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INSIDE
MONEY 10
INDIA'S ECONOMY
PROJECTED TO GROW 6.6
PER CENT IN 2025: UN

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INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES DROP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended January 3, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had declined by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion. The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. For the week ended January 3, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 6.441 billion to USD 545.48 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

MARKETS



Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. This comes in the backdrop of

increasing pressure on the rupee. The rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86.00-mark (provisional) for the first time against the US dollar on Friday as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds. Surging crude oil prices overseas and negative sentiment in domestic equity markets also weighed down the Indian currency, forex traders said. Also, dollar strengthened on increased demand amid the anticipation of restrictive trade measures by the new US administration after Donald Trump takes over as president on January 20. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.88, hit the intra-day peak of 85.85 before settling at the lowest-ever level of 86.00 (provisional) against the greenback, 14 paise lower from its previous close.

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SC orders status quo on Sambhal Mosque

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ordering status quo, the Supreme Court on Friday asked the Uttar Pradesh authorities, the Archaeological Survey of India and others not to take steps over a "private well" near the Mughal-era Jama Masjid mosque in Sambhal. Considering a plea of the management committee of Shahi Jama Masjid, Sambhal, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar issued notices to the Centre, the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Sambhal District Magistrate and other private individuals from the Hindu side led by Hari Shankar Jain. "Issue notice returnable on February 21. In the meanwhile, a status report to be filed by the respondents in two weeks. The respondents shall not give effect to any notice in relation to the well," the bench ordered. The mosque committee, in a fresh plea, said the Sambhal district administration, was conducting a purported drive to revive old temples and wells in the city with reports indicating at least 32 old unused temples were revived and 19 wells were identified for public use and prayers. "In the list of wells being sought to be revived by the district administration is also a water well situated in the precincts of the mosque itself," it said. The plea therefore sought a direction to the Sambhal district magistrate to ensure a status quo over the private well located near the mosque entrance besides any future action without the Supreme



Court's permission. While a covered half of the well was said to be inside the mosque, the other half protruded outside on a curved platform. Water from the well, situated at the junction of three narrow lanes leading to the main entrance of the mosque, was being used by the mosque, the plea said. It was argued that the survey led to violence and loss of lives, prompting the urgent intervention of the top court. Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, representing the mosque management committee, referred to the well's historical significance and said, "We have been drawing water from the well since time immemorial." Ahmadi raised concerns over a notice referring to the site as "Hari Mandir" and plans for starting religious activities there. "No such activities will be permitted. Please file a status report," the CJ said. The bench said the status quo concerning the well must be maintained, and no such notices would be given effect to. Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu party, said the well was outside the mosque's purview and used for worship

historically. Ahmadi said the well was partly within and partly outside the mosque premises, citing Google map imagery to buttress his claim. The mosque committee had challenged a November 19, 2024 order by the Sambhal senior division civil judge allowing the appointment of an advocate commissioner to survey the mosque. The mosque committee said the plea for survey was allowed without hearing it on the same day it was filed. The top court, on November 29 last year, ordered a Sambhal trial court to halt proceedings in the case over the mosque and its survey at Chandausi while directing the UP Government to maintain peace and harmony in the violence-hit town. The bench had directed "peace and harmony must be maintained" and took note of the statement of additional solicitor general K M Nataraj, appearing for the state administration. It directed the proposed report of the advocate commissioner following the mosque survey to be kept in a sealed cover, till the appellate court including the Allahabad High Court heard the appeal of the mosque committee.



2024: hottest year, global temp above pre-industrial levels

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2024 was the hottest year on record, and the first with a global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, European climate agency Copernicus said on Friday. Every month from January to June 2024 was the warmest ever recorded for those months. From July to December, except for August, each month was the second warmest on record, behind 2023, it said. According to scientists at the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), 2024 was the hottest year since global temperature tracking began in 1850. The average global temperature was 15.1 degrees Celsius -- 0.72 degrees above the 1991-2020 average and 0.12 degrees higher than that in 2023, the previous record-holder.

Continued on page 8

WEATHER

LUCKNOW
MAX 21.6°C(+1.2)
MIN 5.4°C(-2.2)

Modi talks Godhra, US visa refusal in debutant podcast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his first-ever podcast, opened up about significant moments from his political journey, including his experiences during the 2002 Godhra riots and the United States' decision to deny him a visa in 2005. The podcast, hosted by Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath, was released on Friday. Recalling the events surrounding the 2002 Godhra riots, Modi shared, "On February 24, 2002, I became an MLA for the first time, and on February 27, I

BALLOONS TO BEHOLD



Enthusiasts at the 10th Tamil Nadu International Balloon Festival, in Mamallapuram

PTI

Delhi to begin renovation of T2, to shift operations to T1

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi airport's Terminal 2 (T2) will remain closed for about six months for refurbishment works in the next financial year. Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) has unveiled an ambitious plan to refurbish Terminal 2 or T2 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport which was built by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) four decades ago. During the renovation, T2 will temporarily close for four to six months, with operations being shifted to the newly expanded Terminal 1 to minimise disruption. Sources said the refurbishment work is set to commence in the 2025-26 financial year, with completion targeted by the second quarter. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked the operator of IGI airport to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of Terminal 2 (T2). The financial year starts from



April 1, 2025. According to DIAL, the closure will not significantly impact airport operations as Terminal 1 (T1) will accommodate the additional load of passengers. T2, which was constructed 40 years ago by the AAI, will undergo extensive renovations to improve the passenger experience and increase capacity for future growth. T1 and T2 currently serve domestic flights while Terminal 3 (T3) handles international flights. The decades-old terminal will undergo significant upgrades aimed at elevating the passenger experience and increasing the airport's capacity to meet future growth demands," said DIAL in a Press statement.

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Delhi student held for bomb threats at 23 schools

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With fear looming over the national Capital since May last year due to a spate of bomb threats, the Delhi Police on Friday revealed that they had detained a Class 12 student for allegedly sending bomb threats to more than 23 schools in the city over the past few weeks as he did not want to write his exams. More than 15 educational institutions including Lady Shri Ram College across the national Capital received bomb threats, which later turned out to be hoaxes. Since May last year, more than 100 schools have been receiving bomb threats through mails. Police sources said the south district police apprehended the Class 12 student, a minor, Thursday evening in connection with the threats. According to police sources, the content of the mail received on Wednesday mentioned that since exams are going on in the schools, this will be the best time to strike and create maximum damage.

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AAP promises funds for RWAs to hire guards

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The political discourse in Delhi is currently being dominated by conversations around "freebies" ahead of the Assembly polls overshadowing other major issues including pollution, law and order, crimes against women and infrastructure. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal announced his 10th freebies on Friday, pledging to provide Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) with funds to hire private security guards if the party is voted back into power, as he took digs at the BJP for turning the city into a "crime capital". This was his 10th guarantee of the ongoing freebies being offered by his government. Announcing funds for security guards in RWAs, Kejriwal said if the AAP forms the government, all RWAs will be provided with appropriate funds from the Delhi government to appoint security guards in their areas. "A systematic approach will be developed to ensure fairness and proper implementation," he added. Reacting to the new poll promise by AAP, the BJP slammed Kejriwal and accused him of making



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses a press conference

"false" promises on the RWAs again. Kejriwal's BJP rival from the New Delhi constituency, Parvesh Verma, in a post on X, asked the AAP supremo if he remembered his previous promises to the RWAs in 2018 and 2022. Ahead of the MCD polls in 2022, Kejriwal promised to grant "financial and political powers" to the RWAs with their own "mini councillors". Earlier, before the 2015 Assembly elections, he promised local area development funds after giving legal status to the RWAs by passing a bill in the

assembly. Kejriwal said the private security guard proposal would enhance public security which has been a priority for the ruling party that had earlier installed CCTV cameras and colony gates. "The security guard proposal is based on feedback received from people. It is timely as people are feeling insecure due to a spurt in crime in the city," he said, accusing the BJP's Central government of not doing enough to check crime in the city. "The BJP may not be worried about the residents of Delhi but for us citizens are like family, and we want to give them a sense of security," he said. AAP chief said now the Delhi government will fund RWAs for hiring private security guards and the number of security guards in each colony will be based on the number of families in the RWA. Meanwhile United Residents Joint Action (URJA) president Atul Goyal said, "We appreciate the announcement but some promises were made earlier as well, which makes it difficult to fully trust this one."

