANKER ■ LUCKNOW

With the announcement of Delhi assembly elections, Rashtriya Lok Dal, an ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party which is the main rival of Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi polls, is also cherishing dreams of its presence in Delhi assembly. Considered a regional party hitherto, the RLD has left its political footprints in the political landscape of Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Jammu Kashmir by contesting the assembly elections there and securing seats in Rajasthan. With the announcement of Delhi assembly elections, the RLD is also preparing to jump into the electoral battle. For this, senior leaders of the party have started camping in Delhi. Party supremo and union leader Jayant Singh is heading the election preparations. While the BJP is announcing its candidates, the RLD, Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) are also demanding seats. Sources in the party disclosed that the RLD has demanded five seats from BJP for the Delhi assembly elections. "If the seats are granted under poll pact, the RLD will field its candidates in alliance. If this does not happen, the party may go solo in the elections. However, the party is thinking of fielding candidates only on some selected seats where its core Jat voters are dominant," the sources said. RLD national general secretary Anupam Mishra said that the number of Jat voters in Delhi is quite large. "Delhi is a hub of Jat voters as it is close to west UP and they are residing there for decades. They play a decisive role in many assembly constituencies. There are also a lot of voters from UP and Punjab in Delhi. In such a situation, RLD's political reach and strength cannot be ignored. The party will play an

important role in wooing these voters in favour of BJP," Mishra said. Mishra said the RLD had a strong base of its core Jat and Gurjar voters in Delhi assembly constituencies bordering UP and stood a good chance there. "The RLD's core voters have a strong presence in Delhi and the party cannot be ignored if AAP is to be decimated in the coming assembly elections. We will campaign for the National Democratic Alliance in all the 70 constituencies irrespective of what we get in seat-sharing. We will decide later if we will go solo," Mishra said. As per a rough estimate, there are 364 villages in Delhi and out of them 225 villages are Jat and Gurjar dominated. In these villages Jats have 10 per cent vote share while Gurjar have 7 per cent share. There are seven assembly constituencies where Jats and Gurjar play important roles in the outcome of elections. They are Mehrauli, Matiyala, Mundawar, Nazafgarh, Nangloi, Bijwasan and Rithala. Only in Najafgarh, the Jat domination is 30 per cent. RLD national general secretary (organisation) Trilok Tyagi said that the party was planning to contest election in Delhi and the talks on this line were underway. "Besides RLD, JDU and LJP (Ram Vilas) are also mulling to contest election in Delhi. Right now, it is yet to be decided if the BJP will share seats with us. After the denial for seats, the RLD will decide whether to go solo in Delhi. We have a party unit in Delhi and we have a strong presence of RLD voters in Delhi. Election preparations are being finalised with national and local leaders. It is expected that a positive decision will be taken on this soon," Tyagi said. He said that it was necessary for all the alliance parties to give a composite fight to AAP to dethrone it.

# Cong demands tax relief in Union budget

Lucknow (PNS): Congress on Thursday asked the Central government to give tax relief and remove goods and services tax (GST) from essential household items and health insurance. Making this demand here during a press conference on Thursday afternoon, Congress national spokesperson and president of party's social media and digital platform, Supriya Shrinete, accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of imposing heavy taxes on the common people of the country and demanded relief to their suffering from "Gabbar Singh Tax" and removal of GST from essential household items and health insurance. Shrinete said that in a few days the government was going to present its budget, this budget would decide the future of the country. She alleged that in this "suit-boot government", income tax was much higher than corporate tax, meaning, big capitalists were paying less tax than common man. She said that the Modi government had done this through "Gabbar Singh Tax" which should be equal for the richest and the poorest people of this country. "But this government has not only messed up the GST but the reality is that GST is being forcibly collected on flour, curd, medicine, education and even on selling popcorn and old car; today the tax on the common man is high and the tax on corporate industrialists is low," Shrinete said. She added that on an average, 64 per cent of the GST collection came from the bottom half of the country's population, that is, the bottom 50 per cent and only 3 per cent of GST came from the top 10 per cent.

## Equinox India

### Tapir Constructions Limited

(CIN: U70200DL2014PLC267441)

Extract of Unaudited Financial Results for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2024

Sl. No.	Particulars	Quarter ended 31 December 2024	Corresponding quarter ended 31 December 2023	Previous year ended 31 March 2024
		(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Audited)
1	Total Income from Operations	5.2	2.7	24.8
2	Net (Loss) / Profit for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(45.0)	(17.5)	(71.5)
3	Net (Loss) / Profit for the period before Tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(45.0)	(17.5)	(71.5)
4	Net (Loss) / Profit for the period after Tax, (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(45.0)	(17.5)	(71.5)
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising (Loss) / Profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	(45.0)	(17.5)	(72.0)
6	Paid up Equity Share Capital	0.5	0.5	0.5
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)	(2,199.1)	(2,078.3)	(2,117.5)
8	Securities Premium Account	-	-	-
9	Net Worth	(2,198.6)	(2,077.8)	(2,117.0)
10	Paid up Debt Capital / Outstanding Debt	4,360.0	3,232.0	3,540.5
11	Outstanding redemption preference share	-	-	-
12	Debt Equity Ratio	(2.02)	(1.56)	(1.70)
13	Earnings per Share (EPS) (Face value Per Share ₹ 10 each)			
	- Basic (Amount in ₹)	(901.76)	(350.00)	(1,430.52)
	- Diluted (Amount in ₹)	(901.76)	(350.00)	(1,430.52)
14	Capital Redemption Reserve	-	-	-
15	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	(0.60)	(0.10)	(0.06)
16	Interest Service Coverage Ratio	(0.60)	(0.32)	(0.35)
17	Current ratio (In times)	1.03	0.78	0.92
18	Total debts to total assets	0.74	0.68	0.71
19	Long term debt to working capital (In times)	13.06	(0.54)	(3.79)
20	Bad debt to account receivable ratio (In %)	-	-	-
21	Current liability ratio (In times)	0.70	0.89	0.76
22	Debtor turnover ratio (In times)	-	-	-
23	Inventory turnover ratio (In times)	-	-	-
24	Operating margin (In %)	6.39	18.61	31.91
25	Net profit margin (In %)	(857.01)	(640.48)	(288.53)

Notes: 1 The above results have been reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors ('the Board') at its meeting held on 09 January 2025. 2 The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly / Annual Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 52(B), read with 52(4) of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly/ Annual Financial Results are available on the Company's website (https://equinoxindia.com/tcl) and on the website of BSE (https://www.bseindia.com) and NSE (https://www.nseindia.com).

Registered Office: Office No. 202, 2nd Floor, A-18, Rama House, Middle Circle, Connaught Place, New Delhi- 110 001. For and on behalf of the Board of Directors

Place : Mumbai Date : 09 January 2025 Abhishek Rajnath Surve Executive director



# Addl secy focuses on SWAYAM implementation in UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) successfully hosted the inaugural regional workshop on the 'Integration and Implementation of SWAYAM Courses in Universities and Affiliated Colleges' at Swatantrata Bhawan, BHU, here on Thursday. This workshop, initiated by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the University Grants Commission (UGC), marks the beginning of a series of such events scheduled from January to March. The primary objective of the workshop was to facilitate discussions on the effective implementation of Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) courses across universities in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi. Emphasis was laid on enhancing student participation for credit accumulation and fostering interdisciplinary learning opportunities. Additional Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Uttar Pradesh, Sipu Giri reflected on integration of AI in SWAYAM and spoke about the implementation of



The regional workshop on SWAYAM courses was organised at BHU in Varanasi on Thursday.

SWAYAM in UP. BHU Rector Prof Sanjay Kumar presided over the inaugural session and remarked that SWAYAM as a digital platform will function as a complement to traditional curriculum. Joint Secretary, UGC, Dr Diksha Rajput acknowledged the shortage of the courses over the SWAYAM platform and motivated faculty members to develop them. Deputy Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Delhi, Rohit

Tripathi stressed upon the role of digital initiatives like SWAYAM as the current brick and mortar system of education will not be able to cope up with the rising demand. SWAYAM co-coordinator, BHU and Workshop Coordinator Dr Ashutosh Mohan welcomed the guests, introduced the theme of workshop while highlighting the achievements of BHU SWAYAM Chapter. He said BHU has demonstrated

remarkable progress in the online education domain. Over the past 14 months, the BHU has launched 15 SWAYAM courses in July 2024 and 22 courses in January 2025, attracting a pan-Indian enrolment of over 39,000 students. The BHU has also been recognised with AAA certification and ranked among the 'Top 100 Best Performing SPOCs in India' for students' enrolment in NPTEL courses. The total credits transfer beneficiaries of stu-

dent from BHU in the academic year 2021-2024 crossed the mark of 20K. In the technical session, Joint Secretary at Ministry of Education, Delhi, Govind Jaiswal reflected on SWAYAM growth journey and benefits of SWAYAM from universities' and students' perspectives. Dr Diksha Rajput elaborated the steps for adoption of SWAYAM courses for credit transfer and examination framework. Senior scientist at National Programme for Technology Enhanced Learning, IIT Madras, Dr Jaykrishnan M has given detailed visual presentation on SWAYAM University Dashboard. In the valedictory session, BHR Registrar Prof Arun Kumar Singh congratulated the SWAYAM committee of BHU for successful organisation of the workshop. The programme was conducted by Dr PC Abhilash and vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Neha Pandey, Member, SWAYAM Executive Committee, BHU. This initiative reflects BHU's commitment to promoting academic innovation and supporting the integration of digital learning platforms in higher education.



Sadhus on Thursday taking part in a procession towards Sangam ahead of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj

PTI

# Temporary halt for many trains at Jhusi, Prayagraj Rambag stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

## MAHA KUMBH

For the convenience of devotees on the occasion of Maha Kumbh Mela to be held in Prayagraj, the Railway administration will provide a temporary halt of five minutes for boarding and deboarding at Jhusi and Prayagraj Rambag stations for trains passing through these stations during this period. As many as 32 trains will be provided a temporary halt of five minutes at Jhusi station and 14 trains at Prayagraj Rambag station. Public Relations Officer (PRO) of NER, Varanasi division, Ashok Kumar said. These trains are 22581 Ballia-New Delhi Superfast Express; 11062 Jaynagar-Lokmanya Tilak Express; 22427 Ballia-Anand Vihar Terminal-Sitamari Express; 11034 Darbhanga-Pune Express; 15267 Raxaul-

Lokmanya Tilak Terminus Antyodaya Express; 15559 Darbhanga-Ahmedabad Express; 12561 Jaynagar-New Delhi Swatantrata Senani Express; 15004 Gorakhpur-Kanpur Anwarganj Chauri Chaura Express; 12946 Banaras-Veraval Superfast Express; 12333 Howrah-Prayagraj Rambag Vibhuti Express; 11037 Pune-Gorakhpur Express; 14005 Sitamarhi-Anand Vihar Terminal-Lichchavi Express; 20962 Banaras-Udhna Superfast Express; 11038 Gorakhpur-Pune Express; 20934 Danapur-Udhna Superfast Express; 14006 Anand Vihar Terminal-Sitamari Express; 20933 Udhna-Danapur Superfast Express; 12562 New Delhi-Jayanagar Swatantrata Senani Express; 12582 New Delhi-Banaras Superfast Express; 22582 New Delhi-Ballia Superfast Express; 22428 Anand Vihar Terminal-Ballia Superfast Express; 20961 Udhna-Banaras Superfast Express; 11061 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus-Jaynagar Express; 12945 Veraval-Banaras Superfast Express; 12334 Prayagraj Rambag-Howrah Vibhuti Express; 15268 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus-Raxaul Antyodaya Express; 11033 Pune-Ahmedabad Express; 15560 Darbhanga-Darbhanga Antyodaya Express; and 15003 Kanpur Anwarganj-Gorakhpur Chauri Chaura Express.

# Industry interface meeting held

Varanasi (PNS): An industry interface meeting was organised by the Zonal Technical Management Committee at the Indian Institute of Vegetable Research (IIVR) here on Thursday. This is an innovative effort to ensure the availability of improved varieties and hybrids of vegetables developed by the institute to vegetable farmers in every corner of the country. In this meeting, a discussion was organised between Indo American Hybrid Seed Private Limited, a leading private sector seed company based in Bengaluru, and scientists of IIVR. This meeting was chaired by Director of IIVR Dr Nagendra Rai. Vegetable Business Head Sridhar Hegde

and Biotechnology Head Dr Devraj Achar were present on behalf of Indo American Hybrid Seed Company. The Director appreciated the efforts of the Zonal Technical Management Committee in the field of public private partnership and technology transfer for the dissemination of the institute's technologies and called upon private seed companies to join the institute. During this discussion, Project Coordinator Dr Rajesh Kumar, Dr PM Singh, Dr DR Bhardwaj, Dr Neeraj Singh, Dr SK Singh, Dr Achyuta Singh, Dr P Karmakar and Dr Vidyasagar were present. The visitors during the field visit observed the advanced techniques and varieties of chilli, ladyfinger etc.

# Route of many trains changed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The railway administration has changed the route of many trains to save time taken in engine reversal at Varanasi Junction station and keeping in mind the operation of additional special trains on the occasion of Maha Kumbh Mela to be held in Prayagraj. The 19489 Ahmedabad-Gorakhpur Express running from Ahmedabad from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the changed route i.e. Varanasi Junction-Jaunpur-Aunrihar instead of the scheduled route Varanasi City-Aunrihar.

The 19490 Gorakhpur-Ahmedabad Express running from Gorakhpur from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the changed route Aunrihar-Jaunpur-Varanasi City-Varanasi Jn. The 19091 Banda Terminus-Gorakhpur Express running from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the changed route Aunrihar-Jaunpur-Varanasi City-Varanasi Jn. Likewise, the 19092 Gorakhpur-Banda Terminus Express running from Gorakhpur from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the changed route Varanasi Jn-Jaunpur-Aunrihar instead of the scheduled route Varanasi City-Aunrihar. On the other hand, the 18202 Nautanwa-Durg Express running from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the

changed route Aunrihar-Jaunpur-Varanasi Jn instead of the scheduled route Aunrihar-Varanasi City-Varanasi Jn. The 19091 Banda Terminus-Gorakhpur Express running from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the changed route Aunrihar-Jaunpur-Varanasi City-Varanasi Jn. Likewise, the 19092 Gorakhpur-Banda Terminus Express running from Gorakhpur from January 9 to February 28 will be run via the changed route Varanasi Jn-Jaunpur-Aunrihar instead of the scheduled route Varanasi City-Aunrihar.

# 2 killed in road mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Two persons, including a retired Army man, were killed when an unidentified vehicle hit their scooter on the highway near Gujaini bridge under Govind Nagar police station area late on Wednesday night. As a result one of them died on the spot. The other seriously injured youth was sent to LLR (Hallet) Hospital for treatment where doctors declared him dead. The deceased included a retired Army man who was taking a youth to his house in Sanigwa for some work. Reports said that Anirudh Singh (42) of Kashiram Colony, Phase 2, Sanigwa, was a native of Ratanpur, Murliapur, Sachendi. He was employed in Panki Power Grid. His daughter Kashish said her father used to do job by living in the village in Panki and used to come home to Sanigwa on holidays. On Wednesday, he was on leave. He was coming to Sanigwa with Sonu Pal (28) of the village for carrying out some work at home. On the way his scooter was hit by an unidentified vehicle killing him on the spot. Anirudh was employed in Panki Power Grid after retirement from Army in 2019. At the LLR Hospital, Sonu's father Mangal Singh said Sonu was the third among his four sons. Station House Officer (SHO)

Govind Nagar Pradip Kumar Singh said both the bodies had been sent for an autopsy. Efforts are on to ascertain identity of the vehicle which hit the scooter which led to the death of two persons, he said. In another incident a youth was killed while his friend seriously injured when a speeding pickup hit their motorcycle near Manipurwa village under Tirwa Kotwali police station area of Kannauj on Thursday morning. Reports said that Amit Kushwaha (19) and Aditya Kumar of Thathia were BSc (first year) students. On Thursday morning they were going to give their exam in a college in Mansukhpurwa under Indergarh police station via Tirwa-Thathia road, on bike. After they reached Manipurwa village the speeding pickup coming from opposite direction hit them leaving them seriously injured. Police sent them to the medical college where Aditya was declared dead by the doctors. The body was sent for an autopsy. Kotwali in charge Jitendra Pratap Singh said the pickup had been impounded while its driver managed to escape from the spot after the mishap. On the basis of complaint, a first information report (FIR) was lodged and necessary action is being taken, he said.

# IIT (BHU) designated as ICMR CCoE for 5 yrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), BHU, has been designated as an ICMR Collaborating Centre of Excellence (CCoE) for a period of five years in recognition of the commendable achievements in biomedical research led by Dr Sanjeev Kumar Mahto, an associate professor in the School of Biomedical Engineering. The felicitation ceremony was held during the ICMR CCoE Conclave held at India International Centre, New Delhi recently where Director General (DG), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Dr Rajiv Bahl officially felicitated the newly selected CCoEs, including his research group from IIT (BHU). Dr Sanjeev Kumar Mahto informed that out of 140 applications submitted, 20 research groups were selected in 2024 as ICMR CCoEs. This prestigious recognition is awarded for five years, and IIT (BHU) is proud to be one among the selected Institutions. Dr Mahto explained that after becoming a CCoE, the main objective of the institution includes strengthening the research ecosystem of ICMR and the whole nation in biomedical research through the intensive collaborative efforts between ICMR

and IIT (BHU) as well as amongst the CCoEs. This collaboration also includes strengthening resources of the country in terms of information, services, research and training in support of national health development. Under a flagship ICMR CCoE, IIT (BHU) will contribute to the activities of ICMR such as setting up a research agenda in line with National Health Priorities, providing research methodology training to ICMR scientists, contributing to the research proposal development for ICMR, conducting observership activities, capacity building development, mentoring ICMR programmes and schemes including national grant missions. He expressed gratitude for the encouragement received from ICMR and acknowledged the support provided by IIT (BHU) that enabled the research group to achieve this prestigious recognition. IIT (BHU) Director Prof Amit Patra congratulated Dr Sanjeev Kumar Mahto and his team for this achievement and said that this research demonstrates the commitment to advancing cutting-edge solutions in support of IIT (BHU)'s global sustainability goals.



