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INSIDE

**WORLD 9**  
MALALA SLAMS AFGHAN TALIBAN FOR 'GENDER APARTHEID' AGAINST WOMEN

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## Congress promises ₹8,500 to educated unemployed youth



Congress leader Sachin Pilot with Delhi Congress President Devendra Yadav, Delhi In-charge Qazi Nizamuddin and others during the launch of 'Yuva Udaan Yojana', at DPCC office in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In the run to lure the voters by offering 'monetary' benefits, Congress on Sunday unveiled the 'Yuva Udaan Yojana,' a scheme promising a highest ever monthly allowance of Rs 8,500 to educated but unemployed youth for one year if they come to power in the national Capital. The move, designed to address the growing issue of unemployment among educated youth, comes as a big announcement with Congress likely being the first political party in the country to offer such substantial financial support as part of their employment strategy. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi is also making his first appearance for campaigning for the party at Seelampur on Monday, ending speculations that there is a rift between the national and state leadership. He will address a 'Jai Bhim-Jai Samvidhan' public meeting

in East Delhi. Congress is vying to come back to power since 2013 when AAP rose to power. This is the third scheme launched by the party ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls. AICC general secretary and former Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan Sachin Pilot, at a press conference, said, "It is the government's responsibility to support our young and educated friends living in Delhi. If the youth gets discouraged, then it is not a good thing for the country. Therefore, we have decided that after the formation of Congress government in Delhi, educated and unemployed youth will be given one year apprenticeship and financial assistance of Rs 8,500." "We will provide financial assistance to youths who can show their skills in a company, factory or organisation. They will get money through these companies. This is not a scheme under which one will get money while sitting at home," Pilot said.

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## BJP to use flash mobs, street plays to target AAP

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Street plays, flash mob, musical bands, magic shows and puppet shows are likely to be witnessed by the people of Delhi in the coming days as the BJP is all set to attack AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on his alleged involvement in different scams, 'Sheeshmahal' and non-deliverance of poll promises using the cultural programmes it will organise in each of the 70 districts ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections. Heightening the election fervour ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, which are slated to be held on February 5, the Delhi BJP will select on Sunday the final teams who will perform and take the messaging of the party forward to the larger audience. Around 350 teams have



auditioned for street plays, out of which the cultural committee will decide on the 140 teams, which will attack Kejriwal and make an appeal to vote for the BJP candidate of the district. The plays, to be enacted by a team of five, which includes one girl, narrates the ordeal of how her husband fights with her after getting drunk in a bid to attack the AAP convener, on the alleged excise policy linked money laundering scam.

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## Jaishankar to attend Trump's inauguration

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States on January 20. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Sunday that Jaishankar will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming Trump administration during his visit to the US. Trump had defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the presidential election held in November. Last month, Jaishankar said Trump has had a positive political view of India and it is in a much more advantageous position than many other countries to build "deeper" relations with his administration and take the bilateral ties forward. "On the invitation of the Trump-Vance Inaugural Committee, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent the Government of India at the swearing-in ceremony of President-Elect Donald J Trump as the 47th President of the United States of America," it said. JD Vance will be the new US Vice President.

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## Dhaka opposes India's border fencing

PTI ■ DHAKA

Foreign Secretary Md. Jashim Uddin on Sunday expressed Bangladesh's "deep concern" over the recent border tensions during a meeting with Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma at the Foreign Ministry here. The state-run BSS news agency earlier reported that Verma was "summoned" by the foreign ministry to discuss escalating tensions along the border. However, a press statement issued by the foreign ministry did not use that term. "Foreign Secretary Ambassador Md. Jashim Uddin today expressed deep concern of Government of Bangladesh to the High Commissioner of India Pranay Verma at his office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the recent activities of the Border Security Force (BSF) of India along the Bangladesh-India Border," the foreign ministry said in the statement. Verma entered the foreign ministry around 3:00 pm (local time). His meeting with the foreign secretary lasted about 45 minutes, BSS reported. "I just met Foreign Secretary to discuss India's commitment to ensuring a crime-free border, effectively addressing challenges of smuggling, movement of criminals and trafficking," Verma told the media after emerging from the meeting.