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Ayodhya readies for first Pran Pratishtha anniversary

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA

Preparations are in full swing in Ayodhya to celebrate the first anniversary of Ram Lalla's Pran Pratishtha at the grand Ram Mandir. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust, in collaboration with the district administration, is organising a three-day celebration from January 11 to 13, 2025. The festivities will begin with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performing the sacred Abhishek of Ram Lalla on January 11. Ram Lalla will be adorned in a specially crafted Pitambari outfit woven with gold and silver threads, symbolizing divine splendour. This outfit, crafted in Delhi, will arrive in Ayodhya on January 10 and will be used during the Abhishek. Devotees will have the opportunity to witness the sacred darshan.



The highlight of the celebrations will be Ram Lalla's Maha Aarti at 12:20 PM on January 11. Cultural performances, devotional rituals, and Ram Katha discourses will follow. Champat Rai, General Secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust, stated that the event is a special opportunity for those who missed last year's consecration ceremony to participate. "We have made

three days, offering everyone a chance to participate in the celebrations. Why the Anniversary is on January 11: While the original Pran Pratishtha ceremony took place on January 22, 2024, this year's anniversary is being observed on January 11, 2025. The shift aligns with Hindu Vedic traditions, which follow the lunar calendar. According to the traditional calendar, Paush Shukla Dwadashi is the same auspicious day as the original consecration-falls on January 11 this year. This year's celebration is particularly significant, as it coincides with ten auspicious yugas. It is believed that worshipping Lord Rama on this day fulfills devotees' deepest desires. The day offers a rare spiritual opportunity, as devotees can perform puja and seek blessings from Lord Ram Lalla.

Explore Supreme Court of India with guided tours every Saturday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opening its doors for public awareness, the Supreme Court has allowed guided tours for general public on designated days. The drive aimed at augmenting engagement and awareness, allows people to put to rest their curiosities on the court's mystique, and stroll through its majestic corridors every working Saturday — except the second and the fourth and declared holidays. "Opening of the secured apex court premises will provide a great opportunity to the public to gain inside access to the interiors of the building and admire the majestic structure in its full glory," said an official. A circular issued on January 9 by Registrar Mahesh T Patankar (court and building) read, "In pursuance of the directions of the competent authority, the guided tour shall be conducted on every working Saturday, except second and fourth Saturdays and declared holidays in four slots from 10 am to 11.30 am; 11:30 am to 1 pm; 2 pm to 3.30 pm and 3.30 pm to 5 pm." Officials would accost the public during the tour and introduce them to the various sections of historical value. For conducting



the guided tour smoothly, a pre-online booking would be mandatory. "A visitor can arrange pre-planned escorted visits with online booking made in advance," the official said, "and will be accompanied throughout the premises and introduced to parts of historical importance and they will also get a chance to see the courtrooms."

Continued on page 8

LA wildfires: 10 dead, thousands of buildings destroyed

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES

The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area have killed 10 people so far and burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures, officials said Thursday. The fast-moving Kenneth Fire started in the late afternoon in the San Fernando Valley just 3.2 km from a school serving as a shelter for fire evacuees and then moved into neighbouring areas by the evening. Officials expressed encouragement after firefighters aided by calmer winds and help from crews from outside the state saw the first signs of successfully beating back the region's devastating wildfires that have killed 10 people so far.

Detail story on page 9

Man attempts immolation with family in front of Vidhan Bhavan, rescued

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Alleging false case against himself, a man on Friday attempted immolation along with his family members in front of Vidhan Bhavan in the state capital, police said.

attempted self-immolation with his wife Neetu Kumari (27), and their three children—Jiya (6), Rudransh (3), and Jiyaanshi (8 months).

Battling cancer, SP leader shoots self

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A former city president of the Samajwadi Party allegedly shot himself here on Friday, police said. Identified as Mujibur Rahman aka Bablu, he shot himself with his licensed revolver on Friday morning.

legal procedures are underway. In his final message, posted on a family WhatsApp group, Rahman wrote: "Thank you very much for all your love. Remember me in your prayers."

dent allegedly hanged herself to death in her hostel room at a private university in Lucknow on Friday, police said. She has been identified as Akshita Upadhyay (21). She was found hanging from the ceiling fan in her room on the third floor of the girls' hostel, police added.

a written complaint with the police regarding the matter. Following this, the Vibhuti Khand assistant commissioner of police and Chinhat station house officer reached the scene with their team.

Retired army man accused of duping former colleague

Lucknow (PNS): A retired army man has been accused of cheating his friend and former colleague of around Rs 60 lakh under the pretext of selling a house in Vrindavan Colony under PGI police station area, police said here on Friday.

CLASSIFIEDS logo and header for notices.

NOTICE: I have changed my name Chandra Pal Singh to Chandra Pal Singh Kushwaha S/o Dal Ganjan Singh for future purpose.

NOTICE: Due to mistake in birth Certificate of my Son Mohd Yusuf Khan my (mother's) name written as Nazish Khan where as my correct name is Nazish. Please correct accordingly.

NOTICE: I have changed my name from Bal Mukund Agarwal to Bal Mukand Agarwal S/o Ram Prakash Agarwal R/o: Plot No-3 block 14 Yg Tower 14/63, Civil Lines Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE: My Mother's correct name is Saba Begum (as per Aadhar card & Pan Card).

NOTICE: I Army No. 14647626 W Hav. DILEEP KUMAR Unit-836 FD WKSP COY declare that by mistake name of my son BHANU PARTAP SINGH YADAV is registered in my service records which is wrong.

NOTICE: My correct name is Utkarsh pal S/o Shree Ram Chandra pal which is mentioned all educational and all records by mistake L.I.C my name is mentioned in policy no 23230267 as Master pratham pal which is my household name.

Advertisement for 'आवश्यकता है' (Need is) with contact details for legal services.

NOTICE: Lease deed no.890 dated 15/4/1974 of my property House No.MIG 224 N-Block is actually lost. Its use would be illegal.

Advertisement for 'श्री शंकर भगवान इस्टीमेट ऑफ टेकनोलॉजी मऊ-चित्रकूट, उत्तर प्रदेश' (Shri Shankar Bhagwan Estimation Office Tehri Chitrkoot, UP).

NOTICE: I, Kamla Devi Alias Sumitra Devi wife of Number 13670179N Late Ex Havildar Ram Dhiraj Singh presently residing at Village Naisra, Police Station-Nandganj, Teh- Saidpur, Dist-Ghazipur, State-Uttar Pradesh, Pin-233302.

NOTICE: General public is here by informed that original allotment letter possession letter issued by Kanpur Development Authority in favour of Mrs. Manorama Awasthi W/o Mr. Laxmi Shanker Awasthi & freehold deed dated 19.05.1997 executed by Kanpur Development Authority in respect of plot No.27 LIG block 'W' scheme second, situated at Jaha Kadan, Keshav Nagar, Kanpur Nagar, area 167.22 Sq.Mtr. in favour of Mrs. Manorama Awasthi W/o Mr. Laxmi Shanker Awasthi, duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar, Kanpur in book No.I.VI.No. Pages 140 to 165 Vol.5372 at Serial No.114 on 19.05.1997 have been lost.

NOTICE: Our daughter's name Khushi Gurm, as entered in marksheet/certificate of CBSE run secondary school examination 2021, is correct where as the name in her passport is Khushi. Both the names are of same person.

NOTICE: General public is here by informed that original allotment letter possession letter issued by Kanpur Development Authority in favour of Mrs. Manorama Awasthi W/o Mr. Laxmi Shanker Awasthi & freehold deed dated 19.05.1997 executed by Kanpur Development Authority in respect of plot No.27 LIG block 'W' scheme second, situated at Jaha Kadan, Keshav Nagar, Kanpur Nagar, area 167.22 Sq.Mtr. in favour of Mrs. Manorama Awasthi W/o Mr. Laxmi Shanker Awasthi, duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar, Kanpur in book No.I.VI.No. Pages 140 to 165 Vol.5372 at Serial No.114 on 19.05.1997 have been lost.

NOTICE: My correct name is Arnab Gupta S/o Narendra Kumar Gupta which is mentioned all educational and all records by mistake L.I.C my name is mentioned in policy no 2325217347 as Mayank gupta which is my household name.

Schools up to Class VIII closed till January 14

Lucknow (PNS): Due to the ongoing cold wave, District Magistrate Surya Pal Gangawar on Friday directed that all schools up to Class VIII remain closed until January 14.

15-yr-old boy gets stuck in lift, dies

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 15-year-old boy met a tragic end after getting stuck in a lift in Sarojinagar on Friday evening. Upon receiving information about the incident, local police and fire personnel rushed to the spot.