# UPSIDA leading development of Bhara-Pachpera industrial area

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Under the visionary leadership of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) is leading the development of the Bhara-Pachpera industrial area, a 951.79-acre project located in Bhara-Pachpera village, Pilibhit. The site is strategically located approximately 36 km from Pilibhit town, 100 km from Bareilly and 300 km from both Lucknow and Delhi. The project is part of UPSIDA's significant strides in enhancing the state's industrial infrastructure, a crucial component of Uttar Pradesh's goal to achieve a \$1 trillion economy. The key features of the project include: **Large industrial plots:** Offering large industrial plots up to 130 acres, providing ample space for diverse range of industries. **State-of-the-art infrastructure:** Featuring 'plug & play'

facilities for underground utilities, integrated solid waste management and optical fibre connectivity. **Sustainability focus:** Incorporation sustainable practices such as zero discharge, rainwater harvesting, solar panels on all buildings. **Smart monitoring:** Utilising robust Command and Control Centre with SCADA systems to ensure 24/7 surveillance and smart utility management for water, sewerage and power. **Web-based integration:** Providing real-time information to industrialists and visitors through mobile applications, enhancing operational efficiency. **Eco-friendly environment:** Creating a tranquil setting with a 37 acres eco park and green buffers zones to support biodiversity and reduce the carbon footprint. **Sustainable water management:** Implementing rainwater harvesting and zero-liquid discharge through central effluent treatment plant (CETP).

The UPSIDA is focusing on developing bordering districts there-by promoting regional balance development. The local in situ employment generation will help in reduction in migration. The works amounting to ₹239.72 crore will be executed on industries related to agro food processing, manufacturing of coir items, ayurvedic and homeopathic medicines, wooden products, packaging materials, scientific instruments manufacturing etc. The ground work will commence soon. Chief Executive Officer (CEO), UPSIDA, Mayur Maheshwari, emphasised that this project exemplifies the authority's commitment to developing state-of-the-art industrial infrastructure, generating employment opportunities, and driving regional economic growth. Upon completion, Bhara-Pachpera is poised to become a key industrial hub, attracting substantial investment and significant contributing to the state's economic vision.

# St John's Ambulance Brigade a symbol of dedication & discipline: Dr Kumar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The annual short-term training camp organised by Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) St John's Ambulance Brigade concluded in a grand manner on Wednesday at South Western Railway (SWR) Bharat Scouts and Guides District Training Centre, Bengaluru (Karnataka). This programme re-established the importance of first aid, relief work and discipline. In the closing function, Public Relations Officer (PRO) Rajesh Kumar welcomed the guests with a flower bouquet. Chief guest and Corps Commander (Medical) Principal Chief Medical Officer (PCMO) of BLW Dr Devesh Kumar and special guest and Principal Chief Materials Manager (PCMM) of Rail Wheel Factory (RWF Yelahanka) Trilok Kothari, Chief Medical Superintendent (CMS) of Divisional Railway Hospital, Bengaluru, Dr Prabhavati Gajalakshmi, were present. Also, ALT Scouts M Arpudraj, DOC Scouts Md A Irfan Basha,

DTC Scouts Thomas Abraham attended the programme. Chief guest Dr Devesh Kumar praised the discipline and performance of the brigade members and said, "St John's Ambulance Brigade is a symbol of dedication and discipline. This training camp has infused new energy and enthusiasm towards social service". Trilok Kothari underlined the need for first aid and said, "First aid proves to be life saving in emergency situations. The work of St John's Ambulance Brigade is exemplary". Dr Prabhavati Gajalakshmi commended the brigade's work and said, "Human service is the greatest service and such training camps are helpful in increasing health awareness in the society". On the last day of the camp, the brigade members demonstrated various first aid techniques along with parade salute, including techniques for transferring the injured to a stretcher, artificial respiration, CPR, fireman lift, human crutches etc. These demonstrations attracted the attention of the guests present and everyone

appreciated the dedication of the brigade members. On the closing day, a cleanliness drive was also carried out in the training center premises under the 'Swachhata Hi Seva' campaign. Brigade members did *shramdaan* to clean the premises and spread the message of cleanliness. In the four-day camp, Best Camper Award was given to Amitabh, Distinguished Camper Award to Ravi Prakash Yadav, Seva Samman Award to Badri Prasad, Munna Rajak and Shrawan Kumar for their service. Ambulance Officer BR Vishwakarma, who has been serving for the last 30 years and will retire in February, was specially honoured for his experience and dedication. Vishwakarma said discipline and service spirit is the true identity and the members of the brigade should keep moving forward with this spirit. Camp manager and PRO Rajesh Kumar played an important role in the successful conduct of the camp. HN Singh, Rajendra Prasad, Rajkumar Patel, Shambhu Dey, Employee Council member Naveen Sinha and others were present.

# Solarisation of dev blocks, tehsil buildings being done

Varanasi (PNS): On the initiative of Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal, the solarisation work of all development blocks, pack houses and tehsil buildings of the district is being done by the UP NEDA. The work order has been issued for this and solar rooftops will soon be installed on all the buildings by the firm concerned and this will lead to huge savings in the current electricity bill. In addition to the 'PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana', all the departments have been asked to submit proposals for installing solar rooftops on all the government buildings of the district. The

CDO is trying to install solar plants on the Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) model in buildings with less than 25 kW of electricity connection and at Renewable Energy Service Company (RESCO) model in buildings with more than 25 kW of electricity connection. In this way, all the departments will not only protect the environment by generating electricity from sunlight but there will also be financial savings. Many government buildings like Commissionerate, Vikas Bhawan, Collectorate, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, BHU Malaviya

Bhawan etc have big solar plants that are saving electricity. Rajatalab tehsil old building has a load of 7.5 kW, new building 5 kW, Sadar tehsil 15 kW and Pindra tehsil 45 kW electricity load due to which the process of installing it on RESCO model is in progress and the work of installing solar rooftops is going on in other tehsils. Similarly, the work of installing solar rooftop of 15 kW in development block Sewapuri, 5 kW in Chiragaon, 15 kW in Arziline, 13 kW in Badagaon, 11 kW in Pindra, 4 kW in Kashi Vidyapeeth, 5 kW in Cholapur and 5 kW in Harhua development block has been started.

# Cochlear implantation at IMS-BHU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The cochlear implantation of a woman was performed in the ENT department of Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) here on Wednesday. Prof Vishwambhar Singh of the department said her condition is good and a positive response is expected soon. "She is doing well post

operatively", he said, adding that the total expenditure for the surgery is being borne by the state government. A 54-year old woman from Azamgarh district was operated by team of Prof Vishwambhar Singh and his team at ENT department, IMS-BHU under mentorship of Prof Rajesh Kumar. The team comprised Dr Arpit, Dr Chandrashekar, Dr Jeffrey, Dr Aman, Dr Mayur and Dr Siva

Slrivastava. Prof Singh said about 10 to 12 years back, the said woman started developing tinnitus, followed by which she gradually had hearing loss which is complete at present and bilaterally. "There is no finding on Computed Tomography (CT) scan or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) but the Brainstem Evoked Response Audiometry (BERA) test suggests that implantation can be done", he added.

# Cash, jewellery stolen from medicine trader's house

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Cash and jewellery worth around Rs.10 lakh were stolen from the house of a medicine trader in Ganesh Nagar under Rawatpur police area on Wednesday night. Miscreants broke into his house when all family members had taken the trader to a hospital after his condition suddenly started deteriorating. When his son returned home around 7.30 am on Thursday, he came to know about the incident. On getting information police rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. Reports said that Manoj Katiyar of Ganesh Nagar, Rawatpur, owns a medical store near Namak Factory. On Wednesday around 10.30 pm, his condition suddenly started deteriorating. His wife Rani informed her brother-in-law Sanjay Katiyar of Maswanpur and all family members immediately took Manoj to the hospital for treatment. Sanjay Katiyar said around 1 am, when he had gone to Manoj's house to collect his scooter, everything was okay. But when Manoj's son Ayush returned home around 7.30 am on Thursday, he found

the house burgled. Sanjay said at 2.15 am, four people riding on two scooty were seen entering Manoj's house in the neighbour's CCTV cameras. They broke open the lock of the main gate and entered the house. Thereafter, miscreants stole Rs.15,000 cash from the almirah and jewellery worth around Rs.10 lakh from there. ACP Kalyanpur Abhishek Pandey said after lodging a first information report (FIR) raids are being conducted in search of the thieves. **YOUTH HANGS SELF:** A youth committed suicide by hanging himself under mysterious circumstances in the jungle near Maholi village under Maharajpur police station area. He had gone missing from house a week ago after being scolded by father. Police immediately rushed to the spot and carried out probe in the matter. Satyendra alias Fattan (28) of Purwamir, Maharajpur, was found hanging from a tree in the jungle of Maholi village. Purwamir outpost incharge said probe was on in the matter. On the basis of complaint and autopsy report, further action will be taken, he said.



# Dream big, strive to become changemakers, leaders of tomorrow: Army chief urges NCC cadets

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Recalling his days as an NCC cadet, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Thursday urged the youth to dream big and strive to become the "changemakers, innovators and leaders" of tomorrow. Addressing a gathering of cadets and officers during his visit to the ongoing National Cadet Corps (NCC) Republic Day Camp at Delhi Cantonment, Gen Dwivedi also wished his best to an NCC expedition team that will attempt to scale Mount Everest later this year. "Being part of NCC is a way of life. The formative years as a cadet will forge a unique identity for each one of you, and shall form the edifice of your achievements later in life," the

army chief said. It is also encouraging to know that in 2024, 100 boy cadets and 10 girl cadets joined the army's pre-commissioning training academies through NCC's entry schemes, while more than 8,800 NCC cadets joined the force as Agniveers, Gen Dwivedi said. The army chief was welcomed by the NCC cadets upon his arrival at the camp. Later, he also interacted with some of them in the flag area, and presented mementoes to those who delivered excellent briefings. He was also treated to culture performances in the auditorium at the venue. "Seeing all of you proudly donning your uniform makes me nostalgic as I recall my NCC enrolment number -- 73727 -- which I had for seven years, and the cherished days I spent



as an NCC cadet," he told the gathering. Gen Dwivedi, an alumnus of Sainik School in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, also said he felt proud being part of the NCC Alumni Association. "Dear cadets, as I look at you today, I see not just the leaders of tomorrow, but the custodians of our country's heritage and future. As young citizens of this great nation, you are an integral part of India's transformation and growth story," he said in his address. "Leadership roles in diverse fields shall soon come your way. Therefore, dream big, and strive to become the changemakers, innovators and leaders of tomorrow," he added. The army chief also urged the cadets to believe in themselves, equip themselves with determination and fortitude, and "let

hardwork and dedication be your companion in your pursuit of excellence". Gen Dwivedi also praised the noble efforts of the cadets in community service, blood donation programmes, environmental conservation, and spreading awareness on social issues, and urged them to "demonstrate the strength of youth towards making a tangible difference towards nation-building". "I know that a team of NCC cadets will attempt to scale Mount Everest this year, and I am happy to note that they are currently training at the Army Mountaineering Institute in the Siachen Base Camp. My best wishes are with the expedition team," the army chief said, adding that he will eagerly look forward to "see a glimpse of the NCC summit flag atop Mt Everest".

Saying that the Indian Army takes great pride in its association and support to the NCC, Gen Dwivedi said at one time, more than 12,500 army personnel stood posted as staff in the NCC. As part of training support, more than 30,000 NCC cadets have done attachment training with army units thus far, including 4,000 cadets -- boys and girls -- undergoing attachments with military hospitals, the army chief said. A total of 2,361 NCC cadets from around the country are taking part in the month-long Republic Day camp, which began on December 30 and will culminate with the PM Rally on January 27. The annual event is also witnessing the participation of 917 girl cadets, the largest contingent so far.

## INSV 'Tarini' with two women Navy officers crosses International Date Line

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) 'Tarini' carrying two women officers on Thursday crossed the International Date Line (IDL), achieving a significant milestone during the crew's global circumnavigation expedition, officials said. "As the vessel sailed eastwards, the crew adjusted their clocks to account for the date change, symbolising the blending of two consecutive calendar days," a Navy spokesperson said. "Tarini successfully crossed the International Date Line (IDL) today at approximately 1130 hours, Indian Standard Time (IST)," he said. This notable achievement marks a significant milestone in the

crew's ongoing global circumnavigation expedition, the official added. "Tarini" is undertaking the global circumnavigation journey under the Navika Sagar Parikrama II, an Indian Navy expedition attempting a double-handed circumnavigation of the earth via the three Great Capes. The boat was flagged off from Goa on October 2, 2024, by Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi. Carrying the two women officers, 'Tarini' had left the Lyttelton Port in New Zealand on Saturday for the longest and the most challenging leg of its expedition. INSV 'Tarini' had reached Lyttelton on December 22, completing the second leg of the historic circumnavigation

being undertaken by two Indian Navy officers -- Lt Cdr Dilna K and Lt Cdr Roopa A -- symbolising India's growing prowess of maritime exploration. The crew had left the Lyttelton Port for its onward passage -- third leg of the expedition -- to Port Stanley (Falkland Islands). This is the longest leg of the expedition with a distance of approximately 5,600 nautical miles (about 10,400 km), the official said. During the stay at Lyttelton, the crew undertook repairs and maintenance of the vessel with particular focus on the next leg where it will cross the South Pacific, pass through the treacherous Drake Passage, before crossing Cape Horn to reach Port Stanley, the spokesperson earlier said.

## Kin of woman who died in child birth allege negligence by hospital

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

A family member of a woman who died on Sunday allegedly that she was expired at the Saksham Health Care hospital due to negligence of the hospital administration. The deceased's family has also filed a complaint against the hospital administration at the Kherki Daula Police Station for further investigation. According to police, the husband of the 30-year-old victim a resident of Manesar has alleged that his wife died due to medical negligence. Cops said on Thursday, they have received a complaint against Saksham Health Care hospital located in Sector-83 Manesar but they will forward the case for preliminary inquiry to the Gurugram health department to get a nod for going



ahead with their investigation (as is norm for cases against doctors). According to the complaint, the deceased's woman husband Manoj Yadav admitted his wife Monika Yadav for delivery around 9 am on January 5. Doctor Shikha Parashar at Saksham Health Care hospital perform normal delivery around 2.20 pm. She delivered baby boy on January 5.

"After delivery she was responding well. The doctors suggested us to go home as the medical staff will take care of the patient. At around 6.40 pm, her condition deteriorated due to bleeding and the doctor failed to control her bleeding and later she died at the hospital," deceased husband Manoj told The Pioneer. He alleged that the hospital administration did not arrange

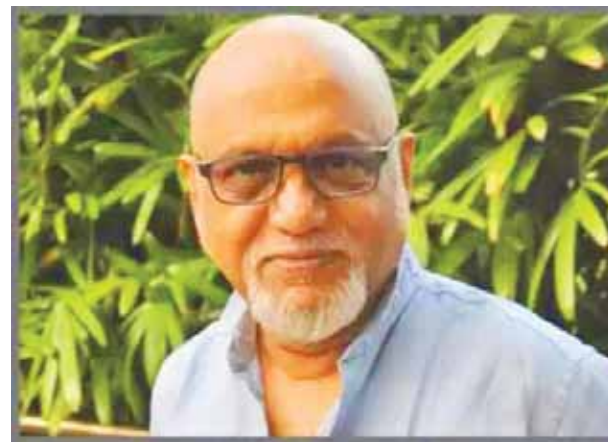
ambulance on time. They even did not use blood unit despite arranged by the family. "My wife was in immense pain and was begging me to save her. I told doctors that she is in pain, but they said this was normal and she will recover soon. Soon after, she lost consciousness. Doctors then put her in an ambulance and asked me to rush to another hospital as the case was beyond their control," the complaint said. She was expired at the hospital but despite this and to misguide us they shifted my wife to another private hospital, where the hospital management informed us that she was expired hours back," he alleged. The Doctors had initially said the treatment would cost around Rs 80,000 and has charged Rs 50,000 after the delivery, he said. "We have lodged a complaint

with the Kherki Daula police station for Manika's death due to medical negligence and also filed complaint with the Gurgaon civil surgeon," he said. When contacted, the hospital administration said that it was rare case of death. Despite all possible care and efforts, she succumbed on January 5. "The patient had previously delivered a girl through operation but the family insisted for normal delivery. We also informed the family about the seriousness of the normal delivery but despite this they were adamant for normal delivery. After the delivery she suffered Postpartum hemorrhage (PPH) which is severe bleeding after giving birth. The family was briefed on her criticality before delivery," Dr Shikha Parashar told The Pioneer.

## Film personalities remember 'creative genius' and 'brilliant' Pritish Nandy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Filmmakers Sudhir Mishra, Hansal Mehta, actors Kareena Kapoor Khan, Sayani Gupta, and Sanjay Dutt paid rich tributes to veteran journalist, poet and filmmaker Pritish Nandy, who died in Mumbai on Wednesday. Nandy died after a cardiac arrest at his home in south Mumbai. He was 73. As a film producer, Nandy backed films such as "Hazaaron Khwahishen Aisi", "Kaante", "Jhankaar Beats", "Chameli", "Shabd", and "Pyaar Ke Side Effects". Mishra expressed gratitude towards Nandy for producing his acclaimed 2005 film "Hazaaron Khwahishen Aisi". "Pritish Nandy changed my life. Only he could make 'Hazaaron Khwahishen Aisi'. He taught me so much. I am so sorry Pritish Da. I couldn't come up with an idea for the sequel," he wrote on X. Mehta said his most personal work, the 2017 movie "Omerta", had lost "one of its greatest patrons". He revealed that it was Nandy who encouraged him to make Rajkumar Rao-starrer which was based on the life of British-Pakistani terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. "I remember when I first met him in 2005 I had shared the



idea for 'Omerta'. Let's make it he said. When nobody had belief in me or my ideas Mr Pritish Nandy gave me the strength to dare, to dream and to tell stories that mattered to me - no matter what. "He did not end up producing 'Omerta' eventually but I owe the film and a lot of my journey beginning from Shahid to him. We had the most delightful conversations, he was always candid with me and I always left his room very energized. So hard to believe that he is gone," he posted on X. Kareena, who received critical acclaim for her performance as a sex worker in "Chameli", shared a picture from the set of the 2004 movie with an infinity symbol and a folded hands emoji as a caption. Dutt said Nandy was "a true

creative genius and a kind soul" who would be missed. The actor worked in "Kaante" and "Shabd". "Fierce. Fearless. Fine. Godspeed Pritish Uncle," director Meghna Gulzar wrote on Instagram. Anil Kapoor posted on X, "Shocked and heartbroken by the loss of my dear friend Pritish Nandy. A fearless editor, a brave soul, and a man of his word, he embodied integrity like no other." Nandy was the "youngest guy in the room, the most articulate and brilliant", said Sayani Gupta, one of the lead actors of Prime Video series "Four More Shots Please!", which is backed by Nandy's banner Pritish Nandy Communications. "Always smiling, always warm and with that glint in his eyes.

He loved a good conversation. He loved Bong women. And I knew he loved me. He would always express his love & never shied away from appreciating the people around him. There are very few people who are this magnetic. "An absolute stalwart. A true visionary. A rock star feminist who has created some of the most iconic women characters for cinema. I thought of him a lot when his very close friend Mr. Ratan Tata passed away recently. How he must be holding up. Cannot believe he left us so soon. The head of our family just left us. Hasn't sunk in. I am grateful for his grace, wisdom & the moments spent under his light. A deep deep loss," Gupta wrote in an Instagram post. Bhumi Pednekar, who will next be seen in Netflix series "The Royals" produced by Nandy, described Nandy as a visionary that disrupted the ways in his time. "Deeply saddened by the passing of Pritish Nandy sir. His vision shaped stories that touched millions, and I'm grateful to have been a part of a project he believed in," Pednekar said in an Instagram post. Actor-filmmaker Anupam Kher shared news of Nandy's death on social media on Wednesday night.