"We have an understanding with regard to fencing the border for security, BSF and BGB (Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh) have been in communication in this regard. We expect that understandings will be implemented and there will be cooperative approach to combatting crime," he added. The development came hours after Dhaka alleged that India was trying to construct fences at five locations along the Indo-Bangla border, violating a bilateral agreement. The foreign secretary "stressed that such activities particularly the unauthorised attempt to construct barbed wire fencing and the related operational actions by BSF, have caused tensions and disturbances along the border," the statement said.

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## HERE COME THE KITES



Enthusiasts fly kites during the International Kite Festival, in Ahmedabad. PTI

## Foreign Investors sell ₹22,194 Cr in Indian stocks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have withdrawn Rs 22,194 crore from Indian equities this month, driven by expectations of a weak earnings season, a steady rise in the US dollar, and concerns over tariff war during Donald Trump's presidency. This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the month of December, data with the depositories showed. Foreign investors have scaled back their investments in Indian equities significantly amid global and domestic headwinds. "This exodus of foreign money from the Indian markets could be attributed to multitude of factors, such as expectation of yet another weak earning season, concerns over the tariff war under Trump's presidency, slowdown in GDP growth, still high inflation numbers and uncertainty over the commencement of the interest



## SKM to hold tractor marches on Republic Day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Sunday called for tractor marches across the country on January 26 and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi hold discussions with farmers over their pending demands. The SKM's call comes amid growing concerns over the health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast for 48 days. Dallewal, the convener of SKM (Non-Political), has been on the indefinite hunger strike at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 last year over farmers' various demands including a legal guarantee to Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. In a statement issued here, the SKM also announced that a meeting with SKM (Non-

political) and KMM will be held on Monday for a joint struggle over demands, including MSP and the scrapping of the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing (NPFAM). "SKM called upon farmers to conduct Tractor/Vehicle/Motorcycle Parades on 26th January 2025, the 76th Republic Day, at the district/sub-division level across the country," it said in a statement. "The farmers will parade demanding that the Prime Minister immediately convene discussions with all the Kisan organisations on the struggle and save the life of Jagjit Singh Dallewal, immediately withdraw the anti-farmer, anti-federal NPFAM, and enact a law for MSP at C2+50 per cent with legally guaranteed procurement," SKM added.

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## BCCI names new secretary and treasurer

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Devajit Saikia and Prabhat Singh Bhatia were on Sunday elected secretary and treasurer, respectively, unopposed at the BCCI Special General Meeting here. They both were elected unopposed after being the only ones to file nomination for the posts vacated by Jay Shah and Ashish Shelar. Shah had to leave the secretary's post after becoming the ICC chairman last month while Shelar resigned after taking oath as a cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government. Saikia hails from Assam and Bhatia from Chhattisgarh. Saikia was performing the additional duties of secretary after Shah took over as ICC chairman on December 1. He was the joint secretary and now that post lies vacant. "The Two (02) Elective Posts of the Office Bearers - Secretary and Treasurer were Uncontested, and it was not necessary to conduct a Poll in respect of these Two (02) Posts," stated electoral officer A K Joti in his declaration of results. Shah, who was felicitated by the BCCI on Saturday night, was also feted at the SGM.

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## Maha Kumbh set for auspicious start today

PTI ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Maha Kumbh 2025 — a 45-day event billed as the biggest gathering of humans in one place — is all set to begin Monday with the first major bathing ritual or 'Shahi Snan' on the auspicious occasion of 'Paush Purnima' at the Sangam, the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and the mystical Saraswati rivers here. The present edition of the Kumbh is being held after 12 years, though seers claim the celestial permutations and combinations for the event are taking place after 144 years, making the occasion even more auspicious. Perhaps that's why the Uttar Pradesh government is confident of 35 crore devotees visiting Prayagraj this time. Already the numbers are telling, with a record 25 lakh people taking the holy dip on Saturday, two days ahead of the formal start of the event. "It will be a grand Maha Kumbh this time. Along with divinity and spirituality, it would also showcase modernity as this time it is going to be a 'Digi-Kumbh' of sorts with Artificial Intelligence (AI) being tapped in a big way," officials said. On the ground, Prayagraj is all decked up for the grand occasion, ready to welcome saints, seers, pilgrims, and masses from across the globe, many of whom have already arrived —