Around 4 pm on Friday, while coming down from the third floor in a lift, Sharad's leg became trapped. The accident left him seriously injured, and he succumbed to injuries while being taken to hospital.

and was using the lift to go from the third floor to the ground floor for work when the accident occurred. The lift reportedly stopped when it reached the second floor.

Khurram Nagar flyover opens for light vehicles

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Khurram Nagar flyover trials began on Friday for light vehicles, including four-wheelers and two-wheelers. A senior PWD official said that the trials were carried out on one lane of the flyover and that its official inauguration was likely to take place shortly.

decongest the currently plying traffic, saving time, fuel, and energy for lakhs of daily commuters. It will also ensure quicker healthcare access, as there are many important hospitals along the project highway's alignment.

that the total length of the flyover is 2.6 km, starting from Sector 19, Indiranagar, and ending at the mini stadium in Vikas Nagar. "It's a four-lane flyover and will provide continuity for all those wishing to go to Ayodhya.

it has V-shaped piers which form arches over which the load will rest. "Normally, all piers of flyovers are vertical, and the load rests on them, unlike this flyover, where the load rests on the arches.

TDS, TCS provisions discussed

Lucknow (PNS): The Income Tax Department conducted four seminars across the state capital on Friday, focusing on Tax Deducted at Source (TDS), Tax Collected at Source (TCS) provisions, and preventing wrongful refund claims.

Woman with low immunity overcomes HMPV infection

Lucknow (PNS): The report of the samples from the suspected case of HMPV on Friday confirmed that the woman was infected with the virus but had recovered from it. KGMU spokesperson Dr Sudhir Singh said that two samples from the woman were received by their microbiology lab for confirmation.

disease," he said. He added that it should be noted that the woman is elderly. "She is on dialysis, and her immunity is also low. Despite the low immunity, the woman has completely recovered from this disease.

Recruitment rally for Agniveers begins

Lucknow (PNS): The recruitment rally for Agniveers, organised by HQ Recruiting Zone (UP & UK) Recruiting Office, Lucknow, began at the AMC Stadium on Friday.

Indian Bank has come up with Mahakumbh Special Edition ATM debit cards. The Special Edition ATM debit card was unveiled on Friday by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Prayagraj. Also present were Indian Bank CGM, Lucknow, Sudhir Kumar Gupta, FGM, Prayagraj, Navin Kumar Shrivastava, ZM, Lucknow, Pranesh Kumar, and ZM, Prayagraj, PN Upadhyay.

Advertisement for HNBUMU (HNBUMU) with contact details and services.

Advertisement for HDFC Bank with details on a POSSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV (RULE 8(1)) regarding a property dispute.

Advertisement for Equinox India Sylvanus Properties Limited with financial results for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2024.



Indian Bank has come up with Mahakumbh Special Edition ATM debit cards. The Special Edition ATM debit card was unveiled on Friday by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Prayagraj.

Rajnath calls for enhanced cohesiveness of global community

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday here called for enhanced cohesiveness of the global community in view of the current security environment which, he said, is in a state of flux with multiple conflicts and challenges. Addressing Ambassadors' Round-Table, organised as a prelude to Aero India 2025, he stressed on the need to overcome the present geopolitical tensions for ensuring mutual prosperity and global peace. This 15th edition of Aero India is scheduled to be held at the Air Force Station, Yelahanka in Bengaluru, Karnataka from February 10 to 14. "It is of paramount importance that the like-minded countries should strive together for collective actions for peace and prosperity. Without these, our future generations will not be able to take advantage of economic growth or technological innovations that we are experiencing in today's

era," the defence minister told the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of various countries attending the event. He pointed out that India is emerging as a leading voice for the Global South, and it advocates for a multi-aligned policy approach, which ensures that diverse views are considered in the collective pursuit of prosperity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has articulated India's commitment to addressing global challenges through five guiding principles: Respect, Dialogue, Cooperation, Peace and Prosperity. In today's geopolitical landscape, fostering unity among like-minded nations is essential for ensuring mutual prosperity and peace, while addressing contemporary challenges. India has always championed shared prosperity and shared responsibility based on the fundamental principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, "One Earth, One Family", which was also the theme for G-20 Summit in 2023," he added.



Rajnath Singh described Aero India, Asia's largest aeroshow, as one such event, where nations come together and form bonds beyond boundaries. Elaborating on the vision behind the biennial event, he stated that it has proven itself to be the meeting ground for the aerospace and defence sectors to showcase their products/technologies. He defined it as a forum to forge strategic partnerships towards increasing opportunities for business, Transfer of Technology, joint development and co-production between various industries. The defence minister emphasised that, today, India possesses one of the largest defence industrial ecosystems in Asia and the government is committed to further enhancing the capabilities. He added that the Indian aerospace and defence sector represents an attractive opportunity for foreign companies seeking to establish new ventures and partnerships. He cited the significant milestone of setting-up of the man-

ufacturing facility of C-295 transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force through collaboration between Tata Advanced Systems Limited and Airbus Defence & Space. Rajnath Singh asserted that India has emerged as an attractive destination for investment, and Aero India 2025 presents an opportunity for friendly nations to jointly explore strengths and capabilities in the defence sector, addressing both strategic needs as well as tactical requirements. He added that the event will facilitate industry captains, technology leaders, intellectuals and entrepreneurs with new avenues for collaboration in defence industrial enterprises. "Aero India 2025 will serve as a vital forum for exploring partnerships that will form the base for future challenges. Together, we can create pathways for growth that are inclusive and sustainable," he said. The defence minister emphasised that air and space power have become pivotal elements in shaping strategies as such assets,

incorporated with Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning systems, provide an unprecedented advantage in battle-field scenarios. He described Aero Space Power as the new frontier of military dominance which acts as strategic deterrence. During the Round-Table, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of various countries were briefed on the major events of Aero India 2025, and extended a personal invite from defence minister for their senior most leadership. Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary (Defence Production) Sanjeev Kumar and other senior officials of the Ministry of Defence as well as the Government of Karnataka attended the Round-Table.

No tree felling in Mumbai's Aarey without our nod: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the tree authority of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation not to allow any further tree felling in Mumbai's Aarey colony without its permission. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Aravind Kumar said the authority could process the applications and then seek orders from the court. The order came after the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) informed the bench there was no pending propos-

al to cut of more trees in the area. The top court posted the hearing on March 5. The apex court had directed the Maharashtra government to inform if there was any proposal to fell more trees in Aarey forest. The court in 2023 permitted some forest-dwelling communities to move the Bombay High Court with their grievances over felling of trees in the forest for the metro rail project. On April 17, 2023, the apex court came down heavily on Mumbai Metro for trying to "overreach" its order permitting the felling of only 84 trees in the



forest for a car shed project and directed it to pay Rs 10 lakh as penalty. The court said it was improper on the part of the MMRCL to move the tree authority for felling of any trees in excess of 84. The top court, however, permitted the company to remove 177 trees from Aarey forest, saying a stay on tree felling would bring the public project to a standstill which was not desirable. The apex court in 2019 took suo motu cognisance of a letter petition addressed to the chief justice of India by law student Rishav Ranjan seeking a stay on the felling of trees in the

colony. On November 29, 2022, the apex court permitted Mumbai Metro to raise its plea to fell 84 trees at Mumbai's Aarey Colony with the authority concerned. The top court had directed MMRCL to strictly abide by its undertaking on no tree felling and warned of strict action in case of violation. The apex court had restrained the authorities from felling any more trees after the solicitor general submitted on behalf of Maharashtra government no more trees would be cut. The felling of trees in the colony was opposed by green activists and Aarey residents.