## SC orders status quo on construction under PM Awas Yojana on Abbas Ansari's land in Lucknow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered status quo on the construction of housing units under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana at a disputed site in Lucknow's Jiamau whose ownership is claimed by the sons of late gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari. In 2020, the Lucknow Development Authority had bulldozed the bungalow that belonged to Ansari and his sons including Abbas Ansari. The government plans to build flats on the land under the PM Awas Yojana. An SC bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh took note of submission by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Abbas Ansari, that the plea regarding the possession of land was listed before the Division Bench of Allahabad High court repeatedly, but no interim stay was passed. On October 21 last year, the top court asked the High Court to take up the application for interim stay for hearing as early as possible. When the matter came up for hearing in the SC on Thursday, Sibal informed the bench that despite its order, the case has not been taken for hearing. "Some High Courts, we don't



know what will happen. Allahabad High Court is one of the high courts which one should be worrisome about," the bench said. While granting the status quo on construction, the top court bench directed the high court to hear the matter expeditiously. "Since we have not issued notice and have also not obtained any report from Registry of the High Court, we are not inclined to express any opinion as to what were the circumstances in which the petitioner's writ petition could not be taken up for hearing by the bench, though it was listed from time to time," the bench observed. It said that the petitioners have specifically stated that the

authorities have commenced construction at plot No 93 located in Village Jiamau, Lucknow, which they claim to be under their ownership. If third party rights are created it is likely to cause irreversible loss to the petitioners, the court observed. "We dispose of this application with a direction to the authorities as well as to the petitioners to maintain status quo at the site till the matter is heard by the High Court," it said. According to Abbas Ansari, his grandfather purchased a share in a plot in Jiamau and the deed was registered on March 9, 2004. The said property was allegedly gifted by him to his wife Rabia Begum, who then bequeathed the same through a registered will dated June 28,

2017 to the petitioner and his brother. The plea said that the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Dalibagh, Lucknow allegedly passed an ex parte (in their absence) order on August 14, 2020 declaring the plot a government property. Thereafter, the petitioner and his brother were dispossessed in August 2023. Abbas Ansari then filed a petition in 2023 before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court. Some other co-owners of the plot, who were also affected by the SDMs order, also approached the High Court and the matter was listed before a division bench. When Abbas Ansari's writ petition came up for hearing before the single judge on January 8, 2024, he ordered it to be listed along with other matters so as to avoid conflicting orders. Abbas Ansari contended that his writ petition has been listed before the division bench repeatedly, but no interim stay has been passed in their favour, as was done by the division bench in the case of other affected persons. "Resultantly, the authorities, after taking physical possession of the petitioner's plot, have started construction of some dwelling units at the site under the Prima Minister Awas Yojna," the plea said.

## Paralympic contingent, top sarpanches, innovators among 10,000 special invitees for R-Day Parade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Members of Paralympic contingent, sarpanches from top-performing villages, handloom artisans, and forest and wildlife conservation workers are among the nearly 10,000 special guests invited to witness the 76th Republic Day Parade at the Kartavya Path here, the government said on Thursday. "These architects of 'Swarnim Bharat', with diverse backgrounds, include best performers in various fields and those who have made best use of the schemes of the government," the defence ministry said in a statement. In line with the objective to increase 'Jan Bhagidari' (public participation) in events of national importance, approximately 10,000 special guests have been invited to witness

the Republic Day Parade, it said. The ministry also shared that these special guests have been drawn from diverse areas and fields, falling into 31 categories. 'Sarpanches from top performing village', 'Disaster Relief Workers', 'Best performing Water Warriors', 'Guests from Vibrant Villages', 'Guests from North Eastern States', 'Best Patent Holders', 'Best Start-Ups', 'Road Construction Workers' are some of these categories. The invitees also include handloom artisans, members of Paralympic contingent and forest and wildlife conservation volunteers and workers, according to the statement. In addition to attending the Republic Day celebrations, these special guests would be visiting the National War Memorial, PM Sangrahalaya and other prominent places in



Delhi, it said. They will also get an opportunity to interact with people in different ministers. Besides them, Chess Olympiad medallist, Bridge World Games silver medallist and Snooker World Championship gold medallist have been invited as special guests as they have made country proud with their performances, the ministry said. Sarpanches whose villages have achieved targets in selected government initiatives have been invited. A national-level competition was announced by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances among panchayats. The panchayats which have achieved targets in "at least six flagship schemes" were selected as special guests, the statement said. Some of those who have been

invited as special guests are carrying out "exemplary work" to ensure income and employment generation and environment protection through self-help groups (SHGs), it said. SHGs working in areas of food, nutrition, health, water sanitation and hygiene, Panchayati Raj Institutions-community based organisations convergence and gender activities have been invited. Preference has been given to a SHG member who has not visited Delhi, it added. PM-JANMAN (Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan) mission participants, tribal artisans, Van Dhan Vikas Yojna members, National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation ventures, ASHA workers, MyBharat volunteers have also been invited. For their excellent work in the area of disaster relief and envi-

ronment protection, disaster relief workers, 'Water Warriors', community resource persons, among others, have been "invited for the first time", it said. Farmers and families who have supported environment conservation and use of renewable energy under PM Surya Ghar scheme and PM KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan) have also been invited for the first time, the ministry said. "Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, patent holders and start-ups have also been included as special guests. Schoolchildren with patriotic fervour who have emerged as winners of All-India School Band Competition and Veer Gatha competition will also be attending the Republic Day ceremony as special guests," the statement said.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Breaking ice

The India-Afghanistan talks reflect India's shift from non-recognition of the Taliban to a pragmatic approach to engagement

In a significant step towards recalibrating ties, India and the Taliban-led Afghan government held a high-level meeting in Dubai. The dialogue, attended by India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, revolved around enhancing bilateral relations and addressing regional challenges. The talks, focusing on economic, humanitarian, and strategic cooperation, underscore India's pragmatic approach toward engaging with Afghanistan despite the complex political dynamics following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. India's relations with Afghanistan have been historically robust, characterised by cultural and economic collaboration. However, the Taliban's return disrupted bilateral ties, with India maintaining a cautious stance while continuing to provide humanitarian aid. The evolving geopolitical landscape, Pakistan's actions in the region, and Afghanistan's dire humanitarian crisis have necessitated a renewed engagement. The discussions also gain relevance amidst regional tensions, notably Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan, which New Delhi strongly condemned. This shared concern over Islamabad's destabilising actions further aligns Indian and Afghan interests, fostering mutual cooperation.



The Dubai meeting covered a wide range of topics. India reaffirmed its commitment to aiding Afghanistan's recovery. It pledged continued support in healthcare, food security, and disaster relief, building on its earlier contributions, such as 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat, medical supplies, and vaccines. Besides, both sides emphasised the strategic importance of Chabahar Port in Iran as a key trade and humanitarian supply route. The port offers Afghanistan access to global markets, bypassing Pakistan, and could serve as a stabilising economic lifeline for the war-torn country. India has expressed readiness to resume developmental activities, including infrastructure and capacity-building projects. This signals India's willingness to strengthen Afghanistan's socio-economic framework despite challenges posed by the Taliban's governance. The Afghan delegation addressed India's concerns about terrorism and regional stability, assuring cooperation to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for anti-India activities. The talks indicate a shift in India's approach. This may encourage other nations to adopt a similar stance, recognising the necessity of dealing with the Afghan government. But the biggest takeaway from this meeting indeed was Strengthening India-Afghanistan ties to counter Pakistan's influence in the region. Islamabad's strained relations with Kabul, exacerbated by recent airstrikes, present an opportunity for New Delhi to assert its role as a reliable partner. Reviving trade and development projects through Chabahar Port could bolster Afghanistan's economy and offer India strategic leverage in Central Asia.

importance of Chabahar Port in Iran as a key trade and humanitarian supply route. The port offers Afghanistan access to global markets, bypassing Pakistan, and could serve as a stabilising economic lifeline for the war-torn country. India has expressed readiness to resume developmental activities, including infrastructure and capacity-building projects. This signals India's willingness to strengthen Afghanistan's socio-economic framework despite challenges posed by the Taliban's governance. The Afghan delegation addressed India's concerns about terrorism and regional stability, assuring cooperation to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for anti-India activities. The talks indicate a shift in India's approach. This may encourage other nations to adopt a similar stance, recognising the necessity of dealing with the Afghan government. But the biggest takeaway from this meeting indeed was Strengthening India-Afghanistan ties to counter Pakistan's influence in the region. Islamabad's strained relations with Kabul, exacerbated by recent airstrikes, present an opportunity for New Delhi to assert its role as a reliable partner. Reviving trade and development projects through Chabahar Port could bolster Afghanistan's economy and offer India strategic leverage in Central Asia.

## PICTALK



A commuter rides his bicycle through a mustard field on a winter morning, in Nadia

## Navigating Trump redux: India's tightrope



BHOPIINDER SINGH

While Trump's focus on countering China could strengthen Indo-US strategic ties, his erratic temperament and divisive policies present challenges

In India, there is a mix of excitement, tentativeness, and even concern, with the second coming of Donald Trump as the President of the United States. While Trump's excitable temperament is well known, he ought to be served better with hindsight of experience. But he may not. While India will remain resolutely relevant and critical in his foreign policy calculus, the handling of certain issues could test Indian reaction and patience. His inevitable fixation with managing China will necessitate nurturing the strategic 'pivot' of India as a counterbalance, Delhi's deep-rooted equations with countries like Russia or Iran, could earn his ire and vitriol.

A lot will depend on 'Team Trump' who will aid and assist Trump as he attempts the shape his poll promises of MAGA i.e., Make America Great Again! However, unlike the first term when he did inherit and heed reputation and professionalism as the criteria for key jobs in the Trump administration (though subsequently, he developed a penchant for 'revolving door' ousters of many), this time the criteria only seem to be 'loyalty' to Trump, personally. There is a disconcerting and contradictory logic to many recent appointments that begs the question if it indeed will be 'business as usual' - something Delhi had got used to, irrespective of the dispensation in Washington DC. Sadly, that vital presence of 'adults in the room' from the first Trump administration who were able to navigate and manage Trump out of his outlandish and fickle ideas, will not be present anymore. If anything, in a room filled with 'loyalists' (read, obsequious staff), chances that someone will play the 'adult in the room' anymore, will be starkly lesser than before, as there could be competitive grovelling to valourise Trump's ideas, whatever be the portent. How will Trump's purported 'non-interventionist' preferences sit with Sino-wary countries like India, Japan or Australia (the other three from QUAD framework) that are in the direct line of Chinese belligerence and expansionism? Will Trump's 'non-intervention-



ist' instinct embolden Beijing to finally bite the bullet on Taiwan and storm the same, knowing that beyond mouthing platitudes, Washington DC will not intervene militarily? The picture emerging out of a beleaguered (and potentially isolated) Ukraine does not seem reassuring from a security angle, as the possibility of America pushing its 'allies' under the bus, seems very plausible. Even disconcerting memories of the Summer of 2020 when the Chinese aggression pushed through Indian frontiers, with a seemingly disinterested Trump offering to 'negotiate a deal' instead of adopting a more assertive stance, are still raw. Indeed, the Americans had expedited the exports of weaponry to Delhi, but all that made imminent commercial sense to the die-hard businessman in Trump. Just how ramrod and unflinching will the Trump support be in meeting any such exigency in the future, is worth considering. Even in bilateral relations, there is a fresh bunch of unrestrained radicals who make up the Trump redux cabinet. They may or may not play by the traditional rulebook of diplomacy and could make comments that are unpalatable to Indian sensibilities. Delhi will be under immense pressure to moderate the bilateral

THERE IS A DISCONCERTING AND CONTRADICTORY LOGIC TO MANY RECENT APPOINTMENTS THAT BEGS THE QUESTION IF IT INDEED WILL BE 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' - SOMETHING DELHI HAD GOT USED TO, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE DISPENSATION IN WASHINGTON DC

engagement and conversations, as the Indian democracy has its dynamics and imagined perceptions that will disallow unruly comments, even if they were to come from the USA. Adding to the complexity is the contradiction that many amongst this new Trump cabinet are trigger-happy interventionists (e.g., Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Elise Stefanik the Ambassador to UN etc.) a la neoconservatives whom Trump rubbish repeatedly - how this contradiction will manifest will be interesting. Even on non-security issues like immigration, trade terms, or commitment towards the environmental issues, could be a very rocky ride for Delhi. India has made ambitious commitments towards the global environmental cause, whereas Trump's rhetoric has cockily been, "We're going to drill, baby, drill," and confirmed that, "I will terminate the green new scam". While India isn't on top of its target list on immigrant issues, it will only be a matter of time before the bogey "stealing your jobs" impacts India. Trump will be a mega populist who will dance to the 'redneck' wish list and this will impact relations with the world's largest democracy, a lot more gravely than other countries. Trump has demonstrated a ter-

rifying ability to shed responsibilities towards his allies (sovereign, coalition, and even personal) and also his moral responsibility by readily abandoning its vital geostrategic stakes (remember Afghanistan, and now Syria) with a thoughtless shrug of the shoulder and "not my problem" approach. This tests the will to invest in a transactional relationship like the one offered by Trump, as no support can be construed for sure. Owing to his polarising politics of identity and blind support for the likes of Benjamin Netanyahu, the narrative emanating from the White House could jeopardise and harm the societal fabric of a diverse country like India that needs to maintain an inclusive outlook. America itself is in for a tumultuous time with the President-designate having promised to close the border with Mexico and launch the largest deportation exercise in US history within hours (not days) of taking over. While Donald Trump's rhetoric is usually more bark than bite, India may find it difficult to accommodate his provocative talk and temperament, beyond a point. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## INDIA'S GDP GAP WITH CHINA WIDENS

Madam — An analysis of the economies done by a start-up highlights the pressing necessity to boost India's lacklustre growth. In 1980, India's Gross Domestic Product was \$186 billion, close to China's \$303 billion. But, by 2024, India's GDP had grown 21 times to \$3.93 trillion, while China's GDP had surged to \$18.5 trillion—61 times its 1980 level. To put it differently, China's GDP in 2004 was 2.82 times greater than India's. In 2014, it was 5.13 times greater and in 2024, 4.71 times greater. India's GDP surged 2.94 times from \$694 billion to \$2,043 billion between 2004 and 2014, while it grew merely 1.92 times, reaching \$3,930 billion between 2014 and 2024. Had the GDP growth in the decade starting in 2004 persisted in the decade beginning in 2014, the GDP disparity would have further decreased.

The decade before 2004 was a period of consolidation after structural reforms were initiated. India has to rejig its economic strategy to achieve a consistent 9-10 per cent rate of growth. India chose a mixed economic system, which combines the features of both socialist and free-market economic systems. The recent push towards private investment in government-owned assets has served only as an easy route for crony capitalists to enrich themselves into billionaires. Democratic India can consider a new economic system aimed at fostering faster growth. However, growth in Southern India, which accounts for about 31 per cent of GDP, has thrived under the current system and can accelerate further with adequate support from the Centre. Northern India needs to explore strategies to bridge the gap with the South. And the ostrich-like attitude and constant denials hinder progress in addressing realities. The nation must embark on a rapid growth path that creates jobs, elevates the living standard of common man and reduces inequality.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

## India's AI gets a leg-up



A golden chapter has begun in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India. The announcement by Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella to invest \$3 billion (approximately Rs 25,000 crores) marks a historic step toward elevating India's technological capabilities to new heights. This initiative will serve as a foundation for strengthening visionary programs like Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's 'Digital India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India). The Government of India is already committed to promoting digital infrastructure, skill development, and startups. Microsoft's investment will further bolster these plans.

The initiative to train 10 million Indians in AI over the next five years is a significant step to prepare the youth for global competition. This effort will create new opportunities in areas such as cloud infrastructure, data centres, and SaaS (Software as a Service). With the support of the government, Indian industries and startups will become global leaders in competition. The collaborative efforts of Microsoft and the government will not only place India in a leading position on the global AI map but also pave the way for entering a golden era of self-reliance and innovation.

RK Jain | Barwani

## STAMPEDE AT TIRUPATI TEMPLE

Madam — Six devotees, including four women, and many injured in a stampede near Vishnu Niwasam in Tirupati for getting tokens to visit Tirumala Srivari Vaikuntha Dvara is disturbing, tragic and appalling. A huge rush for getting tokens by devotees had caused the tragedy. But this accident at Tirupathi is unfortunate and could have been avoided. It is the utter failure of the state machinery. Mismanagement in the crowd governance system is a primary cause of the accident.

An immediate investigation should be conducted into this incident. Officials should be made accountable for negligence of duty. People were accommodated in temporarily constructed compartments and neatly provided darshan. This token system is ill-advised and should be dispensed with. All safety measures should be put in place so that people have a hassle-free Vaikunta Ekadasi Darshan, which is to run for the next ten days.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

## EARTHQUAKE IN TIBET

Madam — Powerful Tibet earthquake near Nepal kills 53, injures 62; tremors also felt in Bhutan and northern India, including Delhi-NCR and parts of Bihar. The impact of the temblor was felt across the region of 800,000 people, which is administered by Shigatse, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism.

Can we ever forget the havoc the Nepal earthquakes wreaked back in 2015, killing about 9,000 people, or the huge quake in China's Sichuan province in 2008 that killed almost 70,000 people? Today (on January 7, 2025), a 7.1 magnitude earthquake, near the Nepal-Tibet border, was felt in North India. India's geographical position at tectonic plate boundaries makes it prone to earthquakes, particularly in the Himalayan and Northeast regions.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## How India's healthcare sector is accelerating towards Viksit Bharat 2047



P N ARORA

As India embarks on its journey toward becoming a \$35 trillion economy by 2047, the healthcare sector emerges as a critical pillar in this transformation.

As India aims to achieve its ambitious goal of becoming a \$35 trillion economy by 2047, the healthcare sector stands as the cornerstone of this transformation. With aspirations to increase the average life expectancy from 71 to over 85, India's vision of Viksit Bharat aligns closely with the sentiment of "Swasth Bharat, Viksit Bharat, and Niramaya Bharat." It considers a robust healthcare system not just as a necessity but as the foundation for a healthier, more productive nation.

## A Visionary Healthcare System

As part of its vision, the government strives to establish a healthcare system capable of addressing the diverse needs of a population exceeding 1.4 billion.

Not only are efforts underway to improve physician and hospital bed ratios, expand access to affordable healthcare, and ensure universal health insurance coverage but the inclusion of senior citizens over 70 years through the Ayushman Bharat Vay Vandana Card highlights the commitment to an inclusive healthcare approach. India's



Viksit Bharat 2047 journey builds upon substantial achievements in the healthcare sector. Since independence, the nation has witnessed notable reductions in neonatal, infant, under-five, and maternal mortality rates, reflecting improved healthcare outcomes.