all driven by the common goal of getting soaked in the spiritual fervour. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said during his one-of-the-many visits to Prayagraj that the Maha Kumbh, to be held from January 13 to February 26, will elevate India's ancient cultural and religious traditions to global prominence. Calling the event a testament to India's rich spiritual and cultural legacy, Adityanath said, "Maha Kumbh offers people from across the globe a chance to reconnect with their ancient traditions and cultural roots. The latest edition of the Maha Kumbh will be a grand, divine, and digitally advanced event." "Spanning 10,000 acres, the event will set an exemplary standard for cleanliness, security, and modernity. To enhance the convenience of devotees, a

digital tourist map will facilitate monitoring the cleanliness of toilets, while an AI-powered security system integrated with smartphones will ensure safety," the chief minister said. He also said the Maha Kumbh is not merely a religious event, but a symbol of social and spiritual unity. The event will transform (Mahakumbh Nagar) into the world's largest temporary city, accommodating 50 lakh to 1 crore devotees at any given time, Adityanath said. According to Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, more than 55 police stations have been set up along with the deployment of 45,000 police personnel for the fair. Projects have also been sanctioned to monitor social media continuously to guard against any mischief, he said.

Thirteen Akharas of seers from different sects are participating in this Maha Kumbh, drawing the attention of one and all, including those wanting to learn about the timeless Indian spiritual beliefs. The walls of different offices in Prayagraj have been adorned with drawings depicting different aspects of Hinduism, gods and goddesses, and prominent events mentioned in the religious texts. The crossroads of the city have also been given a major facelift, all decked up with various religious objects such as the 'kalash' (pitcher), conch shell, and various positions of the 'Surya Namaskaar' yogic practice. Barricades have been put up at various crossroads and tri-sections for better crowd management. As many as 30 pontoon bridges, both in the Sangam area and Phaphamau, have also been readied to facilitate the movement of people from one end of the confluence to the other. Huge gates have also been installed at some of the entry points to welcome the devotees into the holy city. This time the Maha Kumbh Mela assumes special significance as it is the first Kumbh being held after the 'Pran Pratistha' of Lord Ram in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024. Currently, the first anniversary celebrations of the consecration ceremony are underway in Ayodhya.

## Kolkata, Bengaluru, Pune slowest in traffic globally

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Three of the world's 10 slowest cities in terms of traffic speeds are in India. The 2024 TomTom Traffic Index has put Kolkata, Bengaluru and Pune among the top five slowest cities in the world. After Barranquilla in Colombia, Kolkata was the second most congested city in the world in 2024, and the most congested in Asia, followed by Garden City Bengaluru slipped to the second spot, Pune rounded up the top three. Last year, Bengaluru was India's most congested city. Surprisingly Delhi was ranked much lower this time. It ranked 122 in the list. Last year, Delhi was ranked 44th in the world. According to the latest survey by the Netherlands-based location

technology firm TomTom on traffic and congestion on roads, drivers in the city spent an average of 34 minutes and 33 seconds to travel a distance of 10 km. The percentage of congestion is 32. Kolkata was followed closely by Bengaluru, where drivers spent 34 minutes and 10 seconds to cover 10 km. The level of congestion is 38 percent here. Pune finished third with a travel time of 33 minutes and 22 seconds for the same distance, leaving India with three cities in the global top five. The level of congestion here is 32. The report says drivers wasted 117 hours in a year in traffic in Kolkata, 110 hours in Bengaluru and 108 hours in Pune due to traffic congestion. The TomTom, annually evaluates



traffic conditions in major cities worldwide, and this year's report has placed Kolkata, Bengaluru and Pune among the worst for traffic flow. The differences in travel times (or average speeds) across cities