Project 'Veer Gatha 4.0' as part of R-Day celebrations garners incredible nationwide response

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The fourth edition of Project 'Veer Gatha 4.0', a joint initiative by Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education as part of Republic Day celebrations, has garnered an incredible nationwide response. This year, approximately 1.76 crore students from around 2.31 lakh schools participated in the competition, defence ministry said here on Friday. One hundred (100) winners are selected at the national level. The winners are divided into four categories, with 25 winners from each: Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8), Secondary Stage (Grades 9-10) and Secondary Stage (Grades 11-12). The first 100 winners will witness the traditional parade at Kartavya Path as Special Guests. Launched on September 05, 2024, Project Veer Gatha 4.0 presented a variety of thought-provoking topics for essay and paragraph writing. Students had the opportunity to write about their chosen role models, particularly focusing on Gallantry Award recipients. They were also encouraged to explore the inspiring lives of freedom fighters such as Rani Laxmibai, the 1857 First War of Independence, and the significant role of Tribal Uprisings in India's Freedom Struggle. This diverse array of topics not only enhanced the quality of the entries, but also deepened participants' understanding of India's historical and cultural legacy. The project involved schools conducting activities at the local level, nationwide interaction programmes by Gallantry awardees (both offline and online), and the submission of top entries via MyGov portal. The school-level activities concluded on October 31, 2024. Following evaluations at the State and District levels, nearly 4,029 entries were submitted



for national-level evaluation, where top 100 entries were selected as SUPER-100 winners. These winners will be felicitated jointly by the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education in New Delhi. Each winner will receive a cash prize of Rs 10,000. In addition to the 100 national-level winners, eight winners at the State/UT level (two from each category) and four winners at the district level (one from each category) will be selected and honoured by State/UT/District authorities. Project Veer Gatha was launched in 2021 as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate India's 75th year of Independence. The project aims to raise awareness of Gallantry awardees' acts of bravery and the life stories of these heroes. The initiative helps instill patriotism and civic values in students. The journey of Project Veer Gatha from Edition 1 to Edition 4 has been inspiring, expanding the reach of the competition across the length and breadth of the country. In the first two editions of Project Veer Gatha, 25 winners were selected at the national level, with around eight lakh students participating in the first edition and 19 lakh in the second edition. The third edition marked a significant milestone, with the selection of 100 national winners for the first time and an increased participation of 1.36 crore students. The momentum continued to grow in Veer Gatha 4.0, reinforcing the widespread impact of this initiative.

Shah to chair regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah on Saturday here will chair a regional conference on "Drug Trafficking and National Security." The conference, organized by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), aims to address the growing concern of drug trafficking and its impact on national security, with a special focus on eight states and Union Territories of northern India, home ministry said here on Friday. During the event, Shah will launch the Drug Disposal Fortnight, inaugurate the new office complex of the NCB's Bhopal zonal unit and extension of the MANAS-2 helpline to all 36 states and Union Territories. The conference will focus on the sharing of real-time information from the National Narcotics Helpline 'MANAS' portal with the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of States and Union Territories, evaluating the progress of States in combating drug trafficking, and assessing the effectiveness of the Narcotics Coordination



Mechanism (NCORD). It will also address strengthening and enhancing the functionality of State Forensic Science Laboratories (SFLs), utilizing the NIDAAN database to bolster efforts against drug trafficking, implementing provisions of the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act, establishing special NDPS courts for the speedy trial of drug-related cases, and fostering a Whole-of-Government approach to ensure comprehensive collaboration among all agencies to combat drug trafficking and abuse effectively. During the drug disposal fort-

night starting from January 11-25, a total of 44,792 kilograms of seized narcotics, whose international market value is Rs 2,411 crore, will be disposed of. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has adopted a Zero Tolerance Policy against drug trafficking. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is implementing a three-pronged strategy to achieve a drug-free India by 2047. This includes strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing coordination among narcotics agencies, and launching a massive public awareness campaign.

DG NCC inaugurates 'Idea and Innovation Competition' for cadets

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Director General National Cadet Corps (DG NCC) Lt General Gurbirpal Singh here on Friday inaugurated 'Idea and Innovation Competition', to provide cadets with tools and guidance to develop solutions to real-world challenges. This unique initiative which was taken up for the first time in NCC Republic Day Camp (RDC) provided cadets with the tools and guidance to think critically and develop solutions to real-world challenges, defence ministry said. Before the competition, the NCC organised a series of workshops and contests pan India under the aegis of all 17 NCC State Directorates, with the aim to inspire and meet the aspirations of cadets. The initiative yielded remarkable results, with cadets generating an impressive 256 innovative ideas and solutions. Out of these, 56 top innovations were shortlisted and showcased during the Republic Day Camp 2025. The innovations highlighted



the cadets' ability to think outside the box, demonstrated creativity, teamwork, and a commitment to nation-building. The Idea and Innovation competition resonated deeply with the cadets, emphasised entrepreneurship, problem-solving, and the spirit of innovation in the cadets. These initiatives not only underlined the NCC's dedication to nurture future leaders but also boost the potential of young minds in addressing pressing societal challenges. The aim of the initiative was to align NCC training with contemporary aspects and give exposure & opportunities to cadets towards 'Yuva Setu' and prepare them for 'Viksit Bharat'.

Former UP Police DG appointed president of IPF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Former Uttar Pradesh Police director general O P Singh has been appointed the new president of the Indian Police Foundation (IPF), an independent think tank on policing subjects. A message shared by outgoing President N Ramachandran with other members of the organisation said Singh's skills and "team building" abilities apart from "remarkable contributions and visionary leadership make him the ideal choice to further the vision and mission of the Foundation." According to the message, Singh was "unanimously" elected as the IPF president and CEO during a meeting of the executive council held here on Friday. The 1983-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer retired from service in January 2020. Apart from heading the Uttar Pradesh Police, he served as the director general of two central forces -- the Central Industrial Security Force and the National Disaster Response Force.

India marks significant milestone in journey towards achieving climate goals with launch of Bharat Climate Forum

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India marked a significant milestone in its journey toward achieving climate goals and economic self-reliance with the launch of the Bharat Climate Forum on Friday. A national platform dedicated to unifying stakeholders from policy, industry, finance, and research to accelerate cleantech manufacturing in India, the Bharat Climate Forum aims to drive sustainable economic growth and innovation. Hosted by the Centre for Indigenous Economic Understanding (CIEU) and Dalberg Advisors, the Bharat Climate Forum is supported by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), NITI Aayog, and International Solar Alliance (ISA). Addressing the launch, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Atmanirbhar Bharat embodies India's drive for eco-



nommic sovereignty and technological leadership through innovation and collaboration. "Our 4G-5G telecom stack showcases this spirit which the cleantech sector can imbibe, with public-private partnerships enabling world-class, competitive solutions. I thank the Bharat Climate Forum organizers for highlighting India's commitment to cleantech innovation for a sustain-

able future," he said in a statement. The forum comes at a time when India is pursuing ambitious climate targets, including achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and scaling up non-fossil fuel capacity to 500 GW by 2030. Despite progress in renewables, challenges such as reliance on imports for solar and wind infrastructure persist. Ashwani Mahajan, National

Co-Convenor of Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Member-Secretary of the Bharat Climate Forum, emphasized the need for a comprehensive manufacturing policy to address these challenges. The forum also spotlighted the economic opportunities in cleantech. By 2030, Dalberg estimates suggest that cleantech manufacturing could create a domestic market worth \$120-150 billion annually and generate export opportunities of \$40-45 billion while generating 50 million new jobs by 2070. Jagjeet Singh Sareen, Partner, Global Climate Practice at Dalberg Advisors and Member-Secretary of the Bharat Climate Forum mentioned, achieving the 1.5-degree target requires urgent acceleration in our efforts. The inaugural event witnessed the launch of Bharat Cleantech Manufacturing Platform by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal an initiative to strength-

en India's clean tech value chains—spanning solar, wind, hydrogen, and battery storage. The Forum launch was also addressed by several distinguished attendees including Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa who provided insights into delivering cost-competitive clean tech solutions. Bharat Climate Forum 2025 is an influential platform that brings together key stakeholders from the government, industry, and global community to accelerate India's clean energy transition. CIEU is committed to fostering comprehensive research, facilitating dialogues, and curating innovative ideas that address the needs of diverse communities. Dalberg Advisors is a strategic advisory firm that combines the best private sector strategy skills and rigorous analytical capabilities with deep knowledge and networks across emerging and frontier markets.