Flagship initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres, the establishment of new AIIMS, and a growing network of medical colleges have bolstered healthcare delivery. Moreover, digital advancements through initiatives like CoWIN, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, and e-Sanjeevani have revolutionized healthcare accessibility, particularly in rural areas.

**Role of the Pharmaceutical Sector**

India's pharmaceutical leadership has further solidified the country's position as a global healthcare contributor. As a leading producer of vaccines and generic medicines, the nation plays a pivotal role in ensuring global healthcare equity. Coupled with its steadily increasing medical tourism industry, India continues to attract patients worldwide, offering advanced care at affordable costs.

The private sector continues to play a crucial role in complementing public healthcare efforts. Innovation, R&D, and cost-effective healthcare models spearheaded by private players have extended quality healthcare to remote and underserved regions. Technological advancements, from AI and robotics to telemedicine and wearables, are shaping the future of healthcare delivery, making it more accessible.

**Roadmap of Viksit Bharat 2047:** Looking ahead, the roadmap to Viksit Bharat 2047 includes priorities such as workforce development through the expansion of medical and nursing colleges, further integration of cutting-edge technologies, and an

emphasis on preventive care, mental health, and holistic wellness. The transition from mass-produced to biotech-based personalized medicine, supported by advancements in CRISPR and nano-technology, is set to redefine pharmaceutical practices.

India's healthcare system is also poised to transform its business models, shifting from predominantly out-of-pocket expenses to public and insurance-funded frameworks. This evolution will not only strengthen the healthcare sector but also ensure equity and affordability for all. As India strives toward its 2047 goals, public-private partnerships and an unwavering commitment to equitable healthcare are vital. India's healthcare providers remain dedicated to contributing to this transformative journey. By fostering innovation, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring quality care for all, the sector aims to play an integral role in building a healthier, stronger, and more prosperous India.

(The writer is CMD, Yashoda Super Speciality Hospitals, Kaushambi, Ghaziabad; views are personal)





## FIRST COLUMN

## TRUMP 2.0: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASEAN

With Trump's return, Southeast Asia finds itself bracing for another era of US ambiguity



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

With the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, Southeast Asia braces for another era of unpredictability in American foreign policy. Southeast Asian nations, while expressing formal congratulations following Trump's victory, are now focusing on how his administration will impact their economies and strategic interests. As the region's governments gear up for a distinctly different governance style than the one under President Joe Biden, the potential for dramatic shifts in trade relations, diplomatic ties and regional stability is palpable. The ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—spanning from Indonesia to Myanmar—are acutely aware that Southeast Asia may not be at the top of the new administration's priority list.

Trump is a known figure for his transactional and often unpredictable style of diplomacy. ASEAN countries, while understanding the volatility that a Trump administration can bring, remain cautiously optimistic that his return might lead to a return to serious trade talks. Many regional leaders believe that Trump's preference for direct, bilateral negotiations could lead to more favourable deals for specific countries, particularly those that are not bound by multilateral negotiations, like those seen under Biden's tenure. Yet, for many in Southeast Asia, the most pressing concern remains the US-China relationship. Since Trump's first term, ASEAN nations have had to balance their relationships with both China and the US, seeking to maintain economic growth and regional security without angering either side. The dynamic has changed considerably in the



post-pandemic era, as China and ASEAN emerged as each other's largest trade partners. The direction of US-China relations will have profound consequences for Southeast Asia's economic stability and security. Under Trump, this relationship was tense, marked by the trade war and military posturing, and the nomination of hardline China critics, such as Marco Rubio for Secretary of State and Mike Waltz as National Security Advisor, signals that the US will continue to confront China head-on in ways that could disrupt regional dynamics. While many ASEAN leaders are concerned about the economic impact of a hard-line US-China policy, there is also hope that Trump's presidency could bring much-needed attention back to Southeast Asia's trade and strategic importance. This could be particularly appealing to resource-rich nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, which are in high demand for critical minerals used in electronics and green technologies. On the other hand, a significant worry for ASEAN countries is that they may become collateral damage in the US's efforts to reduce its trade deficit.

Despite these uncertainties, ASEAN's primary goal will remain stability and balance. ASEAN countries will push for steady relationships with both global powers, aiming to shield themselves from the worst effects of US-China tensions while seeking to expand their own economic and diplomatic space. To avoid being left behind, India is watching the space closely, as it is well aware that Trump will target Delhi soon.

Delhi is trying to rebuild bilateral relationships with several ASEAN groups of countries, even as it participates with full vigour on the multilateral platform. The chief guest for 2025 Republic Day would be the President of Indonesia, a key country in ASEAN. India's exports to the US could be hit due to Trump's overtures and it needs to find new markets for its products, while gently easing out domestic compliances and trade barriers. The region's future relationship with the US will depend not only on Trump's domestic agenda but also on how ASEAN and India navigate the delicate balance between American and Chinese influence in the years to come.

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

## The courage to tell untold stories on the celluloid



SANTANU GANGULY

Despite the challenges, a new wave of filmmakers continues to illuminate untold stories, challenging entrenched narratives and bringing forgotten truths to light



Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised the film *The Sabarmati Report* produced by Ekta Kapoor and her Balaji Motion Pictures. Before this also PM has been praised for films - *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story*. It took almost seventy years after the independence of India, for a few courageous filmmakers like Vivek Agnihotri to make *Buddha in a Traffic Jam*, *The Tashkent Files*, *The Kashmir Files*, and *Vaccine War*; Sanjay Puran Singh make *72 Hoorain* and Sudipto Sen to make *The Kerala Story* and *Bastar: The Naxal Story* both produced by Vipul Shah. Fortunately, most of these films have been celebrated among the audiences overwhelmingly. The group of pseudo-secular, those who still control the fake narratives to spread one-sided, false propaganda throughout the world, have also been super active in dismissing these films.

But not all filmmakers are lucky enough; forget about PM's praise to release their films, get proper distribution channels or theatres, or the cooperation from the local authorities, governments and positive reviews by film critics. It is almost swimming against the tide. After the success of those films, some independent filmmakers got the courage to tell the true stories, incidents which were unfortunately never been part of our history syllabus. The incidents were not discussed, or debated much by the elite of the society or the so-called liberal, secular, intellectual groups. Very few filmmakers dare to make films on those subjects, because, in most cases, the victims are the majority Hindu community while the oppressors are from other communities. Since the last many years there has been a tendency among the liberals, that whenever the Hindus are the victim, the stories have been buried with all extra efforts so that the so-called peace should be maintained in society.

Even if there has been immense loss of human lives, property, rape of women, and permanent displacement from the homeland, nothing is much more impor-



SINCE THE LAST MANY YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A TENDENCY AMONG THE LIBERALS, THAT WHENEVER THE HINDUS ARE THE VICTIM, THE STORIES HAVE BEEN BURIED WITH ALL EXTRA EFFORTS SO THAT THE SO-CALLED PEACE SHOULD BE MAINTAINED IN SOCIETY

tant than the pseudo ideology of keeping peace in the society to just appease the particular community.

That is why so far whatever films have been made on the partition of India very few films portrayed the true stories. Most of the films are sugar-coated to portray that the victims belong to both communities and it was a loss for everyone. No doubt the partition of India was a great loss for all the communities but why do we feel ashamed to point out the faults and the responsible people? Neither our history books nor the literature or cinema have been ever so brave as to tell the actual stories of our society.

Filmmaker M K Shivaaksh made the film *Accident or Conspiracy: Godhra* which is based on the infamous case of Godhra in Gujarat, where fifty-six Ram devotees were burnt alive in a train coach of the Sabarmati Express by one particular community. Again the film became the victim of the ecosystem and got a very limited release so the film can't be seen by many people in the country. While *The Sabarmati Report* not only got praise from the PM but also Yogi Adityanath, Pushkar Singh Dhami and Naib Singh Saini took time to watch the film along with the crew and casts and made the film tax-free in their respective states UP, Uttarakhand and Haryana because of Ekta Kapoor - Smriti Irani connection. But Shivaaksh was not that lucky at all.

He had planned to release his film *Accident or Conspiracy: Godhra* in February but the censor board delayed the process for seven months. They have asked for literally all the evidence and the makers have provided all the related evidence based on the

Nanavati - Mehta Commission Report, Court Verdicts, eyewitness records as well as all the supporting documents.

To study the material the censor board took seven months and even after that they gave the certificate where they chopped about fifty per cent of the content, informed Shivaaksh. Unfortunately, some renowned actors also took advantage of the situation from these novice young independent filmmakers to bully them, those who have good connections with the government agencies as well as some strong political backing. Initially, they talk big to bag the role and comparatively good remuneration, but after the film is completed, instead of helping the film for smooth sailing, they even discourage the other co-actors from not promoting their film just pretending to be secular. Forget to help with the censor process, they don't even come forward to promote the film, nor even post on social media.

Pushendra Singh director of *Ajmer 92*, Kamal Chandra director of *Humare Baraah and Shivaaksh*, all of them have the same terrible experiences with some of their actors. Akashaditya Lama's Bengal 1947 described the hardships faced by the displaced Hindu refugees from the then East Pakistan now Bangladesh to the completely unknown, unfamiliar terrain of present days Chhatisgarh.

A few political leaders' high ambitions divided the country into three different territories and created devastating for the crores of innocent people in the country. The film was released in very limited theatres. Akashaditya said that when he made the film in Chhatisgarh, the then Congress government helped him a lot

without imposing many terms and conditions, then Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, told him only not to show Pundit Nehru in a bad light.

Even a cabinet minister came to receive the shooting team at the airport, and arranged the full-proof security for the entire team, with overwhelming hospitality. By the time the film got ready to release BJP government came to power in Chhatisgarh, but unfortunately, the film never got any special attention or tax rebate from the local government. However, the films have been screened at various film festivals. In the same manner, another film *The Diary of West Bengal* directed by Sanoj Mishra has suffered massively at the hands of the government and political elements of West Bengal.

Finally, the film was released, which too a very limited release by the order of the court. All of these films are not only talking of the great human rights violations by one particular religious community towards the majority Hindu community but also these films are unbiased, true documentation of time a political era as well as the impact on society. Unfortunately, none of these films got any recognition, big awards or even tax rebates from the government. In this situation, a special section "The untold stories" could have been curated in the just concluded International Film Festival of India (IFFI) which would have been very much appropriate to showcase the film to the larger audiences, as well as the screening at IFFI would have certainly boosted the morale of the filmmakers.

(The writer is a Delhi based Film Festival curator. The views expressed are personal)

## What gaming regulation can learn from SEBI'S F&amp;O regulations

India's gaming sector stands at a critical juncture. Thoughtful regulation can help it realise its immense potential while safeguarding consumers

Two seemingly disparate sectors—India's gaming industry and capital markets—are drawing significant attention in public policy discourse. Both sectors hold immense promise: gaming contributes to job creation, while capital markets foster capital formation. However, both also pose substantial challenges. Gaming can lead to habit formation and addiction, while the Futures and Options (F&O) segment of capital markets carries risks of speculative losses. Policymakers have tackled these challenges differently, with contrasting approaches in gaming and F&O regulation.

**The Opportunities and Challenges:** India is a global gaming hub, housing 40 per cent of the world's gamers—



MANDAR KAGADE

around 568 million players—and employing 15,000 developers. The sector's revenue is projected to grow from \$3 billion in 2023 to \$6 billion by 2028, potentially creating 250,000 new jobs over the next decade. With development costs in India nearly 50 per cent lower than the global average, gaming has the potential to generate significant export revenues. However, this growth depends

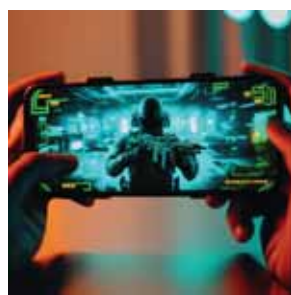
on balanced regulation, particularly concerning gaming's habit-forming nature. Unfortunately, current proposals by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), and other stakeholders lean toward rigid, prescriptive measures, drawing inspiration from China's heavy-handed regulatory framework.

#### Flaws in Current Gaming Regulation

**1. Time and Age Restrictions** Proposals to impose strict time limits and age restrictions on gaming apps are touted as innovative but raise significant concerns. Forcing intermediaries to monitor minors' activities infringes on privacy and contravenes the data minimi-

sation principle of India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA). Such policies may inadvertently lead to surveillance overreach, compromising minors' online privacy. Parents, who have a far greater vested interest in their children's wellbeing, are better positioned to manage their gaming habits. Handing this responsibility to unelected bureaucrats not only undermines parental discretion but also risks creating intrusive and overly broad policies.

**2. Blanket Warnings and Advertising Restrictions** The Ministry of Education's 2021 advisory linking online gaming to "gaming disorder" is an overgeneralisation. Such broad statements, without clinical substantiation, stigmatis-



gaming and equate it with gambling. Similarly, ASCI's restrictions on advertisements portraying gaming as a viable career path stifle creativity. These measures lump educational and cerebral games with gambling-like activities, dis-incentivising developers from creating "good habit-forming" games. This could slow innovation and limit the gaming sector's growth potential.

**Learning from SEBI'S Approach to F&O Regulation** The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) faced a similar challenge with F&O trading, where explosive volumes exposed retail investors to speculative risks. Instead of resorting to outright bans,

**Key Steps by SEBI:**  
**Increased Contract Sizes:** Raising the minimum investment size by 50 per cent reduced speculative trading by retail investors.  
**Disclosure Requirements:** Brokers were mandated to display potential downsides prominently, promoting informed decision-making.  
**Structural Adjustments:** Limiting weekly expiries to one per exchange curbed excessive speculative activity. These steps exemplify a bal-

anced approach—relying on nudges and incentives rather than bans. SEBI recognised that heavy-handed policies could undermine broader goals, such as increasing equity market participation. India's gaming sector can benefit from SEBI's measured approach to F&O regulation. Policymakers must embrace strategies that balance innovation, consumer protection, and industry growth. Here are three actionable recommendations:  
**1. Nudges and Incentives Over Mandates:** Rather than micromanaging user behavior, regulators can incentivise responsible gaming through voluntary measures. For instance, gaming platforms could offer rewards for adhering to healthy gaming limits.

#### 2. Transparent Education Over Stigma

Policymakers should prioritise honest disclosures about gaming's potential downsides instead of messaging that fosters shame. Clear and factual communication can empower gamers to make informed choices without demonising the industry.

**3. Consideration of Unintended Consequences:** A tunnel-vision approach risks stifling innovation and creating barriers to growth. Policymakers must evaluate how restrictive measures might deter investment, hinder creativity, or drive users to unregulated platforms.

(The writer is Founder & Principal, Black Dot Public Policy Advisors; views are personal)



## Aadiya Thackeray urges Fadnavis to address housing issues for retired police

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and former minister Aadiya Thackeray on Thursday urged Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis to stay or reduce the penalty for retired police families staying in police quarters, and to revive the proposal of building new police quarters for police personnel mooted by the previous Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government. Aadiya made the requests to the chief minister on behalf of the police personnel based in Mumbai, when he met the latter for the third time since the new MahaYuti government assumed office on December 5. In a post put out on micro-blogging site "X", Aadiya wrote: "Today we met with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis ji, raising a few very important issues with him". Aadiya said that the issues he raised with the chief minister

included water access for all and housing for retired police personnel, and a request that a policy for the reduction of premiums on the conversion of collector land to freehold land be brought in at the earliest. The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader said that the water-for-all policy brought in by then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray during the MVA government had ensured that every house in Mumbai would get water, irrespective of their legal status, as a right. "The earlier unconstitutional regime of Eknath Shinde had given a 'stay' to this policy. We humbly requested that this policy be implemented again so that all Mumbaiers can benefit," Aadiya wrote. "We also requested that the penalty for retired police families staying in police quarters be stayed or reduced, and permanent homes should be provided for retired police personnel in Mumbai.

# Supreme Court orders cancellation of unclaimed Amrapali flats in Noida

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Saying bookings will be cancelled and flats will be sold to other buyers, the Supreme Court on Thursday took a dim view on home buyers not turning up to take possession of flats in the Amrapali projects, being completed by the state-owned NBCC. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma asked attorney general R Venkataramani, who was appointed a court receiver in the case, to furnish the latest status report of unsold assets or where the home buyers did not turn up despite efforts to reach out to them. "We will request the court receiver to file a latest report where possession has not been taken over by the home buyers despite efforts by him

and the NBCC," the bench said. Senior advocate Ravinder Kumar, appearing for the Noida and Greater Noida authority informed the bench that Greater Noida authority had granted its approval for construction of additional flats in Gold Home Project and with regard to other five projects, there was need for some compliances to be made by the NBCC. The bench noted the submission of senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for the NBCC, saying the compliance was regarding uploading of the map in a portal, which was done for the four projects - Centurion Park, Leisure Valley, Leisure Park and Dream Valley. The bench directed the Greater Noida authority to grant approval for the remaining four projects. For Silicon City project

located under Noida's jurisdiction, the bench directed the authority to grant expeditious approval for the additional flats. The top court further directed the Uttar Pradesh government authority to grant required environmental clearances to these projects as early as possible. Dave informed the bench NBCC required more Rs 500 crore for completing the project aside from an outstanding amount of Rs 343 crore which was put in by the corporation for completing the project. Advocate M L Lahoty, appearing for the home buyers, said his client wouldn't be able to pay the money and a consortium of banks had paid Rs 1,600 crore to the NBCC apart from State Bank of India, which infused Rs 650 crore for completing the pending projects. He alleged in 2024, the

NBCC said it had completed 20,000 flats but home buyers were given only 7,000 flats and the rest 13,000 flats were lying somewhere. Venkataramani urged Lahoty not to make such a submission as the information was factually wrong. He said around 3,000-4,000 home buyers did not turn up to take the possession of their flats despite repeated attempts to reach out to them and offered to file a detailed project-wise report on such flats. The top court disposed of a number of pending petitions observing the cause of action was addressed in the main petition on the Amrapali project. The bench said petitioners of disposed of matters could take proper recourse available under law. On August 29, 2024, the top court directed the Noida and

Greater Noida authorities to grant approval within 30 days of construction plans for additional flats in six Amrapali projects to ease the financial crunch faced by these projects. It had also directed the Uttar Pradesh environment impact assessment authority to grant environment clearance within two months of submission of application. The apex court in its July 23, 2019, verdict had cracked whip on errant builders for breaching the trust reposed by home buyers and ordered the cancellation of the registration of Amrapali group under real estate law RERA and ousted it from prime properties in the NCR by mixing land leases. The top court, which is trying to bring in funds for the stalled projects, appointed a court receiver as custodian of the properties of Amrapali group.

## Rahul Gandhi to begin Delhi election campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Upping the ante ahead of the Delhi polls, the Congress scion Rahul Gandhi is likely to address his first rally in the poll bound Delhi on January 13. The rally is expected to be held in the Trans-Yamuna area. During the rally, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha will make all-out attempts to cash in on the proclaimed "insult" of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, by BJP in the parliament. Speculations rife, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra might attend the rally apart from the senior leaders of the party. Notably, Gandhi had skipped two rallies in the past. He was scheduled to attend the closing ceremony of Delhi's Nyay yatra at the Indira Gandhi stadium but was cancelled.

# Two Nandu Gang members arrested in Bengaluru triple murder

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police's Special Cell has arrested two sharpshooters of the Kapil Sangwan alias Nandu Gang wanted in a triple murder case in Haryana's Panchkula and broad daylight murders in Tilak Nagar and Kakrola from Bengaluru in Karnataka. According to an official on Thursday, the accused, has been identified as 27 year old Sahil alias Poli and 37 year old Vijay Gehlot

alias Kalu, were arrested from Bangalore on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday. "Persevering effort and continuous ground work for several months by the team gave result on Thursday, wherein on the basis of a specific input above wanted criminals Sahil and Vijay Gahlot were apprehended in Bangalore, Karnataka after a chase of 5000 km. Both suspects were wanted for their involvement in multiple crimes, including daylight murders in Delhi and a high-profile triple murder case in

Panchkula, Haryana," a senior police officer said. The officer further said that a team tracked the fugitives' movements, conducting multiple raids across Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Karnataka, before apprehending the suspects. Three mobile phones and Rs 2 lakh in cash were recovered from the suspects, he added. These items are being analysed for further evidence and connections to their criminal network. Police said that Sahil was first

arrested in 2018 for a robbery case in Najafgarh. While in custody, he became acquainted with Sachin Chhikara, a prominent member of the Nandu gang. Upon his release, Sahil committed further crimes under the gang's instructions, including the murder of Roshan alias Chhota in Najafgarh. "Accused Sahil came in contact with Kapil Sangwan through one PK who is a close aide of Nandu gang. In 2018, accused Sahil was arrested in a robbery case of Police Station Najafgarh, Delhi where he met

gangster Sachin Chhikara who is a key member of Nandu gang. After coming out on bail, he along with shooters Vikas alias PK and Rohit Dagar shot their rival Roshan alias Chhota in Najafgarh on the instructions of Nandu. He was wanted in several heinous cases and was evading his arrest," a senior officer said. Further, he added that the accused Vijay Gehlot is an active Bad Character (BC) of Dwarka North police station having involvement in several heinous criminal cases.

## Speeches of Umar, Sharjeel created fear: Delhi police to HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Speeches by Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam and others created a sense of fear after a common reference to CAA-NRC, Babri mosque, triple talaq and Kashmir, police argued before the Delhi High Court on Thursday. Opposing their bail pleas before Justices Navin Chawla and Shalinder Kaur, police made its submissions in the UAPA case related to the violence which took place in northeast Delhi in February 2020. "Speeches by Meeran (Haider), Sharjeel Imam, Khalid Saifi and Umar Khalid show a common pattern. All are on identical lines. They create a sense of fear in the people hearing them..(by talking about) CAA-NRC, Babri, triple talaq and Kashmir," said special public prosecutor Amit Prasad. He said aside from the speeches, Umar Khalid gave an "objectionable speech in Amravati" which was made "viral" at the relevant time. He accused Umar Khalid of deliberately travelling outside

Delhi at the time when violence erupted in the capital to evade any responsibility. "There was a concerted plan to remain outside Delhi. When violence broke out, there was immediate reaction," he said. Khalid, Imam and others were booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and provisions of the IPC for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the violence, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured. The violence erupted during the protests against the CAA and NRC. While challenging the trial court orders refusing bail, Khalid and others cited their long incarceration and parity with other co-accused who were granted bail. SPP Prasad also referred to the statements of several protected witnesses to establish the accused persons were not "innocent bystanders" who merely organised protest sites, but planned to cause violence through WhatsApp groups, resulting in registration of 751 FIRs related to the riots precedent.

## Cong cornered in INDIA bloc truck

From page 1

Abdullah stressed both the central and state governments should prioritize the needs of the people rather than engaging in conflicts that hinder progress. Reacting to claims about his son and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah being influenced by New Delhi, the NC chief said, "Omar Abdullah is elected the chief minister by people. He does not act on anyone's instructions. He acts on his own decisions. Those who are under this misunderstanding should come out of it."

## SC to review JEE-Advanced...

From page 1

The fresh plea, filed through advocate Sanjeet Kumar Trivedi, said it related to the process for admissions into the prestigious IITs but the joint admission board (JAB), entrusted to conduct the JEE-Advanced exam, changed the eligibility criteria for students in an "arbitrary" manner. "The JAB, vide its press release dated November 5, 2024, first fixed the permissible number of attempts for JEE-Advanced at three, only to change it abruptly vide another press release dated November 18, 2024, and thereby reducing the number of attempts to two,"

the plea said. "The abrupt changes in the eligibility criteria," it said, "has affected the petitioner as well as thousands of similarly situated persons denying them a valuable opportunity to enter the IITs." The plea said the change in eligibility criteria was against the principles of natural justice and added, "The impugned notification is also in violation of principles of legitimate expectation and promissory estoppel." Seeking setting aside of the November 18, 2024 press release, it said the change disentitled and disqualified many students from taking the JEE-Advanced 2025 exam.

# HC orders removal of deepfake clips of Dr Trehan on social media

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the removal of deepfake videos of Medanta aNaresh Trehan circulating on social media. Justice Mini Pushkarna said if the videos were not taken down by those who uploaded or shared the clips within a day, social media intermediaries would remove it within 36 hours from the receipt of the order. "The plaintiffs have demonstrated a prima facie case for grant of injunction and, in case, no ex parte ad interim injunction is granted,

the plaintiffs will suffer an irreparable loss. Further, balance of convenience also lies in favour of the plaintiffs, and against the defendants," the court said on January 8. The interim order came on a plea by Medanta Hospital and Dr Trehan seeking removal of fabricated or deepfake videos in which the medical practitioner was shown giving medical advice and propagating natural remedies to cure problems in the field of urology. The plea said several fake videos of Dr Trehan, a world renowned cardiovascular surgeon and head of the Heart Institute of Medanta, the

Medicity Hospital, Gurugram, were being circulated on social media and claimed he neither gave an interview nor recorded any such video. "The intent of such posts is to deceive and mislead the public at large by promoting usage and sale of unapproved and uncertified medicines and natural remedies, towards illicit commercial gains of third parties, by misusing the repute and goodwill gathered by the plaintiffs on account of their contribution in the field of medicine, especially, plaintiff number 2 (Dr Trehan), as he is a personality in his own right/on his merit," it said.

# Bijli, Paani free on BJP's poll platter?

From page 1

In a bid to further win over religious communities, the BJP is considering extending this electricity benefit to religious places such as temples and gurudwaras. Insiders say that these places of worship could receive up to 500 units of free electricity each month, benefiting not just the devotees but also helping the institutions reduce their operational costs, allowing them to focus on social and charitable activities. Sources said the BJP may announce a special scheme for women empowerment in Delhi like the 'Ladli Behna Yojana'. For AAP, which is eyeing a third straight term in power, the Mahila Samman Yojana is at the centre of its game plan. Under the scheme, the AAP has promised to hike the monthly dole for women in Delhi from the initial Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,100. AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal has also promised a scheme, 'Sanjeevani Yojana', that will provide free healthcare to residents over 60 years. Besides, AAP has announced Rs 10 lakh for auto drivers, allowance of Rs 18,000 for priests and granthis. Congress too has left no stone unturned to woo voters. The Congress has promised 'Pyari Didi

Yojana' for women in Delhi. Congress has said that if the party comes to power, this scheme will be implemented in the first cabinet meeting itself. The party also announced 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana' that provides an insurance coverage of up to Rs 25 lakh. "The fact is that AAP's entire election campaign is based on freebies. After the election, the party announced many freebies which are not even possible to fulfil. The BJP, on the other hand, is focusing on its manifesto with schemes which it could deliver smoothly after forming the government. The clear picture will come up in the coming days as the party is working on it," sources said. In his first election rally in Delhi on Sunday last, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that no public welfare scheme would be discontinued if the party comes to power. However, it would go a step ahead and remove corruption in the implementation of the schemes. "Anticipating their defeat in the Delhi election, the AAP has started spreading a lie that if BJP comes, this would be stopped, that would be stopped. I want to assure the people of Delhi that no schemes of people's welfare would be stopped in the BJP government," the PM had said.

## Naidu visits Tirupati stampede victims

From page 1

Accompanied by several ministers, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) officials and others, the CM inspected the makeshift arrangements made to handle the multitudes of pilgrims arriving for the pilgrimage. At the stampede site, Naidu demanded answers from TTD joint executive officer (health & education) M Gowthami over the incident. The Andhra Pradesh government announced an ex-gratia of Rs 25 lakh each to the kin of the deceased devotees who died in a stampede here. Hundreds of devotees turned up from across the country

for the 10-day Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam commencing from January 10. "We cannot replace life with anything else. To support the families, we have announced Rs 25 lakh," said Prasad, talking to reporters after calling on the victims' families as part of a group of ministers visit. Senior YSRC leader and former Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) chairman B Karunakar Reddy demanded that Chief Minister should own moral responsibility for the Tirupati stampede and initiate stringent action against the officials responsible. The Congress' state unit held the TTD that governs the Lord Venkateswara temple,

responsible for the tragedy and called for immediate probe into the incident. According to the former TTD chairman, the incident occurred due to the inefficiency of the administration, which is more "inclined towards serving Chandrababu Naidu than Lord Venkateswara". "Chandrababu Naidu always gives priority to publicity and self-boasting and such an incident was seen during Godavari pushkarams, which claimed over 30 lives due to his publicity craze," he said, referring to a previous stampede incident on the banks of Godavari river in Rajamundry during erstwhile TDP regime between 2014 and 2019.

## GRAP III revoked in the Capital

From page 1

The CAQM has confirmed that the actions under Stage-I and Stage-II of the revised GRAP will remain enforced. These measures will continue to be implemented, monitored, and reviewed by the relevant agencies in the entire NCR to prevent any further deterioration in air quality. Under Stage III, classes up to 5 are required to shift to hybrid mode. Parents and students have the option to choose online education, wherever available. The restrictions also include banning of road construction activities and major repairs. The government may take a decision to stagger timings for public offices and municipal bodies in other areas of NCR. Delhi's average AQI clocked 357 today at 4PM, i.e. 'Very Poor' Category (AQI ranging between 301-400); CAQM Sub-Committee on GRAP observed that the AQI of Delhi which was recorded as

297 on 08.01.2025, exhibited a sharp increasing trend and has been recorded 357 at 4:00 PM on 09.01.2025 owing to calm winds and foggy conditions. "According to CAQM, forecasts from IMD/ IITM also suggest a likelihood of the average AQI of Delhi to particularly remain in this adverse range for a few days owing to unfavorable meteorological conditions. The Sub-Committee accordingly decides to invoke the 9-point action plan as per Stage-III of revised GRAP in the entire NCR with immediate effect, in an effort to prevent further deterioration of air quality in the region; All actions as envisaged under Stage-III of the revised GRAP, be implemented in right earnest by all the agencies concerned in NCR, with immediate effect, in addition to all actions under Stages I & II of revised GRAP already in force," the CAQM said.

# Indian passport ranking slips

From page 1

Singapore passport holders can currently travel visa-free to a total of 195 out of 227 destinations around the globe, giving its citizens more unrestricted travel access than anywhere else in the world. Close behind, runner-up Japan climbed from third to second place in the 2025 ranking. The Japanese passport unlocks visa-free access to 193 nations, a total that now includes China for the first time since Covid-19. Six countries - Finland, France, Germany, Italy, South Korea, and Spain - are tied for third place with visa-free access to 192 destinations globally. In fourth place, Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands,

Norway, and Sweden are also tied, with their citizens enjoying travel to 191 destinations without needing a visa. The United Arab Emirates, in tenth place, remains the only Arab nation to have secured a spot in the top 10 ranking, meaning its passport holders can travel visa-free to 185 destinations worldwide. UAE passport holders have seen a major improvement in global mobility over the past decade, and have gained access to an additional 72 destinations since 2015. Meanwhile, the US passport, dropping from second place in 2015 to its current ranking in ninth place, has become less powerful over the past decade. The British passport has also diminished in power

in recent years, and is now ranked in fifth place. It has been over a decade since the UK and the US jointly held first place on the index in 2014. In 2025, Pakistan and Yemen shared the 103rd position on the Henley Passport Index, both with visa-free access to only 33 countries. They are followed by Iraq (31 countries), Syria and (27 countries) and Afghanistan (26 countries). Several EU member states, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, drop two places in the ranking to 3rd position, and are joined by Finland and South Korea, which each lost a place over the past 12 months and now have access to 192 destinations with no prior visa required.

The statement adds that a seven-nation EU cohort, all with visa-free access to 191 destinations, Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, share 4th place, while five countries, Belgium, New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland, and the UK, come in 5th with 190 visa-free destinations. The statement adds that on the other end of the mobility spectrum, Afghanistan, unsurprisingly, remains firmly entrenched at the bottom of the Henley Passport Index, having lost visa-free access to a further two destinations over the past year, creating the largest mobility gap in the index's 19-year history, with Singaporeans able to travel to

169 more destinations visa-free than Afghan passport holders. "The very notion of citizenship and its birthright lottery needs a fundamental rethink as temperatures rise, natural disasters become more frequent and severe, displacing communities and rendering their environments uninhabitable. Simultaneously, political instability and armed conflicts in various regions force countless people to flee their homes in search of safety and refuge. The need to introduce Free Global Cities to harness the untapped potential of displaced people and other migrants, transforming them from victims of circumstance into architects of their own futures

has never been more pressing or apparent," says Christian H Kaelin, Chairman, Henley & Partners and the inventor of the passport index concept. The statement adds that the rest of the index's Top 10 is largely dominated by European countries, except for Australia, which is 6th place with 189 destinations, Canada, 7th place with 188 destinations, the US 9th place with 186 destinations and the UAE, the first and only Arab state to ever make it into the upper echelons of the rankings. The UAE is one of the biggest climbers on the index over the past decade, having secured access to an additional 72 destinations since 2015, enabling it to climb 32 places to 10th spot with visa-free access to 185

destinations worldwide. According to the statement, only 22 of the world's 199 passports have fallen down the Henley Passport Index ranking over the past decade. Surprisingly, the United States is the second-biggest faller between 2015 and 2025 after Venezuela, plummeting seven places from 2nd to its current 9th position. Vanuatu is the third-biggest faller, losing six places from 48th to 54th position, followed by the British passport, which was top of the index in 2015 but now sits in 5th place. Completing the Top 5 losers list is Canada, which dropped three ranks over the past decade from 4th to its current 7th place. In contrast, China is among the biggest climbers over the

past decade, ascending from 94th place in 2015 to 60th in 2025, with its visa-free score increasing by 40 destinations in that time. And in terms of its openness to other nations, China has also risen on the Henley Openness Index, which ranks all 199 countries and territories worldwide according to the number of nationalities they permit entry to without a prior visa. China granted visa-free access to a further 29 countries over the past year alone, and now sits in 80th position, granting visa-free entry to a total of 58 nations as the new year commences, compared to its rival America, which ranks 84th and allows just 46 other countries access without a prior visa.



# Hollywood Hills fire breaks out as deadly wildfires burn out of control across Los Angeles

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

A fast-moving fire broke out in the Hollywood Hills on Wednesday night, threatening one of Los Angeles' most iconic spots as firefighters battled to get under control three other major blazes that killed five people, put 100,000 people under evacuation orders and ravaged the city from the Pacific Coast to inland Pasadena.

The Sunset Fire was burning near the Hollywood Bowl and about a mile (kilometer) from the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The streets around Grauman's Chinese Theatre and Madame Tussauds were packed with stop-and-go traffic as sirens blared and low-flying helicopters soared by on their way to dump water on the flames. People toting suitcases left hotels on foot, while some onlookers walked towards the flames, recording the fire on their phones.

More than 1,000 structures, mostly homes, have been destroyed, and more than 130,000 people are under evacuation orders in the metropolitan area. Winds eased up some Wednesday, a day after hurricane-force winds blew embers through the air, igniting block after block, and hundreds of firefighters from other

states have arrived to help, but the four fires burning out of control showed the danger is far from over.

More than half a dozen schools in the area were either damaged or destroyed, including Palisades Charter High School, which has been featured in many Hollywood productions, including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie" and the TV series "Teen Wolf," officials said. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said air operations were dousing flames. She warned they still faced "erratic winds," though not of hurricane force like Tuesday evening, when much of the destruction occurred.

In Pasadena, Fire Chief Chad Augustin said between 200 and 500 structures have been damaged or lost from the Eaton Fire that started Tuesday night. He said the city's water system was stretched and was further hampered by power outages but even without those issues, firefighters would not have been able to stop the fire as embers blown by the intense winds ignited block after block. "We were not stopping that fire last night," he said. "Those erratic wind gusts were throwing embers for multiple miles ahead of the fire."

On the Pacific Coast west of downtown Los Angeles, a



Los Angeles Fire Department firefighters work to extinguish a house fire as the Palisades Fire ravages a neighborhood amid high winds in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles.

AP/PTI

major fire leveled entire blocks, reducing grocery stores and banks to rubble in the Pacific Palisades, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity homes and memorialized by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA."

More than 1,000 structures were destroyed in the Palisades fire, the most destructive in the modern history of L.A. Many people were hurt, including

first responders, LA County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said.

The scope of the destruction was just becoming clear: Block after block of California Mission Style homes and bungalows were reduced to nothing but charred remains dotted by stone fireplaces and blackened arched entryways. Ornate iron railing wrapped around the smoldering frame of one

house. The apocalyptic scenes spread for miles. Swimming pools were blackened with soot, and sports cars slumped on melted tires. As flames moved through his neighborhood, Jose Velasquez sprayed down his Altadena home with water as embers rained down on the roof. He managed to save their home, which also houses their family business of selling churros,

a Mexican pastry. Others weren't so lucky. Many of his neighbors were at work when they lost their homes.

"So we had to call a few people and then we had people messaging, asking if their house was still standing," he said. "We had to tell them that it's not." Beyond the burned areas, residents worked wearing N95 masks, unable to escape the toxic smoke wafting over huge

sections of the city.

**Actors lost homes:** The flames marched toward highly populated and affluent neighborhoods, including Calabasas and Santa Monica, home to California's rich and famous. Hollywood stars. Mandy Moore, Cary Elwes and Paris Hilton are among the stars who said Wednesday they had lost homes. Billy Crystal and his wife Janice lost their home of 45 years in the Palisades Fire. "We raised our children and grandchildren here. Every inch of our house was filled with love. Beautiful memories that can't be taken away," the Crystals wrote in the statement.