New FIR against Karti Chidambaram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

CBI has registered a fresh case against Congress MP Karti Chidambaram, accusing accepting bribes for lifting the ban on liquor manufacturer Diageo and FDI clearance for Sequoia Capital and routing bribe money through Vasani Eye Care and his own firm Advantage Capital. As per the CBI FIR, Karti got around Rs.87 crore on these deals by misusing father and former Finance Minister P Chidambaram's office. Apart from Karti, other accused are Chidambaram family's Chartered Accountant S Bhaskararaman, Vasani Eye Care promoter (late) Dwarakanathan, bribe givers liquor company Diageo Scotland and venture capital firm Sequoia Capital and Karti controlled firms Advantage Strategic Consulting, Vasani Eye Care, which is now defunct. CBI FIR charges Karti and his firm Advantage for accepting



bribe of 15,000 Dollars for lifting ban on liquor company Diageo Scotland which supplies famous brand Johnnie Walker Whiskey. CBI FIR says more than 86 crore was routed by Karti controlled firms Vasani Eye Care and Advantage Strategic Consulting in providing Foreign Direct Investment clearance for Mauritius based venture capital firm Sequoia Capital's proposals from Finance Ministry then headed by P Chidambaram. Detailing the money trail, CBI FIR says these

transactions happened between 2008 to 2010. Karti is currently facing three CBI cases -- Aircel Maxis deal, INX Media bribery and Chinese Visa case. This is his fourth case, facing corruption, misusing his father former Finance Minister P Chidambaram. He is also facing Enforcement Directorate's case in Aircel Maxis and INX Media bribery case. In Aircel Maxis deal and INX Media bribery case, Karti is a Co-Accused with his father P Chidambaram.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Transforming defence

The 'Year of Transformation' can give necessary momentum for defence manufacturing and innovation

India's defence landscape is set to undergo a transformative shift in 2025, as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) embarks on an ambitious overhaul aimed at modernising procurement processes, expanding indigenous manufacturing capabilities and boosting research and development (R&D). The year has been declared as the 'Year of Transformation,' with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other top officials outlining a vision to address long-standing challenges while positioning the country for greater self-reliance and competitiveness in defence. One of the key focus areas for the government is to revamp the Defence Acquisition Procedures (DAP). These procedures, which have been criticised for their complexity and inefficiency, are set to be replaced with a more streamlined, lighter, and faster version. The aim is to cut down delays in procurement timelines and eliminate bureaucratic hurdles that have long impeded defence modernisation. The new framework will not only make the system more efficient but will also create a level playing field for both established players and newcomers in the defence sector.



In addition to reforming procurement, the government has placed a strong emphasis on boosting indigenous manufacturing and R&D. While India is the world's fifth-largest manufacturing economy, its defence manufacturing capacity remains relatively small in comparison to its overall economic standing. To address this gap, the government plans to allocate more resources to defence R&D, with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) targeting an increase in R&D spending from 5 per cent to 15 per cent of the defence budget in the coming years. One area that has garnered particular attention is the development of aero engines. India has faced challenges in developing these critical technologies domestically, and the government has signaled that joint ventures with foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) will be essential for progress.

With significant investments required—potentially as high as Rs 50,000 crore—the government is determined to make the necessary commitments to build the infrastructure and expertise required for successful co-development of aero engines and related technologies. Another significant initiative is the creation of a more competitive defence industry ecosystem. Currently, India's defence sector is largely dominated by Public Sector Undertakings. The government aims to level the playing field by encouraging the participation of startups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises through policy changes. Despite these ambitious plans, India's defence ecosystem still faces several challenges. One of the most significant hurdles is the relatively small manufacturing base in sectors like aerospace, where India's ability to scale production and develop cutting-edge technologies has been limited. Besides, archaic policies, delays in preparing Requests for Proposals and overly complicated procedures have often led to extended timelines. This must change if defence sector is to become competitive and innovative.

PICTALK



Devotees carry 'kalash' during 'Hindu Rashtra Seva Mela' at Goregaon

The trust factor in human interaction



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The temperament and conviction of individuals play a pivotal role in shaping trust, whether in personal relationships or organisational dynamics

There is a general feeling that if something is committed on paper, with other things being equal, it is reliable evidence that it will be carried out. If it is on a legal document, the credibility quotient is still higher, and if there are clauses that recognise the punitive element of violation, the feeling of reliability further goes on. This, like many truths, goes a certain distance.

This cannot be the place to explore the veracity of such belief, but there is an occasion to look at certain other aspects of reliability, especially the temperament of the people involved. Some people take their words seriously, and others casually. This attitude permeates their entire behaviour, and in certain matters, it becomes even more evident that they take their words seriously.

Other types of people are quite figuratively the opposite, and they take their own words so lightly that when they utter them, they are not sure what conviction they carry. Between these two extremes, the larger part of the population rests with varying degrees of reliability and different levels of conviction.

This simple truth makes the entire range of human conviction open to many shades of possibilities and makes dealing with each other either at a direct level or at a group level, an extremely dubious proposition wherein liability is concerned. This even affects official interaction as indeed it does personal interaction. It is therefore necessary in a group culture to inculcate the correct values of interpersonal dynamics.

People cannot be 'taught' to be reliable. This is because the fundamental principles of values, like eternal values, remain the same. Every domain of human life talks about what is right, what is beautiful, and what is essential to keep groups sustainable and harmoniously together. In such circumstances where it is recognised that observing pristine standards



may be difficult, many people practice silence. They simply do not talk about values at all. This may or may not work because silence and lack of communication would allow each one to create his norm and use his interpretation. What matters most then is how the leader of the group behaves as an exemplar and what other members of the group see as the essence of acceptable behaviour.

Positive or negative recognition then follows. For this, the informal and formal leaders of the group must agree on certain examples and set an example collectively. It is difficult, especially when there is no clear reference point and no way of verifying what rules the roost.

If the group has a powerful man, his behaviour is noticed and others try to imitate him. If the powerful man acquires power by formal position, it is one story. If, however, he acquires power through organising cliques and factions and through manipulations, there are always dangers of somebody calling the bluff or indeed power slipping out of his



IF THE POWERFUL MAN ACQUIRES POWER BY FORMAL POSITION, IT IS ONE STORY. IF, HOWEVER, HE ACQUIRES POWER THROUGH ORGANIZING CLIQUES AND FACTIONS AND THROUGH MANIPULATIONS, THERE ARE ALWAYS DANGERS OF SOMEBODY CALLING THE BLUFF

hand. All this is not conducive to organisational stability or, for that matter, even clarity. It makes the job of a new entrant particularly complex. The complexity would be enhanced if the new entrant could not navigate his way intelligently with perspicacity and shrewdness. If the group has a large number of turnovers, then the complexity is further compounded. Under the circumstances, it's perhaps best to recognise that, like all truths, simplicity is the best approach. Being truthful, simple, and straightforward is the foundation of sound behaviour, stable relationships, and the achievement of goals constructively and dependably. Like all foundations of a sound civil society, positive thinking, straightforward action, and dependable follow-up is the way to go forward.

It is the human mind that creates complications. Legality and other elements that try to substitute the basic character of dependability, without the right ambience, will remain halfway houses. It can lead to

quibbling, litigation, and, at times, disappointment. However, stability will remain a matter of character, and that is where civil societies need to pitch. Whether this is in a formal organisation or an informal civil setup, it would hardly make a difference. Truth remains the truth and for the best way, it is important to follow it up relentlessly with simplicity and dignity. Like many tales, this too has a tailpiece.

There is a Sanskrit dictum, 'Satyam bruyat, priyam bruyat naa bruyat satyam apriyam'. A free translation of this shall be "Speak the truth, speak the pleasant; do not speak the truth which is unpleasant".

There can be many views on this, and each will have its assumptions and derivations. If assumptions vary, as do the derivations, conclusions would be also varied. That is the nature of truth: multifaceted, each appearing right in its way. One has to navigate one's way.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TWO TIER SYSTEM IN TEST CRICKET

Madam — There are talks between Australia, England, and India and the International Cricket Council's (ICC) new chair, Jay Shah to split Test (cricket) playing nations into two tiers, with Australia, England and India in one tier and the rest in a different tier. The concept has gained impetus post the BGT series, where the attendance and TV viewership touched new records. If agreed upon by the ICC council, this will come into effect post-2027 after the present commitments are met by these nations. The objective is that these three nations will play against each other twice in three years as against the present four-year schedule. While the idea may have sprung up from the revenue point of view, ICC must focus on its unwritten objective of improving the quality and skill level of the weaker member nations and making all the members play competitive cricket.