In Palisades Village, the public library, two major grocery stores, a pair of banks and several boutiques were destroyed. "It's just really weird coming back to somewhere that doesn't really exist anymore," said Dylan Vincent, who returned to the neighborhood to retrieve some items and saw that his elementary school had burned down and that whole blocks had been flattened. The fires have consumed a total of about 42 square miles (108 square kilometers) — nearly the size of the entire city of San Francisco.

**Landmarks get scorched and studios suspend production:** President Joe Biden signed a federal emergency declaration

after arriving at a Santa Monica fire station for a briefing with Gov Gavin Newsom, who dispatched National Guard troops to help. Several Hollywood studios suspended production, and Universal Studios closed its theme park between Pasadena and Pacific Palisades.

With an estimated 1,000 structures destroyed and the fire still active, the Palisades Fire is by far the city's most destructive in modern history, topping the Sayre fire in 2008 that destroyed just over 600 structures, according to statistics kept by the Wildfire Alliance, a partnership between the city's fire department and MySafe:LA. Structures refers to homes and other buildings. Southern California Edison shut off service to thousands because of safety concerns related to high winds and fire risks. More than 1.5 million customers could face shutoffs depending on weather conditions, the utility said.

Several Southern California landmarks were heavily damaged, including the Reel Inn in Malibu, a seafood restaurant. Owner Teddy Leonard and her husband hope to rebuild. "When you look at the grand scheme of things, as long as your family is well and everyone's alive, you're still winning, right?" she said.

## Body of Israeli hostage found in Gaza, possibly alongside his son's remains

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli soldiers recovered the body of a 53-year-old hostage in an underground tunnel in southern Gaza, the military said Wednesday, and the army was determining if another set of remains belongs to the man's son.

The discovery of Yosef AlZayadni's body comes as Israel and Hamas are considering a ceasefire deal that would free the remaining hostages in Gaza and could halt the fighting. Israel has declared about a third of the 100 hostages dead, but believes as many as half could be alive.

Yosef and his son Hamzah AlZayadni were thought to still be alive before Wednesday's announcement, and news about their fate could ramp up pressure on Israel to move forward with a deal.

The military said it found evidence in the tunnel that raised

"serious concerns" for the life of Hamzah AlZayadni, 23, suggesting he may have died in captivity. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesperson, said the circumstances behind Yosef AlZayadni's death were being investigated.

AlZayadni and three of his children were among 250 hostages taken captive after Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing 1,200 people. AlZayadni, who had 19 children, worked at the dairy farm at Kibbutz Holit for 17 years, said the Hostages Families Forum, a group representing the relatives of captives. AlZayadni's teenage children, Bilal and Aisha, were released along with about 100 hostages in a weeklong ceasefire deal in November 2023.

The family are members of the Bedouin community, part of Israel's Palestinian minority who have Israeli citizenship. The traditionally

nomadic community is particularly impoverished in Israel and has suffered from neglect and marginalisation. Palestinians make up some 20 per cent of Israel's 10 million population, and millions more live in Gaza and under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank.

Eight members of Israel's Bedouin minority were abducted in the October 2023 attacks. Yosef AlZayadni appeared on a list of 34 hostages shared by a Hamas official with The Associated Press earlier this week who the militant group said were slated for release. Israel said this was a list it had submitted to mediators last July, and that it has received nothing from Hamas.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that a ceasefire and hostage deal between Israel and Hamas is "very close" and he hopes "we can get it over the line" before

handing over US diplomacy to President-elect Donald Trump's administration later this month.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed sorrow at the news of AlZayadni's death, and said in a statement he had "hoped and worked to bring back the four members of the family from Hamas captivity." Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz earlier said the bodies of both Yosef and Hamzah AlZayadni had been recovered, but the military said the identity of some remains were not yet determined.

The Hostages Families Forum said the ceasefire deal being negotiated "comes far too late for Yosef - who was taken alive and should have returned the same way."

"Every day in captivity poses an immediate mortal danger to the hostages," the group said in a statement.

## 16 labourers abducted in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

At least 16 labourers working on a uranium and plutonium mining site in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province were abducted by unknown armed men on Thursday, sources said.

The labourers were abducted from a vehicle en route to the Atomic Energy Mine Project site in Lakki Marwat district. Later, the abductors set the vehicle on fire in the Qabal Khel area. The gunmen shifted the labourers to an undisclosed location. No group claimed responsibility for the abduction.

The banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is active in the area and has been blamed for such abductions in the past. The TTP set up as an umbrella group of several militant outfits in 2007, is believed to be close to al-Qaeda. The group has been blamed for several deadly attacks across Pakistan.

This incident highlights the deteriorating security situation in the region.

## Impeached President Yoon's lawyers warn detention may spark 'civil war'

AP ■ SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA)

South Korean opposition parties introduced a bill Thursday calling for an independent investigation into impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol's brief martial law declaration, as thousands of his supporters and critics held tense rallies near his residence ahead of his potential detention.

The bill, jointly submitted by six parties, including the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, proposes that a special prosecutor investigate whether Yoon's martial law decree on December 3 constituted an attempted rebellion.

The bill also calls for an investigation into opposition claims that Yoon sought to provoke a clash with North Korea by allegedly flying drones over Pyongyang or discussing the possibility of shooting down trash-laden balloons launched from North Korea across the border, to justify a power grab at home. Yoon's lawyers and the South Korean military have denied the suspi-

cions. Yoon remained holed up at his official residence in the capital city of Seoul, where the presidential security service has fortified the grounds with barbed wire and rows of vehicles blocking the roads, anticipating another attempt by law enforcement to detain him after last week's failed effort.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, leading a joint investigation with police and the military, has pledged to work with police to make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon. It has warned that members of the presidential security staff could be arrested if they obstruct attempts to apprehend the embattled president.

Yoon's lawyers argued against bringing him to custody, claiming he isn't a threat to flee or destroy evidence. They claimed that images of him being dragged out in handcuffs could spark a "civil war" in the divided country. At a news conference Thursday, Seok Dong-hyeon, a

lawyer on Yoon's legal team, highlighted the fervent protests by Yoon's supporters and claimed that the anti-corruption office's "reckless" attempts to detain Yoon would "provoke a significant backlash from outraged citizens."

"It would essentially be a civil war situation," he said, claiming that attempts to detain Yoon are aimed at humiliating him by displaying him in handcuffs. Separated by police lines and fences, thousands of Yoon's supporters and critics continued their daily rallies near his residence, shouting passionate slogans either vowing to protect him or calling for his ouster. They occasionally exchanged verbal insults, though there were no immediate reports of major clashes. The opposition has claimed that an independent investigation is crucial because separate investigations led by the country's anti-corruption agency and public prosecutors have been hindered by Yoon's unwillingness to cooperate.

## China concerned over new Syrian regime appointing Xinjiang Uygur militants to top military posts

PTI ■ BEIJING

China said it is greatly concerned over the new Syrian government appointing foreign terrorist fighters, especially from the banned Uygur militant group 'the East Turkestan Islamic Movement', to senior military ranks.

The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is active in China's volatile Xinjiang province.

These remarks were made by Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN, at the UN Security Council Briefing on Syria on Wednesday.

China is greatly concerned about the reports that said the Syrian Army has recently granted senior military ranks to a number of foreign terrorist fighters, including the head of Council, a listed terrorist organisation, the Turkistan

Islamic Party, also known as the ETIM, Cong said.

He called on Syria to fulfil its counter-terrorism obligations and to prevent any terrorist forces from using Syrian territory to threaten the security of other countries, according to official media reports here.

Reports from Syria say that the new Syrian regime headed by de-facto leader Ahmed al-Sharaa has appointed 50 new military officials of which six were foreign fighters, including that of ETIM.

The Army is being re-organised by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Islamist group that is now effectively in charge of the country following the overthrow of former President Bashar al-Assad earlier this month.

Based on the names that have been published, they are said to include Chinese Uyghurs, a

Jordanian and a Turkish national. All are said to have been given high-ranking positions as colonels or brigadier-generals, BBC reported.

China has supported the Assad regime and was caught unawares by its sudden fall. Assad himself fled to Russia where he was granted asylum. Thousands of fighters from many different countries joined the uprising against Assad as it became an all-out armed conflict when mass protests were met with violence by the security forces.

The new appointments appear to have been made in order to reward those fighters - whether from Syria or elsewhere - who played a significant role in the final triumph over the regime.

The issue is just one of many that could complicate any successful transition to a new political and social framework

in Syria, the BBC report said.

For China, ETIM is a red rag as it blames the Uygur militant group for a number of militant strikes in different cities in China and Xinjiang where the Uygur Muslims who constituted the majority were restive over the large-scale settlements of ethnic Hans from other provinces. For over a decade China has deployed thousands of security forces to control the militancy.

China is also apprehensive about the ETIM militants' presence in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime as Xinjiang shared borders with that country. Fu said the situation in Syria is at a critical stage with daunting challenges.

The international community should strengthen solidarity and coordinate its actions to support and help Syria achieve stability and development.

## Jimmy Carter will be honoured at Washington funeral before burial in Georgia hometown

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Jimmy Carter, who considered himself an outsider even as he sat in the Oval Office as the 39th US president, will be honoured Thursday with the pageantry of a funeral at Washington National Cathedral before a second service and burial in his tiny Georgia hometown.

President Joe Biden, who was the first sitting senator to endorse Carter's 1976 presidential campaign, will eulogise his fellow Democrat 11 days before he leaves office. All of Carter's living successors are expected to attend the Washington funeral, including President-elect Donald Trump, who paid his respects before Carter's casket Wednesday.

The rare gathering of commanders in chief is one example of how Thursday will be an



unusual moment of comity for the nation. Days of formal ceremonies and remembrances from political leaders, business titans and rank-and-file citizens have honoured Carter for decency and using a prodigious work ethic to do more than obtain political power.

"He set a very high bar for presidents, how you can use voice

and leadership for causes," said Bill Gates, the Microsoft co-founder whose foundation funded Carter's work to eliminate treatable diseases like the Guinea worm. Gates spoke to The Associated Press on Wednesday shortly before flying to Washington for the funeral.

"Whatever prestige and

resources you are lucky enough to have, ideally you can take those and take a even broader societal view in your post private sector career," Gates said. Bernice King, daughter of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., compared the two Georgians and Nobel Peace Prize winners. "Both President Jimmy Carter and my father showed us what is possible when your faith compels you to live and lead from a love-centred place," said King, who is also planning to attend the Washington service.

Ted Mondale, son of Walter Mondale, Carter's vice president, is expected to read a eulogy his father wrote for Carter before his own death in 2021.

Thursday will conclude six days of national rites that began in Plains, Georgia, where Carter was born in 1924, lived most of his life and died Dec. 29 at the age of 100.

## US 'notorious markets' report warns of risks from online pharmacies

AP ■ BANGKOK

Nearly all of the world's 35,000 online pharmacies are being run illegally and consumers who use them risk getting ineffective or dangerous drugs, according to the US Trade Representative's annual report on "notorious markets."

The report also singled out 19 countries over concerns about counterfeit or pirated products.

The report also named about three dozen online retailers, many of them in China or elsewhere in Asia that it said are allegedly engaged in selling counterfeit products or other illegal activities.

The report says 96 per cent of online pharmacies were found to be violating the law, many operating without a license and selling medicines without prescriptions and safety

warnings.

Their websites often look like legitimate e-commerce platforms, often with false claims that they are approved by the Food and Drug Administration, said the report, released Wednesday. The FDA and US Drug Enforcement Administration have both issued warnings about risks of buying prescription medicines from such sources.

It cited a survey by the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies' Global Foundation that found nearly one in four Americans who have used online pharmacies reported having encountered substandard, fake or harmful medicines.

Last year, Federal prosecutors reported that a network of illegal drug sellers based in the US, the Dominican Republic and India had

packaged potentially deadly synthetic opioids into pills disguised as common prescription drugs and sold millions of them through fake online drugstores, federal prosecutors said Monday.

At least nine people died of narcotics poisoning between August 2023 and June 2024 after consuming the counterfeit pills, the indictment said.

Apart from the risks of using drugs that may contain inert ingredients or those that could cause allergies, the medicines are sometimes made in unsanitary conditions, said the report, which did not give annual statistics for those who may have died or otherwise been harmed.

The USTR's annual report cited examples from inside the United States, but also mentioned risks of imported ingredients including



fenentanyl from China. Many of the illicit online pharmacies are based outside the US.

The "Notorious Markets List" did not mention progress in fighting counterfeit and pirated goods.

In one case, US authorities, industry groups and the police collaborated in shutting down a Hanoi, Vietnam-based piracy ring, Fmovies, and other related piracy sites, in July and August.

The report said the world's then-largest pirated movies site had drawn more than 6.7 billion visits from January 2023 to June 2024.

In another Vietnam-linked case, two people operating piracy television platform BestBuyIPTV were convicted and ordered to pay fines and forfeit property.

The report also cited crackdowns on online piracy in Brazil and the United Kingdom and busts of sellers of counterfeit purses, clothing and shoes in Kuwait.

But problems remain with cyberlockers that thwart efforts to restrict piracy of movies and other content

and of so-called "bulletproof" internet service providers, or ISPs, that promise people using them leeway for using pirate sites, it said.

One such ISP is Avito, a Russian-based ad platform that allegedly lets sellers advertise counterfeit products.

Baidu Wangpan, a cloud storage service of China's largest search engine provider, Baidu, was named for allegedly failing to enforce or being slow to act on copyright protection. The report also pointed to social-commerce site Pinduoduo and to Douyin Mall, a Chinese online platform owned by Tiktok owner ByteDance. It said the shopping platforms have sought to build up protections but that they still host many counterfeit goods.

It also named Shopee, a Singapore-based online and mobile e-com-

merce site, saying some country-focused platforms serving Southeast Asia and South American had better track records in fighting piracy than others.

IndiaMART, a big business-to-business marketplace in India, still offers a slew of counterfeit products, it said.

While a large share of theft of intellectual property has moved online, the report also highlighted real world locations notorious for selling counterfeit products, including markets in Turkey, bazaars in the United Arab Emirates and Saigon Square Shopping Mall in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City.

The report said Bangkok's MBK Centre, a huge mall of about 2,000 stores, had actively cracked down on counterfeiting, though such products still can be found there.



# India has potential to increase organic products' exports to ₹20,000 Crore in 3 years: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has the potential to increase exports of organic products up to Rs 20,000 crore in the next three years, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

He said this while releasing the eighth edition of National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) with new regulations aimed at enhancing clarity and transparency in organic product standards as well as aligning with global standards.

"Currently, our organic product exports are at Rs 5,000-6,000 crore. In the next three years, we can easily achieve Rs 20,000 crore exports, about 3-3.5 times increase from the current level," Goyal said at an event organised in partnership with industry body Ficci.

He said the global demand for these products is about Rs 1 lakh crore, which can grow up to Rs 10 lakh crore in the coming years, a unique opportunity India should not miss. India already has one of the largest numbers of farmers in the world undertaking organic farming.



He also asked startups to come out with solutions that help in growth of the sector. The NPOP has undergone several revisions since its inception in May 2001. The eighth edition marks a significant update to the regulatory framework governing organic products in India, with the last revision occurring in 2014. Key features of the eighth edition of

NPOP include farmer-friendly regulations, streamlined certification, enhanced transparency and revamped traceability system. The eighth edition aims to bolster India's organic export sector, with an ambitious target of reaching USD 2 billion in organic food exports by 2030. Ministers of State for Cooperation Krishan Pal Gurjar and Murlidhar

Mohol, Minister of State for Commerce Jitin Prasada and Cooperation Secretary Ashish Kumar Bhutani were also present at the event.

NPOP plays a crucial role in enhancing the credibility of organic products in both national and international markets. It ensures that agricultural products labelled as "organic" meet stringent standards, thereby protecting consumer interests and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

It is overseen by the Commerce Ministry, with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) managing its implementation.

TraceNet 2.0, an upgraded traceability platform of NPOP for seamless operations and enhanced tools for regulatory oversight, was also launched.

On the occasion, a dedicated NPOP portal was launched for more visibility and ease of Operations for Organic stakeholders. An upgraded redesigned APEDA portal as well as an agri exchange portal were also unveiled.

# Govt to soon launch new credit guarantee scheme for MSME sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju on Thursday said the government would soon launch a new credit guarantee scheme for the MSME sector covering loans up to Rs 100 crore.

"We are likely to come up with a scheme, which was announced by Finance Minister in her last Budget, that could provide loans up to Rs 100 crore without guarantee, if they are already having the enterprise," he said at the concluding day of Grameen Bharat Mahotsav.

The scheme is expected to be placed before the Union Cabinet soon for its approval. "For facilitating term loans to MSMEs for purchase of machinery and equipment without collateral or third-party guarantee, a credit guarantee scheme will be introduced. The scheme will operate on pooling of credit risks of such MSMEs. A separately constituted self-financing guarantee fund will provide, to each applicant, guarantee cover up to Rs 100



crore, while the loan amount may be larger," the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in Budget 2024-25..

The borrower will have to provide an upfront guarantee fee and an annual guarantee fee on the reducing loan balance, she had said.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector employs 50 million people, he said.

MSMEs exports have witnessed a remarkable rise, increasing from Rs 3.95 lakh crore in 2020-21 to Rs 12.39 lakh crore in 2024-25, underscoring their critical role in boosting India's economy and strengthening global trade.

The MSME sector in India has consistently demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, significantly contributing to the nation's GDP over the years. The Gross Value Added (GVA) by MSMEs in India's GDP was 29.7 per cent in 2017-18, rising to 30.1 per cent in both 2022-23.

To promote entrepreneurship in rural India, Nagaraju said, the government is very keen to lend more to rural areas through its various schemes. As the country surges ahead, he said, there is need to focus on four things, quality, linkages for exports, capacity building, and support to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat.

# Inflows into mutual funds' equity schemes increase 14 per cent in December

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Inflows into mutual funds' equity schemes increased by over 14 per cent on-month to Rs 41,156 crore in December, even as market volatilities continued.

The small and midcap schemes of mutual funds continued to attract investor interest with inflows touching record highs during the month, despite the concerns being expressed about the two segments for the risk they portend, industry body Amfi said.

Inflows into systematic investment plans came at Rs 26,459 crore, up from November's Rs 25,320 crore. The SIP assets under management stood at Rs 13.63 lakh crore, which is around a fifth of the overall.

The overall assets under management of mutual funds came at Rs 66.93 lakh crore as on December 31, 2024, which was down from Rs 68.08 lakh crore in the month-ago period.



Venkat Chalasani, chief executive of the Association of Mutual Funds of India (Amfi), attributed the decline to market losses on corrections as well as outflows of Rs 1.27 lakh crore in debt schemes, which is in line with previous experience of a pull out at the end of a quarter.

Responding to a question on the continued interest in equity funds and what to expect in the future, Chalasani acknowledged that there are uncertainties which may

influence the market, like the change in the US administration with Donald Trump as the President in January, but added that Indian investors continued to repose faith in the equity market.

Pointing to the continued interest in SIPs, Chalasani said these inflows illustrate the optimism of the investors in the Indian markets over a long term.