The choice of three nations—India, Australia, and England—also in the upper tier, is arbitrary if it is on the basis of the quality of cricket displayed. If it is so, India has not displayed quality cricket, both in the home series against the Kiwis and down under in the BGT series recently. Also, the Windies have stunned the Aussies in Gabba in a pink ball test in 2024. The recent entrants to the test-playing nations, like Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan have also displayed talents and enthusiasm. Hence such an idea of an arbitrary split must be shunned. If the ICC is serious about splitting, it must be based on the performance in a given time period, say between 2025-28, on the number of points scored by each nation on the number of test wins/losses and can consider having two or three divisions amongst the twelve member countries. Having done that on the basis of points scored, one can consider promotion or demotion of the first and last two, respectively, which will also instill a sense of competitiveness and thereby sustain interest in the test cricket.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

A policy shift for Afghanistan



In a major and surprising development, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai on Wednesday. Though its relations with Afghanistan had nosedived after the Taliban seized power in the mountainous, landlocked republic in 2021, New Delhi, in a smart move, kept providing humanitarian and economic assistance to Afghanistan. The Taliban also requested the Indian delegation to reopen its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan. Now, Misri's meeting marks a major shift in New

Delhi's policy towards the Taliban. This meeting has taken place at a time when Afghanistan is witnessing heightened tensions with Pakistan concerning the Durand Line—the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan—as well as regarding the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

By condemning Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan, New Delhi has played a well-calculated diplomatic move. Besides the Pakistan factor, Iran's Chabahar Port is also going to play a major role in India-Taliban relations as Kabul is looking to leverage its ties with India by using the Chabahar Port. Thus, both the Taliban and New Delhi have realised that bilateral ties are mutually beneficial for both countries. By playing a vital role in restoring peace, stability, and development in Afghanistan, New Delhi can secure geopolitical leverage over Pakistan at the crossroads of South and Central Asia.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

HONOURING INDIAN DIASPORA

Madam—The city of Odisha turned out to be the venue for the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas this year. In order to honour the immense contribution of the Indian diaspora, it is particularly required to appreciate the exceptional contribution of Indians overseas. For many decades, millions of Indians have paid visits to foreign countries to grab vibrant opportunities in different spectrums of life. Indians made exceptional contributions to the economic success of the different nations, assisting India to create its own niche soft power on the basis of its people settled overseas. Indians are globally renowned for contributing the world's highest remittance back to India with 129 billion USD in 2024. The spirit of the Indian diaspora is ever vibrant and zealous, and this celebration at Odisha's Bhubaneswar for appreciating Pravasi Bhartiya is a welcoming initiative. Let's take a moment to thank & appreciate the Indian diaspora, who are continuously extending the legacy of India all around the world.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

MAHAKUMBH MELA IN PRAYAGRAJ

Madam — The Great Mahakumbh Mela 2025, set to take place in Prayagraj, which is held only once in a period of 144 years, which is beginning from January 13 to February 26, is much more than a religious gathering—it is a profound celebration of spirituality, culture, and cosmic alignment. This ancient festival, rooted in the Sanatan tradition, is believed to influence not only human affairs but also cosmic and terrestrial energies.

The event is centred on the holy confluence of three rivers—the Ganga, Yamuna and the Saraswati. The Mahakumbh exemplifies India's rich cultural diversity, drawing millions of devotees, ascetics, and pilgrims from all walks of life. Through practices like ritual bathing, chanting, meditation, and spiritual discourses, it becomes a unifying force, blending traditions and beliefs into a harmonious whole.

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Breaking barriers: The rise of women investors in India's equity markets

Among the most notable trends in the equity market is the surge in women investors, whose participation has grown 6.8 times since 2015

The Indian equity market has radically transformed over the past two decades. The advent of smartphones, digital trading platforms, and increased financial literacy has ushered in a new era of investors — young, financially aware, and open to taking calculated risks. Recent data from the National Stock Exchange (NSE) reveals that women now constitute over 22 per cent of equity market investors in India, a 6.8X growth since 2015.

This surge in female participation is particularly noteworthy given the tepid adoption of demat trading in its early days. It could be attributed to women enjoying greater financial independence, a growing interest in equities, and a disciplined approach to sustainable wealth creation. The rise in women's financial awareness has also been a critical driver of this growth. A study by CRISIL and DBS found that 47 per cent of women now make independent financial decisions. This newfound autonomy is reflected in the increasing number of women investing



in mutual funds. According to AMFI data, women's share in industry AUM rose to nearly 21 per cent by the end of December 2023, against 15.2 per cent in March 2017. Importantly, this trend is not limited to major cities; women in smaller towns show equal enthusiasm for capital market investments. However, the same CRISIL and DBS study revealed that women still allocate 51 per cent of their investible assets to fixed deposits and savings bank accounts, 16 per cent to gold, 15 per cent to mutual funds, 10 per cent to real estate, and just 7 per cent of their investible corpus—being the least preferred option. Given the proven potential for substantial market returns, women's risk-averse attitude towards equities is particularly perplexing.

Over the past five years, benchmark indices have delivered over 100 per cent returns. For instance, based on a daily rolling return analysis, the Nifty 50 Total Returns Index has shown positive returns of approximately 93 per cent over three years.

These double-digit returns from long-term equity investments have far outpaced the single-digit interest rates offered by traditional savings accounts and fixed deposits. However, women tend to be cautious when it comes to equities. The potential impact of increased women's participation in equity markets is substantial. A BCG study found that women contribute \$5 trillion annually to the global wealth pool. Encouraging more significant equity investment among women and prudent risk management practices is crucial for building a stronger financial future for individuals and the nation. Regulators are already implementing measures to create a safe and transparent market environment for women investors. For instance, initiatives like the Women's

Investor Awareness Programme actively educate and empower women by simplifying stock market concepts and encouraging them to take control of their financial futures. Simultaneously, the industry complements these efforts by developing accessible and informative content in regional languages and diverse formats, such as podcasts and video tutorials, to make complex financial concepts easier to understand. Women themselves must actively participate in the stock market by engaging in discussions, seeking knowledge, and taking the initiative to invest. Starting with a systematic investment plan is a smart approach to building wealth over time. Additionally, consulting financial experts can help women navigate the market with confidence. It is time for women to seize this opportunity, take control, invest wisely, and contribute to rebuilding a more equitable and financially robust India.

(The writer is Director & Chief Business Officer at m.Stock by Mirae Asset Capital Markets; views are personal)



ARUN CHAUDHARY



FIRST COLUMN

HOMESCHOOLING: AN OPTION WORTH EXPLORING

While it comes with challenges, its benefits make it an increasingly compelling choice



SAKSHI SETHI

Childhood is a short season, and homeschooling gives a child more time to truly enjoy it. In recent years, homeschooling has seen a significant rise in popularity as parents increasingly opt to educate their children at home rather than through traditional schooling systems. This shift reflects a combination of concerns about conventional education and the desire for more tailored learning experiences. One of the primary reasons parents choose homeschooling is the ability to customise education to suit their child's unique needs.

There is no denying that curriculum is a valuable tool but at the same time a terrible master. Traditional classrooms often struggle to accommodate different learning paces and styles, whereas homeschooling allows parents to tailor lessons, fostering deeper understanding and engagement. Many parents cite dissatisfaction with public or private school systems as a motivator for homeschooling. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms, underfunding, and lack of individual attention can negatively impact the quality of education. Additionally, concerns over bullying, peer pressure, and exposure to harmful influences prompt parents to seek alternatives.

Homeschooling allows families to integrate their cultural, ethical, or religious values into the curriculum. Parents can teach their children in alignment with their personal beliefs, creating an educational experience that reflects their family's principles. Unlike traditional schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility in schedules and teaching methods. Families incor-



porate travel, extracurricular activities, or non-traditional subjects into their routine, enhancing the learning experience. This adaptability appeals to families seeking a more balanced lifestyle.

Unlike traditional schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility in schedules and teaching methods. Families can incorporate travel, extracurricular activities, or non-traditional subjects into their routine, enhancing the learning experience. This adaptability appeals to families seeking a more balanced lifestyle. While homeschooling offers many benefits, it is not without its challenges. Parents often need to dedicate significant time and effort to planning and teaching. Additionally, concerns about socialisation can arise, as homeschooled children may have fewer opportunities for peer interaction. However, many families address this by participating in extracurricular activities, and community events. Homeschooling is not a new phenomenon.

In olden times, education often took place at home, with parents or private tutors guiding the learning of their child. The rise of formalised schooling in the 19th and 20th centuries shifted education to institutions, but homeschooling remained a choice for families who sought alternatives. Modern homeschooling driven by educational reformers and parents seeking greater control over their children's education began gaining traction in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it continues to evolve, integrating technology and innovative teaching practices. Technology undoubtedly has played a pivotal role in making homeschooling more accessible and effective. It has also enabled collaboration and connection among homeschooling communities. Online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and educational applications such as Scholastic Kids, Udemy, Duolingo, Funbrain and many more provide parents with resources to create comprehensive curricula. The shift to homeschooling reflects a broader desire among parents to take control of their children's education and provide a more personalised, values-driven learning environment. While homeschooling comes with its challenges, the benefits of flexibility, individualised attention and alignment with family priorities make homeschooling an increasingly appealing choice for families worldwide.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Junta faces collapse amid escalating defeats



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Losses across key regions, coupled with mass defections and severe military setbacks, suggest a crumbling grip of Military on power in Myanmar



By all indications, 2025 is going to be, militarily, a dismal year for Myanmar's ruling junta. It is clearly losing its war against the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and its armed wing, the People's Defence Force (PDF), ethnic armed organisations (EROs), and the Three Brotherhood Alliance (Henceforth the Alliance). Comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), active in the Kokang Special Region of northern Shan State, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in the Shan State and the Arakan Army (AA), based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part, the alliance has been acting in close cooperation with the PDF and other ethnic armies.