Asset management companies launched a total of 33 new fund offers during the month

through which over Rs 13,643 crore of money was mobilised, Amfi said, adding that this was higher than the 18 schemes that collected over Rs 4,000 crore in November.

"Culmination of NFOs, SIPs and lump sum purchase led to an increase in net sales numbers. Investor confidence on mutual funds are an efficient tool for investments continue to remain strong," Kotak Mahindra AMC's national head for sales, marketing and digital business Manish Mehta said.

Within the equity schemes, sectoral or thematic category attracted investors with the highest net inflow at Rs 15,331 crore, which is almost double of the Rs 7,658 crore in November.

The midcap category saw inflows of Rs 5,093 crore in December 2024, while the smallcap category saw inflows of Rs 4,667 crore, Amfi said, adding that these are record inflows.

# Government to give ₹35,000 Crore LPG subsidy to IOC, BPCL, HPCL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is likely to provide a subsidy of Rs 35,000 crore to state-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to make up for losses they incurred on selling the fuel this fiscal, sources said.

The three fuel retailers have kept the price of domestic LPG unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder since March 2024 despite a rise in input raw material cost. This led to under-recoveries on LPG sales, and the resultant drastic fall in their earnings in the April-September (first half of current 2024-25 fiscal year).

The total under-recovery on LPG sales for the industry in the current fiscal is estimated at about Rs 40,500 crore. Against this, the government is likely to provide Rs 35,000



crore in total spread over two financial years, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

IOC, BPCL and HPCL are likely to get Rs 10,000 crore during the current 2024-25 fiscal and the remaining Rs 25,000 crore in the next, they said, adding that provision of the subsidy is likely to be made in the Union Budget for 2025-26 that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present on February 1.

Sources said there is an under-

recovery (or loss) of about Rs 240 per 14.2-kg cylinder that the state-owned fuel retailers sell to domestic households at the current price of Rs 803.

Prices of domestic LPG are regulated by government to insulate domestic households from high market rates. Regulated prices are lower than the Saudi CP - the international benchmark used to price domestic LPG. This is because domestic LPG production is not sufficient to meet the local demand and the

recovery of about Rs 240 per 14.2-kg cylinder that the state-owned fuel retailers sell to domestic households at the current price of Rs 803. Prices of domestic LPG are regulated by government to insulate domestic households from high market rates. Regulated prices are lower than the Saudi CP - the international benchmark used to price domestic LPG. This is because domestic LPG production is not sufficient to meet the local demand and the

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# Software migration caused error in gold import computation; issue largely rectified: Sources

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government's initiative to migrate SEZ data from NSDL software to ICEGATE system for streamlined reporting of import data caused double counting of gold imports, resulting in inflated figures and the issue has now been largely rectified, government sources said.

The downward revision has provided the actual picture of trade deficit (difference between imports and exports), which was earlier looking very high. The deficit for November will now be revised downwards from USD 37.84 billion to about USD 32.8 billion. Similarly, there

will be a revision in overall import numbers as well. On account of the correction, the commerce ministry has revised downwards the gold import data for November by USD 5 billion to USD 9.84 billion and for the first eight months of the current fiscal by USD 11.7 billion to USD 37.38 billion.

The double counting occurred as imports into the country and the clearances from SEZs (special economic zones) to domestic tariff area (DTA) were counted twice due to technical glitches.

The double counting which occurred on account of migration of NSMDL to ICEGATE has now been

largely rectified, but the migration is still underway, the sources said.

"Correction and revision of data is part and parcel of framework of statistics world over. The data compilation is a complicated process as it involves collection of data from over 500 locations and over 2.5 lakh transactions take place every day," they said.

They added that corrections and revisions of data is a standard practice and an integral part.

"Revision and corrections do happens in data. This is a normal drill of statistics," they said.

Exports and imports take place mainly from two places



— airports and seaports. SEZ (special economic zones) numbers were earlier counted separately (on NSDL system) as these zones are treated as foreign entities in terms of

provisions related to customs. In May last, it was decided to migrate from NSDL to ICEGATE.

India's trade data compilation process starts with exporters

and importers filing Shipping Bills (for exports) and Bills of Entry (for imports) through the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) system at Customs. All the data comes to the server of ICEGATE.

The Indian Customs Electronic Gateway (ICEGATE) is the national portal of Indian Customs of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) that provides e-filing services to trade, cargo carriers and other trading partners electronically.

Customs officials verify these documents for compliance and assign a unique transaction number upon clearance. The verified data is

then transmitted to the DGCIIS in real-time.

DGCIIS validates the data to correct errors and aggregates it by commodity, trade partner, port, and mode of transport.

The data is standardised into a consistent format, with trade values converted to USD for global comparability.

The Kolkata-based DGCIIS prepares a preliminary monthly trade report, which is reviewed and shared with government departments. After further validation, the final data is published in reports such as Monthly Trade Statistics, Annual Reports, and Country-wise Trade Data. This data is disseminated

through DGCIIS press releases, government websites, and the Export-Import Databank, and is also shared with global agencies like WTO (World Trade Organisation) and IMF (International Monetary Fund).

Trade data is periodically revised to incorporate updates from Customs. Key agencies involved in this process include DGCIIS, CBIC (Customs), the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

This comprehensive process ensures accurate and reliable trade data for policymaking and analysis.

# TCS Q3 net profit rises 11.95 per cent to ₹12,380 Crore, employee base dips

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's largest IT services company TCS on Thursday reported an 11.95 per cent jump in net profit at Rs 12,380 crore in the December quarter while the overall workforce reduced by over 5,000 employees.

The Tata Group company had reported a net profit of Rs 11,058 crore in the year-ago period, and Rs 11,909 crore in the preceding September quarter.

The company's revenue grew 5.6 per cent to Rs 63,973 crore as against Rs 60,583 crore a year earlier. However, it was down from Rs 64,259 crore in the September quarter.

New order bookings came at USD 10.2 billion in what is termed as a seasonally challenging quarter due to the holiday season. Chief Executive K Krithivasan said the new orders were across industries,



geographies and service lines, which lends a "good visibility to long-term growth".

He said the banking, financial services and insurance, along with consumer businesses are returning to growth and there are early signs of a revival in discretionary spend in some verticals.

These two trends, along with continuing strong growth in regional markets makes the company confident for the future, he added. The operating profit margin came at 24.5 per cent as against 24.1 per cent in the quarter-ago period, but still lower than the aspirational

bracket. The overall workforce reduced by over 5,000 employees during the three months under review, and the overall base stood at 6.07 lakh as of December this year. The IT services attrition stood at 13 per cent.

Chief Human Resources Officer Milind Lakkad said campus hirings are going according to plan and the company is preparing to onboard a higher number of campus hires next year.

The company board announced a dividend of Rs 76 per share, including a special dividend of Rs 66 per share.

TCS also announced the acquisition of land bank in Bengaluru from a Tata Group company for Rs 1,625 crore. The TCS scrip closed 1.72 per cent down at Rs 4,036.65 apiece on the BSE on Thursday, as against a 0.68 per cent correction on the benchmark.

# Rupee recovers from record low to settle four paise higher at 85.87 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered slightly from its record low and settled with a gain of 4 paise at 85.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid firm American currency and elevated level of crude oil prices.

According to forex analysts, relentless selling in domestic equities and outflow of foreign capital kept the local unit under pressure, while dollar strengthened on improved macroeconomic prospects in the US.

They said, uncertainties related to trade restrictions ahead of the change in US administration under President Donald Trump continued to fuel dollar demand, while concerns over Federal Reserve's move to delay interest cut kept the country's benchmark treasury yields elevated.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at its historic low level of 85.94 and touched an intra-day peak



of 85.84 before ending the session at 85.87 (provisional) against the greenback, 4 paise higher from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee plunged 17 paise to settle at its all-time low closing level of 85.91 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the surge in US bond yields and FII outflows pressured the rupee.

The US macroeconomic data was mixed, with weekly unemployment claims favouring the greenback while non-farm employment data was disappointing. "We expect rupee to trade with a negative bias on weak

domestic markets, strong dollar and rising US treasury yields. Elevated crude oil prices and FII outflows also put downside pressure on the domestic currency. However, any RBI intervention may support rupee at lower levels.

Investors may watch out for non-farm payrolls report. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 85.75 to Rs 86.10," Choudhary said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 108.98. The 10-year US bond yields also remained elevated at 4.67 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.03 per cent to USD 76.14 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined sharply by 528.28 points, or 0.68 per cent, to settle at 77,620.21 points, while the Nifty dropped 162.45 points, or 0.69 per cent, to 23,526.50 points.

## INBRIEF

### POWERGRID SIGNS MASTER AGREEMENT WITH EPRI, USA FOR STRATEGIC COLLABORATION

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a 'Maharatna' Public Sector Enterprise under Ministry of Power, Government of India, has taken a significant step towards collaborative technical research by signing a 'Master Agreement' with independent, non-profit energy research and development organization EPRI, USA.



### BIMA SAKHI CROSSES 50,000 MARK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched LIC's BIMA SAKHI Yojana at Panipat, on December 9, 2024. Bima Sakhi Yojana is a step towards Viksit Bharat through women empowerment which will provide social security to the families. LIC of India is proud to be a partner in Viksit Bharat by including women as partners in the nation's progress by providing them with opportunity of becoming BIMA SAKHI and self-reliant.

### UNITING HEARTS, BRIDGING CULTURES: THE LEGACY OF SYCORIAAN MATRIMONIAL SERVICES

LUCKNOW: Sycoriaan Matrimonial Services is proud to celebrate 28 years of excellence in matchmaking, connecting people across cultures and continents to create lasting relationships. With a focus on personalised services, Sycoriaan has become a trusted name in the matrimonial industry, blending tradition and modern technology to foster meaningful connections.





# A GLIMPSE INTO WANCHO CULTURE

JANUARY READS



**Myth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh** explores the cultural heritage, myths and challenges of the Wancho community, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

**M**yth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh by Tara Douglas and Jatwang Wangsa is a remarkable work that provides readers with a rich and insightful exploration of the Wancho tribe, a prominent indigenous community from the hilly regions of Arunachal Pradesh, India. This book serves as a vital document of the tribe's deep-rooted cultural heritage, values and social dynamics. The authors combine thorough research with a nuanced narrative, bringing to life the tribe's traditions, worldview and their historical context in a way that resonates with readers from various backgrounds.

A standout feature of the book is the authors' deep dive into the animistic belief system of the Wancho tribe. The book illustrates how the Wanchos view nature not simply as a physical environment, but as an interconnected and spiritual entity. In the tribe's worldview, animals, plants and natural features like rivers and mountains possess spirits that are integral to the tribe's existence. This perspective is explored through a variety of captivating myths, such as the story of *Ganghan*, the sun and his younger brother *Katgong*. These stories embody the tribe's philosophy of balance between humans and nature. The authors succeed in conveying the depth of this belief, which challenges the modern

tendency to view nature as a resource to be exploited, making it especially relevant in today's environmentally conscious world. The authors also offer a historical perspective that highlights the tribe's warrior culture, especially the practice of headhunting and its role in the tribe's defense against external threats. One of the most compelling historical accounts in the book is the detailed retelling of the *Nyinu massacre* of 1875, where the Wanchos ambushed British surveyors and killed 80 of them. The authors provide a balanced view of the event, contextualising it within the tribe's broader resistance to colonial forces. Rather than painting the tribe as "savage" or "violent," the book reframes the incident as an act of self-defense and an effort to protect their land and way of life. This nuanced portrayal is an important contribution, as it challenges reductive and one-sided portrayals of indigenous people in history.

In addition to the grand myths and historical narratives, the book also provides intimate stories that offer a glimpse into the everyday lives of the Wancho people. These personal tales of love, sacrifice and family serve to humanise the tribe, making their culture more relatable and accessible. For instance, the stories of tribal elders, who hold deep connections to the land and community, underscore the importance of kinship and collective memory within the

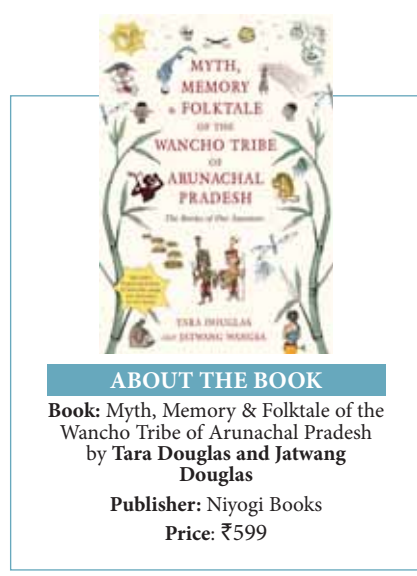
Wancho society. These stories are not only culturally enriching but emotionally engaging, as they capture universal themes that resonate with readers on a personal level. Moreover, the book does not shy away from addressing the challenges the Wancho tribe faces in the modern world. One of the more poignant aspects of the book is its examination of the tensions between traditional practices and the pressures of

modernisation. As younger generations drift away from their ancestral ways, the tribe's rich oral traditions and cultural practices are at risk of being lost. The authors acknowledge this tension and highlight efforts within the community to preserve its heritage. This theme of cultural preservation is one of the book's most powerful messages, as it calls attention to the fragility of indigenous cultures in the face of rapid societal changes. The book emphasises the importance of safeguarding these cultural traditions, which offer valuable lessons for the contemporary world.

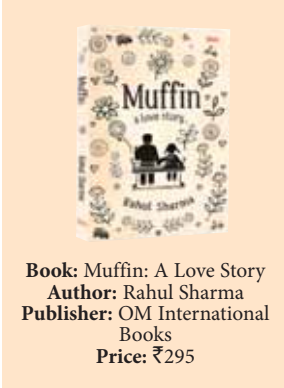
A key strength of the book is how it bridges the gap between academic research and cultural preservation. The authors not only provide anthropological study but also offer a platform for the voices of the Wancho people themselves. The book does not present the tribe through the lens of an outsider, but rather allows the Wanchos to tell their own stories in their own words. This respectful and inclusive approach ensures that the cultural heritage of the Wancho tribe is portrayed authentically, giving readers an opportunity to engage directly with the community's worldview. This is a refreshing departure from many studies that tend to objectify indigenous communities as subjects to be studied rather than active participants in their own representation.

In terms of writing style, the authors strike a delicate balance between scholarly rigor and engaging storytelling. The book is accessible and enjoyable to read, making it suitable for both academic audiences and casual readers with an interest in indigenous cultures. The authors work the myths, histories and personal stories together in a way that is both informative and captivating, ensuring that readers stay engaged while gaining valuable insights into the Wancho culture. *Myth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe* stands as a comprehensive and insightful portrayal of the Wancho people, their beliefs, traditions and struggles. Through meticulous research and a compassionate understanding of the tribe's way of life, Tara Douglas and Jatwang Wangsa have created a significant contribution to the documentation of indigenous cultures in India.

The book provides not only a deeper understanding of the Wanchos but also a broader perspective on the importance of preserving cultural diversity in a rapidly changing world. This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in anthropology, folklore, indigenous studies or the preservation of cultural heritage. It is a valuable resource that offers both academic insight and emotional resonance, making it an important read for those who seek to understand the depth and richness of indigenous cultures.



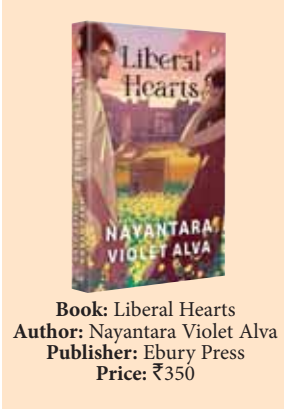
**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
 Book: Myth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh by Tara Douglas and Jatwang Wangsa  
 Publisher: Niyogi Books  
 Price: ₹599



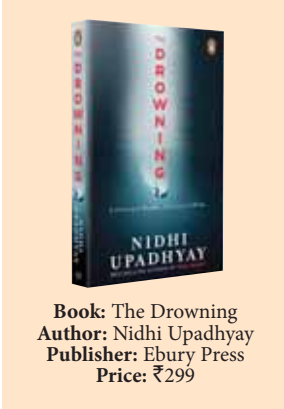
**Book: Muffin: A Love Story**  
 Author: Rahul Sharma  
 Publisher: OM International Books  
 Price: ₹295



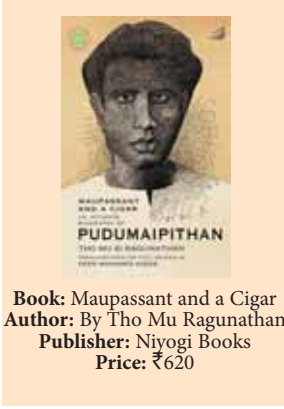
**Book: Ex Object: The art of Holding on, Letting go**  
 Publisher: OM International Books  
 Price: ₹695



**Book: Liberal Hearts**  
 Author: Nayantra Violet Alva  
 Publisher: Ebury Press  
 Price: ₹350



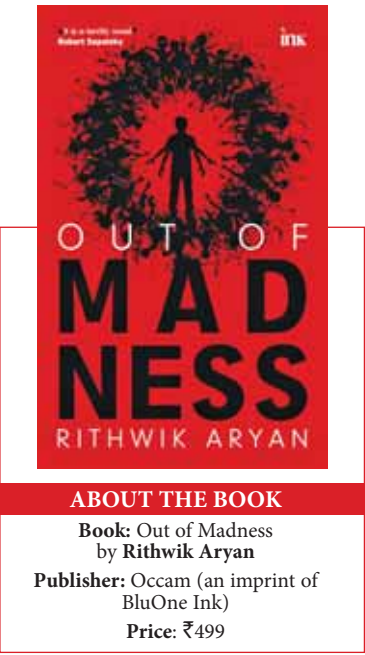
**Book: The Drowning**  
 Author: Nidhi Upadhyay  
 Publisher: Ebury Press  
 Price: ₹299



**Book: Maupassant and a Cigar**  
 Author: Tho Mu Ragnathan  
 Publisher: Niyogi Books  
 Price: ₹620

## LOVE, LOSS AND PSYCHE

**BY TEAM VIVA**  
 Rithwik Aryan's *Out of Madness* is a riveting debut that masterfully intertwines themes of mental health, love, loss and the fragility of human sanity. It is a novel born from an extraordinary journey of self-discovery, research and lived experience, offering readers an unfiltered glimpse into the complexities of the human psyche. Aryan's path to writing *Out of Madness* is as unconventional as the book itself. A dropout from Harvard Extension School, Aryan chose the unpredictable path of storytelling

**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
 Book: Out of Madness by Rithwik Aryan  
 Publisher: Ocam (an imprint of BluOne Ink)  
 Price: ₹499

over academia, immersing himself for over a year in the raw and unsettling environment of India's most notorious mental asylums. This decision infuses the novel with an authenticity that is rare and striking. The narrative follows *Mason Moran*, a psychology professor at *Nalanda University* who stages his death after discovering his wife's infidelity. He and *Bahubali*, an eccentric politician who is bent on shooting a cult adult film, get sucked into the tornado of insanity that compels their trip to a mental hospital, alongside a man blighted by normalisation, *Mr. Staci*, who is also trying to face her inner demons. Critiques of Aryan are equally accompanied by Aryan's own ability to navigate through and critique Aryan's anguish, the same sheds light

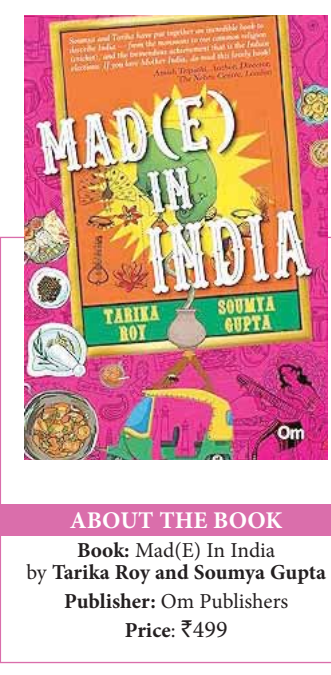
on how men are coerced into hiding their feelings. Using Aryan's masculinity and its portrayal through the character of *Mason* and *Barbrugio*, Aryan contemplates on how masculinity comes with grief and vulnerability, wherein, Aryan poses those males do not have to stoically conform to societal gender norms. Aryan in a more sensitive manner showcases the effect of societal pressures and expectations in suppressing feelings in men. What can be termed as one of Aryan's strongest suit shines in this very novel, the other novels that Aryan has penned encapsulate emotion through an extremely fact-based and observational lens. Aryan unlike many others who idealistically view and comment on other's pain, stayed in a mental asylum while conducting

empirical research, the combination of these two polarising views helped him stably sit in the middle. Aryan's characters are multifaceted, each grappling with their own struggles. *Mason's* existential crisis, *Bahubali's* delusional ambition and *Staci's* haunting past create a web of intersecting narratives that challenge readers to reflect on the nature of obsession, love, and redemption. The book's philosophical undertones deepen its impact, as Aryan delves into profound questions about freedom, identity and the human condition. The interplay of grief and desire, sanity and insanity, creates a narrative that is as thought-provoking as it is emotionally charged. The novel is not without its quirks. Its wild plot twists, dark humor and sometimes surreal narrative might alienate readers seeking a more conventional storyline. However, these elements make *Out of Madness* stand out as a fearless work that refuses to conform. *Out of Madness* is a bold debut that challenges societal norms and delves deep into the human psyche. Aryan's unflinching honesty, coupled with his evocative prose, makes this a must-read for those interested in mental health, emotional complexity, and the chaos of human existence. *Rithwik Aryan* has crafted a tale that is as much a reflection of his own journey as it is a story of his characters. With its raw emotion, intricate storytelling, and philosophical depth, *Out of Madness* cements Aryan's place as a writer to watch.

## The Essence of Indian Life

**BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL**  
*Mad(e) In India* penetrates the rich and amusing psyche of Indianness and Indian people. More than the politics of the nation, it presents the very essence of a nation - its people, its peculiarities, its multitude of caste systems, languages, superstitions, and an even bigger multitude of Gods and Goddesses worshipped. It provides a vivid illustration of the chaotic nature of the Indian metropolitan areas, the obsession inherited by its people with movie stars and their characteristics, and the Indian concept of optimistically doing whatever it takes to solve or fix a problem, termed 'jugaad'. It also underlines Indian culinary art, the diversity of the cultural and traditional practices of society, and the various forms of art present in the nation, showcasing how the integration of such diversity unifies the country, even in terms of conflicted domains. Out of a combination of satirical humour, perceptive and nuanced observations, and a repository of Indian expressions, the authors have come up with an engaging and illuminating account of the intricate web that is India. This, in turn, makes the book very interesting and highly recommended for someone who wants to discover the informatic and spiritual side of India.

*Mad(e) In India* humorously and cleverly depicts what it is to be Indian and how it is to live in this country. The authors of the book discuss Indian life and its various aspects, such as the panoply of languages spoken, the various cultures and religions, and even the everyday life and the unique approaches to solving problems, also known as *jugaad*, as per Indian traditions. The book takes note of the idiosyncratic lifestyles of people living in different metropolises of the nation, their compulsive fandom for movie stars, and the motley of food, customs, and ethnic handicrafts within the country. The authors demonstrate how one thread generalises the millions of complexities that exist in the Indian fabric - the ability of India to hold within itself so many differences. One can sense that the authors are writing in a conversational yet humorous way, which in many places comes laced with Indian expressions, making *Mad(e) In India* an interesting read even for those who merely seek entertainment. In case you have ever wondered how the Hindi film industry has always had a glamorous image of this country, *Mad(e) In India* is fun and informative, providing a comprehensive look at how such misconceptions arise and helping to clear them.



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
 Book: Mad(e) In India by Tarika Roy and Soumya Gupta  
 Publisher: Om Publishers  
 Price: ₹499



# Tottenham beats Liverpool 1-0 in English League Cup semifinals

PTI ■ LONDON

Lucas Bergvall's first goal for Tottenham secured a 1-0 win over Liverpool in the on Wednesday in a first-leg match notable for a serious-looking injury to Rodrigo Bentancur and the first in-stadium announcement by a referee in the English game. The 18-year-old Bergvall slotted home the winner in the 86th minute following a pass from Dominic Solanke, who thought 10 minutes earlier that he had given Tottenham the lead. That goal was ruled out after a VAR check for offside and referee Stuart Attwell communicated the decision via a wireless microphone to spectators inside Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and to TV viewers. In the sixth minute, Bentancur — the Uruguay midfielder who plays for Tottenham — fell to the ground and lay prone after landing awkwardly when

attempting a header from a corner. He was carried off on a stretcher, to applause from around the ground, after receiving treatment during a 10-minute delay and Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou confirmed after the game that Bentancur was "conscious" and talking. The second leg is at Anfield on Feb. 6. Newcastle leads Arsenal 2-0 after the first leg of the other semifinal match. Liverpool, the defending League Cup champion, saw its 24-match unbeaten run in all competitions come to an end and there was a hint of controversy about only the team's second loss of the season. Visiting players and manager Arne Slot were unhappy that Bergvall was on the field to score what proved to be the winning goal after he escaped collecting a second yellow card for a foul on Kostas Tsimikas moments earlier. Indeed, Tsimikas was off the field, waiting to come



back on having received treatment following Bergvall's tackle, when the Sweden midfielder tucked home his finish. Slot earned a yellow card himself for his protests, though he shook Attwell's hand after the final whistle. "The decision he made had a lot of impact on the result tonight," Slot said. Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk said it was "quite obvious" that Bergvall deserved a second yellow card. "And a minute later he scores the winner," Van Dijk said. "He (Attwell) made a mistake, in my opinion. And I told him that." It was a busy end to the match for Attwell, who took center stage after there was a video review following Solanke's strike in the 76th minute. After being notified that Solanke was offside, Attwell used the public address system to declare the goal had been ruled out, in an NFL-style announcement.

The League Cup semifinals were chosen to pilot a process in England that has been widely used in other sports, and in soccer at the Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in 2023 and other FIFA events. **Kinsky's dream debut** Three days after signing from Sparta Prague, Antonin Kinsky — a 21-year-old goalkeeper from the Czech Republic — was handed his debut by Tottenham and he kept a clean sheet after producing a string of great saves, notably from Liverpool substitute Darwin Nunez. His parents and sister were in the crowd to watch him play his first match in English soccer and he was emotional after the game. "I have never dreamed this," Kinsky said. Tottenham signed the highly rated Kinsky with first-choice goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario currently out injured.



## Aiming for hat-trick of SA20 titles: Markram

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Sunrisers Eastern Cape Skipper Aiden Markram says his side is pumped up to make it a hat-trick of titles at the SA20 as it faces MI Cape Town in its opening game. Markram's team has won both the editions of the competition so far. The tournament begins days after South Africa blanked Pakistan in a Test series at home. "Definitely still really pumped to try and get a third one this year. Obviously, (there are) no guarantees and it's a hugely competitive tournament, so hopefully in a month's time something cool can happen," Markram said during the Captains' Day press conference here. Former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said his side Joburg Super Kings haven't got the ideal weather to finalise its preparations as it has rained for the last few days in Johannesburg, but his players are surely up for a fight. "From my side, the weather has been a bit of a downer down in Joburg, it's been pretty wet. But from a squad perspective, some great signings in Joburg too, and you know the likes of Jonny Bairstow, Devon Conway, (Matheesha) Pathirana," du Plessis said. "Those three guys and

(Tabraiz) Shamsi, obviously, have a lot of experience that comes with them. So, all in all, our squad are looking very balanced. Two injuries, that wasn't ideal for our pace attack for Nandre Burger and Lizaad Williams. But we still feel we have enough options to put out a well balanced team," he added. MI Cape Town's Rashid Khan said his side was determined to put a better show in the third edition. "I think from the first year we had some really close games and it just didn't go our way. We had some great cricket last year as well, some wonderful cricket," he said. "But it was just more about the result, it didn't come our way. In the fresh year, we'll go with a fresh mind. We have some new faces in the team. We're looking forward to the new challenges and hopefully this year it won't be the same in the last few years." Paarl Royals' captain David Miller said the competitiveness in the league has benefited South African cricket to a major extent. "It's been two special years for us, but also for the competition itself. Just playing with the competitive juices that we have, all the games are really fun to be a part of, as well as having incredible overseas players, all the coaches are around," he said.

## I think he will be the next captain: Gavaskar on Jasprit Bumrah

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar is in awe of Jasprit Bumrah's leadership qualities and reckons the peerless fast bowler will succeed Rohit Sharma as the next captain of the Indian team following his extraordinary display in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Bumrah recently produced one of the best-ever bowling performances by an overseas pacer in Australia and picked 32 wickets over five Tests. He was also captain during India's only victory in the series, helping the visitors to a convincing win at the Optus Stadium in Perth in the opener. "He could be the next man. I think he will be the next man. Because he leads from the front, he has got a very good air about him, the air of a leader but not somebody who is going to pressure on you," Gavaskar



aired his views on Channel 7. "The batting great added, 'Sometimes, you have captains who put a lot of pressure on you. With Bumrah you can see that, he expects the others to do what their job is, why they are in the national team, but it doesn't seem to pressurise anybody.' Bumrah has been spearheading the Indian pace attack for some years now and his guidance has helped the

likes of Mohammed Siraj to grow as a fast bowler. "With the fast bowlers, he has been absolutely brilliant, standing at mid-off, mid-on and every time just being at hand to tell them. I think he was absolutely brilliant and I won't be surprised if he takes over very soon." Bumrah took his wickets at an incredible average of 13.06 and an even better strike rate of 28.37 before pulling up injured

midway through Australia's first innings at the SCG in the final Test. In Bumrah's absence, the home team chased down 162 on the third day to win the series 3-1. The lead pacer was handed the captaincy in the final Test after the out-of-form Rohit Sharma "opted out" but a back spasm prevented Bumrah from bowling on the crucial third day. Bumrah destroyed Australia in Perth with eight wickets, grabbed six wickets in the first innings at the Gabba, and nearly turned the Boxing Day Test on its head with his exploits on the fourth afternoon at MCG. In the series decider at SCG, Bumrah sent back Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne early in Australia's first innings but could only bowl one over after lunch on the second day when the game was evenly poised.



## McSweeney returns to Australia squad for Sri Lanka tour

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nathan McSweeney was recalled to Australia's test squad on Thursday to tour Sri Lanka, less than three weeks after being dropped from the top order. Australia's selectors announced their squad Thursday for the two-test tour, with several fresh faces added to the group that played India in Sydney last week. Australia won the five-test series 3-1 and clinched a spot in the World Test Championship against South Africa at Lord's in June. Steve Smith will lead the squad to Sri Lanka while regular skipper Pat Cummins is on leave as his wife awaits the birth of the couple's second child. Australia's selectors concentrated on spin for the two Sri Lanka tests, with uncapped 21-year-old Cooper Connolly among the seven full or part-time slow bowling options in the 16-man squad. Connolly, a left-arm allrounder, has represented Australia in limited-overs cricket and has been called up for his maiden test campaign along with specialist spinners Todd Murphy and Matthew Kuhnemann. McSweeney scored 72 runs at an average of 14.4 in his first three tests against India, before being replaced by Sam Konstas for the Melbourne Cricket Ground test starting Dec. 26.

The 25-year-old McSweeney has batted at No. 3 for South Australia state this season — averaging 97 — but has previously batted further down the order. Cricket Australia also said Cummins was "focusing on an ankle issue which was managed through the test summer" and fellow paceman Josh Hazlewood was continuing his recovery from a calf injury. Mitchell Marsh was omitted for the tour, joining Hazlewood in focusing on the 50-overs Champions' Trophy in Pakistan which immediately follows the test tour. The first test begins Jan. 29 and the second Feb. 6, both at spin-friendly Galle International Stadium. A one-off one-day international is scheduled for Feb. 13, also at Galle. "Sri Lanka is a challenging and exciting place to tour given the different conditions players may be presented with," selector George Bailey said. "This squad provides several ways to structure the XI depending on what type of wickets we may encounter in each match." Australia squad: Steve Smith (captain), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cooper Connolly, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Matt Kuhnemann, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Nathan McSweeney, Todd Murphy, Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster.

## Mandhana-led India eye dominant show in first-ever bilateral series against Ireland

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Riding high on a dominant performance against the West Indies, India under Smriti Mandhana will look to carry forward their winning momentum when they take on Ireland in the first-ever women's bilateral series, with the opening ODI scheduled here on Friday. India had swept the West Indies 3-0 in the ODI series, following a 2-1 triumph in the T20 series. Mandhana emerged as the top run-scorer across formats, scoring 148 runs in the ODI series, including two half-centuries, and 193 runs in the T20s, with three successive fifties. Notably, she scored five consecutive half-centuries, only missing out in the final ODI and Mandhana will look to bring the same form as she leads the team in the absence of regular captain Harmanpreet



Kaur, who has been rested alongside fast bowler Renuka Singh. With Kaur and Renuka missing, the responsibility shifts to the rest of the batters, including Harleen Deol, Pratika Rawal, and Jemimah Rodrigues, to step up. Deol was the top scorer in the ODI series with 160 runs, including a brilliant 115, while Rawal and Rodrigues also had solid

outings, scoring 134 and 112 runs, respectively, with a fifty each in the ODIs. In the bowling department, Renuka's absence will be felt as she was the leading wicket-taker with 10 wickets in the ODI series against the West Indies. The onus will now fall on newcomers Titas Sadhu and Saima Thakor to make their mark. Sadhu, 20, who has three wickets in ODIs and 13 wickets in T20s, will be expected to provide early breakthroughs, having impressed with her pace and swing in domestic and recent international cricket. Saima, 28, will also look to continue her good form after taking seven wickets in eight ODIs so far. Vice-captain and off-spinner Deepti Sharma will be crucial, especially after her career-best bowling performance of 6 for 31 in the third ODI against the West Indies. Priya Mishra and Tanuja Kanwar will play key roles in supporting Deepti.

## Australian Open 2025: Cases involving Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek make doping a top topic

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

It is a topic that shadowed tennis in 2024 and is still a talking point as the 2025 Grand Slam season opens at the Australian Open on Sunday (Saturday EST): doping and the cases involving Jannik Sinner — which actually is still not fully resolved — and Iga Swiatek. Both spent much of last year at No. 1, and Sinner still will hold that spot in the ATP rankings when he steps on court at Melbourne Park to begin the defense of his championship, one of two major trophies he won over the past 12 months. Swiatek, a five-time Slam champ and the woman leading the WTA rankings most of the past three seasons, is currently No. 2 behind Aryna Sabalenka, who will be

chasing her third consecutive title in Australia. "Obviously, there are going to be some negative comments," Swiatek said. "You're not going to avoid that." Most current players prefer to remain silent when asked about the cases. But there are those who have been happy to weigh in, including 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic, raising questions about whether Sinner and Swiatek were treated the same as other players facing similar circumstances and why their situations were kept under wraps for months. "I sit and wonder, Why such a big difference in treatment and judgment?" was two-time major champion Simona Halep's reaction to Swiatek's punishment. "I can't find, and I don't think there can be, a logical answer."

Halep initially was banned for four years after testing positive for the banned drug Roxadustat at the 2022 U.S. Open, then had that penalty reduced to nine months on appeal — although she already had been off the tour longer than that. She was supposed to compete at Melbourne Park for the first time in three years, but withdrew from qualifying because of knee and shoulder pain. No one has been louder about the subject lately than Nick Kyrgios, the 2022 Wimbledon runner-up who missed nearly all of the past two seasons because of injuries. He has been commenting regularly, in real life and online, even taking a jab (that he said was in jest) at Cruz Hewitt after the 16-year-old son of Australian Davis Cup captain Lleyton posted a photo with



Sinner from a practice session. "It's been handled horrifically in our sport. Two world No. 1s, both getting done for doping, is disgusting for our sport," Kyrgios said at the Brisbane International, the first event of his comeback. "It's a horrible look."

Where do things stand with Jannik Sinner's positive drug tests? Sinner was the dominant player in men's tennis last year, and there's little reason to think that won't continue. In 2024, he went 73-6 with eight titles, including at the U.S.

Open, and led Italy to the Davis Cup. He heads into the Australian Open on a 14-match winning streak. Hanging over it all is this: Two positive tests for a trace amount of an anabolic steroid in March were made public in August; the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) determined he shouldn't be suspended because the exposure to Clostebol was considered accidental — the result of a message from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger. The World Anti-Doping Agency was not entirely convinced about the exoneration and thinks a ban of one to two years would be appropriate. Its appeal, lodged in September, is still pending, and a final determination is expected after the Australian

Open ends. "It's in (my) head a little bit," Sinner said, adding that he is confident everything will go his way. What happened with Iga Swiatek's failed doping test? Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in late November after testing positive for a banned heart medication known as TMZ. She failed an out-of-competition test in August, and the ITIA accepted her explanation that it was caused by the contamination of a nonprescription medication, melatonin, that Swiatek was taking for jet lag and sleeping issues. She missed three tournaments — although the real reason wasn't revealed at the time — and finished serving her punishment after the season was done. "This whole process was

pretty abstract sometimes and hard to understand," Swiatek said, surely speaking for many observers. Which is why, perhaps, Dutch captain Paul Haarhuis said what he did after his team lost to Sinner's Italy in the Davis Cup finals. "Jannik, in my personal opinion, is an unbelievably nice guy (and) great player," Haarhuis said, "but we (might) never know what happened." Are there other noteworthy cases in tennis? While Sinner and Swiatek will compete in Melbourne, another player involved in a recent ITIA case won't: Max Purcell, who won men's doubles titles at the U.S. Open in September and Wimbledon in 2022 and was a two-time runner-up at the Australian Open.

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