Crystal-gazing is a hazardous business. Nevertheless, a fling at it is warranted by the unfolding events in that star-crossed country. A report under the headline, 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG', (datelined January 6, 2025), in the news website The Irrawaddy, cited the NUG as stating that the military regime controlled only 107 of the country's 330 townships. The PDF and EROs fully or partly controlled 144 townships or 44 per cent of the country. The website, which enjoys a high-measure of credibility, carried an article by Maung Kavi (datelined January 8, 2025) under the headline, 'Myanmar Junta Boss warns resistance as Regime Loses Ground Nationwide', saying that the NUG had further claimed that nearly 1,500 of the junta's soldiers and police personnel had defected to the civil disobedience movement and 480 of them had taken up 'revolutionary duties'. The report titled 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG', further states that 315 officers were killed and 127 injured in course of the last year. In the same period, 53 senior officers ranging in rank from colonel to major general, were either killed, injured, or taken prisoner. Among the rank and file, 14,093 soldiers and border guard policemen were killed and 7,363 injured. Anti-regime groups seized 741 junta

positions. They were mostly captured by ethnic armies, but 162 were taken by PDF and People's Defence Teams in Sagaing, Magwe, Mandalay, Bago and Tanintharyi regions.

The military lost in 2024 some 140 battalions and two regional commands - Northern Shan Command in northern Shan State and Western Command in Rakhine-plus one regional operations command, five military operations commands, six operational bases, two airbases, 17 border guard police bases, as well as many infantry and light infantry battalions, and artillery, logistics, signal, and military engineering units.



THE ODDS ARE NOW RAPIDLY STACKING UP AGAINST THE JUNTA. NO DOUBT, THE LATTER HAS TANKS AND OTHER ARMoured VEHICLES, ARTILLERY AND AIR FORCE. TANKS AND ARMoured VEHICLES ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO DEPLOY IN THE AREAS DOMINATED BY THE ETHNIC FORCES.

While one should not take the NUG's claims at face value reports from the ground indicate that the Sit-Tat (as the junta's army is called) has suffered severe body blows during the last year. The Three Brotherhood Alliance has gained significant ground since launching its offensive, code-named Operation 1027, on October 27, 2023. The AA had established control over almost the entire Rakhine State by April, 2024. In a major development, the MNDAA claimed on July 31, 2024, that it had captured Sit-Tat's military base in Lashio, a city in Shan State close to the border with China, and its airport. This was a major loss for the junta.

As Vivek Shankar has pointed out in a piece in The New York Times datelined August 5, 2024, the 'city of Lashio and its airport lie on a crucial trade corridor to Yunnan Province in China, which is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a high-speed rail link and other infrastructure projects on both sides of the border.'

Besides gains in the north, the anti-junta forces had captured four towns in northern Mandalay.

According to a report by Andrew Nagemson published in Al Jazeera dated September 23, 2024, their capture had placed them within striking distance of the city of Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest urban centre, with a population of nearly two million.

On October 8, 2024, the Sit-Tat suffered a serious reverse with the fall of the township of Pinlebu to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an important part of the coalition of forces fighting the junta, and its allies. Located on the border of the Sagaing Region and Kachin State, its capture opened up to the opposition forces the routes leading to the Kawlin township and the surrounding areas.

Besides its geo-strategic significance, the township's fall is important for what it revealed of the Sit-Tat's state. A report by Saw Lin, published in the news website, The Irrawaddy, on October 14, 2024, cites the NUG as claiming that the junta's troops, numbering 800, were defeated despite 670 airstrikes and the dropping of over 5,000 bombs, that around 70 junta soldiers were killed, 275 were missing, 225 were wounded, 48 surrendered and 102 captured during the fighting. Around 400 firearms and other military equipment were seized.

In keeping with the trend, the Junta had ceded three townships and the Western Command headquarters in Rakhine State in December, 2024, as the ethnic Arakan Army gained control over 14 of the 17 townships in the westernmost state. On January 1, 2025, the Sit-Tat retreated from a heavily-fortified police station in Sagaing Region's Budalin Township after a yearlong siege by regional resistance forces, making it easier for the latter to operate in the region.

According to Maung Kavi's report

cited earlier, the junta, which has been losing towns and bases to EROs in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Karen states, has not been able to launch any military operation to retake the northern Shan State, almost the whole of which it had lost in 2024. The Sit-Tat is in a bad way.

Its morale is low. There is internal discord. Several three-stars generals have been removed. Many younger officers are unhappy as they recognise that almost the entire country is against them. According to a piece by Ye Myo Hein (datelined May 4, 2023) featured by the United States Institute of Peace, it was found the Sit-Tat, whose "headcount," showed a "strength of a total 300,000-400,000 before the coup," showed that it currently "had a strength of about 150,000 personnel."

Roughly 70,000 are combat soldiers. At least 21,000 service members have been lost through casualties, desertion and defection since the coup. At this troop level, the Sit-Tat is barely able to sustain itself as a fighting force, much less a government.

The odds are now rapidly stacking up against the Junta. No doubt, the latter has tanks and other armoured vehicles, artillery and air force. Tanks and armoured vehicles are very difficult to deploy in the areas dominated by the ethnic forces. With densely forested mountainous terrains, deep gorges and steep climbs, these are ideal for staging ambushes. Moreover, air-strikes and artillery do not win wars, even when backed by heavily armed and trained infantry. Otherwise, the United States would have swept to a victory in Vietnam.

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

Real-time travel assistance: Transforming the Indian travel experience

From the integration of cutting-edge technology to the emergence of unique destinations, the way we explore has been redefined

The travel industry in India has undergone a significant transformation in the past decade. The advent of technology, the emergence of unique destinations, and travellers' shifting preferences have reshaped the way we experience travel. While convenience and connectivity have expanded exponentially, so have the challenges that come with travelling through this vast and diverse country.

In such a scenario, the idea of real-time travel assistance is much more than a luxury, gradually becoming a necessity. India is a land of incredible diversity, which often presents challenges for travellers, both domestic and international. With 28 states and countless languages, customs, and tradi-

tions, exploring India can be as overwhelming as it is enriching. A misplaced document, a language barrier, or a medical emergency in an unfamiliar city can turn a dream vacation or a crucial business trip into an overwhelming ordeal. This is where the concept of real-time assistance steps in, bridging the gap between exploration and ease.

The Need for Immediate Support: Travelers today demand solutions that are immediate, efficient, and humanised. The expectations from travel experiences are no longer confined to curated itineraries and luxury stays. Safety, comfort, and resolution to unexpected issues are just as critical to creating memorable journeys. Whether it's assis-



HARISH KHATRI

tance in locating a nearby pharmacy late at night, navigating bureaucratic hurdles in a foreign environment, or finding reliable medical aid during emergencies, travellers increasingly rely on services that ensure a smooth journey. Real-time assistance goes beyond static travel guides or pre-recorded helplines. It operates as a different system where timely, empathetic, and

accurate support becomes a part of the travel experience. It is this proactive approach that helps mitigate common traveller challenges and allows for a seamless journey, irrespective of the destination.

Empathy in Travel Assistance: A game-changer at its core, real-time travel assistance is about offering humanised solutions. Travellers often find themselves in vulnerable situations where a touch of empathy can go a long way. Imagine being stuck at a remote train station with no one to guide you to your next stop or dealing with a sudden health scare in a busy urban centre where you don't know the language.

These are moments when an empathetic, knowledgeable professional on the other end



of a call or chat can provide not just solutions, but also reassurance. It is this empathy paired with technology that is revolutionising travel assistance in India. Real-time support services aim to address the emotional and logistical needs of travellers in equal measure.

Utilising Technology to Enable Seamless Experiences: The amalgamation of technology and travel assistance has unlocked possibilities previously deemed unattainable. Advanced algorithms, live

tracking, and geo-location services now enable assistance providers like India Assist to respond with precision and speed. Right from helping a traveller recover a lost wallet, guiding them to the best transport options, or facilitating emergency care, technology serves as the backbone of real-time assistance.

Moreover, AI-powered systems can predict and preempt potential challenges, ensuring that travellers are equipped with solutions even before they face a problem. Combined with human expertise, such systems provide an unprecedented level of service that adapts to the ever-changing needs of travellers.

A Vision for the Future of Indian Travel
As India continues to grow as

a preferred travel destination for global tourists and a thriving market for domestic explorers, the need for reliable, real-time support systems will only increase. From first-time solo travellers to seasoned professionals on the move, everyone stands to benefit from a travel arena where assistance is no longer a reactive measure but an integral part of the journey.

The impact of such assistance goes beyond individual convenience. It enhances the overall travel ecosystem, fostering trust and confidence among travellers. When individuals feel supported, they are more likely to venture into less-explored destinations, bolstering local economies and creating new tourism opportunities. Real-time assistance also

aligns with India's vision of creating a more inclusive and welcoming travel environment. Addressing the unique needs of every traveller, be it accessibility, safety, or cultural understanding — opens the doors to a more diverse and enriching travel experience. As we move forward, the travel industry must imbibe the ethos of real-time assistance, not as an add-on service but as a core pillar of the travel experience. After all, the most unforgettable journeys are not just about the destinations we visit — they are about the challenges we overcome and the moments of human connection that transform challenges into memories.

(The writer is founder and MD of India Assist; views are personal)

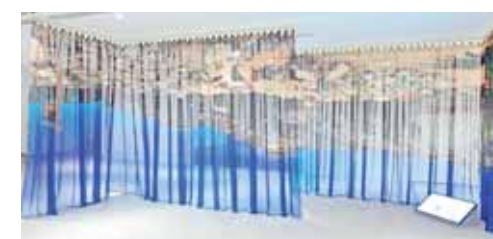


ROOTS AND REFLECTIONS

At KNMA's *The Elemental You*, artists explored Earth's essence through works reflecting nature's intricate narratives and connections, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

"To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wildflower..."

These words by William Blake come alive as you enter *The Elemental You*, an exhibition at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. Curated by Akansha Rastogi, it brings together the works of Simryn Gill, Neha Choksi and Hajra Waheed, each exploring the element of "Earth" with a vision that is both timeless and urgent. The experience engages your senses on multiple levels. Neha Choksi's Porous Earth series draws attention to limestone cast in kiln-glass, revealing stories of geological change and human fragility. Her work highlights the delicate interplay between the permanence of Earth's materials and the fleeting nature of human life. Simryn Gill shifts focus to Port Dickson, an industrial port town in Malaysia. Her long-term photographic documentation captures moments of transformation and decay, inviting viewers to reflect on what persists and what fades with time. There is a quiet, poignant beauty in her images that speaks of history and memory. Hajra Waheed's



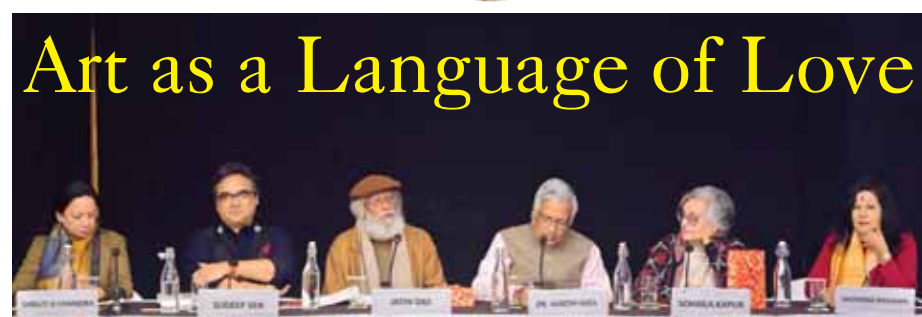
interpretation of the night sky leads you to consider boundaries, both physical and emotional. Her drawings evoke the vastness of Kashmir's starlit skies, working together with personal and collective narratives. It's as though the heavens hold untold stories, offering a sense of both wonder and loss. The exhibition is unhurried, encouraging visitors to take their time with each piece. The pathways, "To Think Like a Mountain," "Survival as Revival," and "Clearing," are designed to deepen understanding of the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world.

Patchineelam and Ranjana Dave connect themes of grounding and immersion, using tools, landscapes, and micro-stories to reveal the subtle interactions between people and their environments. The Artists' Roundtable becomes a dynamic space where materials and ideas evolve, creating a dialogue that is both intimate and thought-provoking. The exhibition does not shy away from hard truths. It juxtaposes beauty with unsettling realities, showing the scars left by mines alongside the resilience of mangroves or the

lifelessness of dead snakes beside the enduring strength of mountains. This contrast challenges visitors to confront the environmental challenges of today while appreciating the artistry that brings these narratives to life. The simplicity of the presentation allows the works to speak for themselves. The museum provides a space for these artists to explore their deep engagement with the natural world, leaving visitors with a sense of introspection and a renewed connection to the Earth. *The Elemental You* offers a thoughtful exploration of how we relate to our environment. It reminds us of the fragility of our planet and the enduring beauty found in its details. As you leave the exhibition, the reflections it inspires remain, offering a quiet yet powerful reminder of our place within the larger story of the Earth.

A collaborative project, *The Working Space*, extends the exploration further. Artists like Vijai M a i a

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



By TEAM VIVA

The 10th edition of *Vividh Mat: Perspectives*, presented by Devyani Jaipuria in collaboration with ASAVARI, focused on the theme *Shringara: Rang Anurag*. This edition explored *Shringara*, a concept that embodies love, beauty and the depth of the human experience. The event began with an engaging discussion led by Padmeshri Shovana Narayan, SNA awardee and Ambassador Dr Suresh Goel, former DG of ICCR. The panel also included Jatin Das, the renowned artist and sculptor, celebrated poet Sudeep Sen and actor-director Sohaila Kapur. Together, they shared their insights into *Shringara*, highlighting it as more than just an aesthetic concept, but an essential part of life. Jatin Das explained that *Shringara* is not only about visual beauty but is also the very pulse of life. He described it as a delicate balance between form and emotion, where art touches the soul. Sudeep Sen further elaborated by describing *Shringara* as "the poetry of the senses," a celebration that speaks directly to the heart, connecting art, love and life. He emphasised how *Shringara* invites us to reflect on the deepest layers of the human soul. Sohaila Kapur added to the discussion by describing *Shringara* as a means of capturing the essence of beauty through performance. She noted that it is the emotional core of art, brought to life through movement, offering an experience that connects the audience directly to the emotions conveyed. The conversation highlighted how *Shringara* is not only a visual or emotional experience but also a spiritual one, bridging cultural and philosophical perspectives. Shovana Narayan, deeply connected to classical Indian dance, shared her personal view of *Shringara*, describing it as a language that speaks directly to the heart. For her, the evening was a celebration of beauty; it was the culmination of



years of dedication, creating a space where everyone could to the rhythm of life. The event concluded with a *Baithaki Bhaav* dance performance by Madhura Phatak. The classical dance embodied *Shringara* beautifully, giving the audience an immersive experience. *Vividh Mat: Perspectives* combined intellectual discussion and artistic expression, highlighting how art connects us to humanity, bridging cultures and emotions.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

LAYERS OF MEANING



Echoes of Elegance presents a unique exploration of India's vibrant art scene through its diverse creators, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

that mirrors human relationships. It's a work that encourages reflection, inviting the viewer to interpret its layers of meaning. Similarly, *Keep ones end up*, another acrylic on canvas, uses bold strokes and vivid hues to explore themes of balance and stability in an ever-changing world. The fluidity of the painting offers a sense of movement, making it feel as if the artwork is alive. *Parody II*, a striking fiberglass piece, challenges the viewer's perception with its playful yet thought-provoking

commentary on modern life. The use of fiberglass in this piece gives it a dynamic quality, blurring the line between reality and illusion. It's a work that not only entertains but also encourages a deeper contemplation of society and its contradictions. Alongside these, the exhibition showcases a range of works by renowned artists such as Bose Krishnamachari, Dileep Sharma, Farhad Hussain, George Martin, Jyothiraj Moyampilly and Mukesh

Sharma. Each of their pieces brings forth unique perspectives on culture, identity and contemporary issues. Whether it's through abstract expressionism, surreal imagery or figurative forms, the diversity of styles on display ensures that there is something for everyone to connect with. The exhibition invites viewers to move beyond admiring art from a distance, encouraging them to understand the creative process and engage with the ideas behind each piece. *Echoes of Elegance* is a journey into the heart of Indian contemporary art. It's an opportunity to witness the talent, vision and passion of some of the country's finest artists, offering a deeper understanding of the dynamic and ever-evolving art scene.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