stem from a combination of static and dynamic factors that significantly influence traffic flow and overall driving conditions. Surprisingly, New Delhi ranked much lower, with an average travel

time of 23 minutes for 10 km. Delhi was ranked as the 44th most congested city centre among 387 around the world in 2023 survey. Till March 31, 2023, Delhi had 79.5 lakh vehicles, of which 20.7 lakh were private cars. As per Delhi Statistical Handbook 2023, the total number of vehicles registered in the capital stood at 1.2 crore, of which 33.8 lakh were private cars. Hyderabad (31.5 minutes) was the other Indian city in the top 20 globally, taking the 18th spot. In Asia, Chennai was ranked 31 spot with an average travel time of 301 minutes for 10 km while Mumbai retained 39 spot with an average travel time of 28 minutes for 10 km. Ahmedabad was ranked 43 with an average time travel of 29 minutes for the same. Ernakulam is also in the list at 50 spot with an

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# Yogi: Vivekananda re-established Sanatan culture on global stage

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/GORAKHPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, paid tributes to Swami Vivekananda on his birth anniversary, saying he showed the world that the Sanatan Vedic culture and Hinduism was the true guide of humanity.

He also unveiled Swami Vivekananda's statue at Saraswati Shishu Mandir Senior Secondary School in Gorakhpur and highlighted how the young monk awakened national consciousness through his bold thoughts and actions.

"Swami Vivekananda was a great son of India who played a key role in bringing the country's ancient spiritual culture to the global stage. Through his speech at the Chicago Summit in 1893, he introduced the world to India's significance and its rich spiritual and cultural heritage," he said, speaking at an event organised on National Youth Day organised on Swami Vivekananda Jayanti in the state. "Swami Vivekananda often used to say, 'the greater the challenge, the more glorious the victory'." This serves as a source of inspiration for the youth, who are forging ahead by embracing this motivational message," he added.

"Say with pride, we are Hindus. Many salutes to the great young monk, thinker, source of inspiration for the youth Swami Vivekanandaji, who reestablished the Sanatan culture on the global stage, on



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath pays tribute to Swami Vivekananda on his birth anniversary, in Lucknow

his birth anniversary. Heartiest congratulations to everyone on National Youth Day!" Chief Minister Yogi said in a post on X. "He (Swami Vivekananda) showed the world that Hinduism is the true guide of humanity," the chief minister added in the post. He called upon the youth to imbibe Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and resolve to work for nation-building. The chief minister acknowledged the achievements of Uttar Pradesh's youth, stating that 63 participants from the state took part in the National Festival, with three of them winning gold medals, bringing

pride to the state.

He noted that while earlier there was an identity crisis for the youth of Uttar Pradesh, today they are proving their talent on national and global platforms. During the event, the chief minister presented the state-level Swami Vivekananda Youth Awards to winners. The event also celebrated young achievers, with the Swami Vivekananda Youth Award being presented to Arshpreet Singh (Jhansi), Amal (Baghpat), Arpita Singh (Gorakhpur), Ajit Kumar Soni (Chandauli), Sundaram Tiwari (Pratapgarh), Satyadev Arya (Bareilly), Siddharth Rai

(Ghazipur), Akshay Shukla (Unnao), and Aryan Gaur (Bulandshahr), who received certificates and checks in recognition of their achievements. Additionally, members of Yuva Mangal Dal, including Praveen Kumar Gupta and Anshu Gupta from Ambedkar Nagar, Abhishek Kumar Yadav from Siddharthnagar, and Piyush Chaubey and Shani from Varanasi, were honoured with certificates and cheques. Swami Vivekananda was born on this day in 1863 in an elite Bengali family of Kolkata. The day is celebrated as the National Youth Day. Swami Vivekananda died on 4 July 1902 at the age of just 39.

## National Youth Day celebrated

Lucknow (PNS): National Youth Day was celebrated across the city on Sunday, commemorating the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

At Raj Bhavan, Special Secretary Shriprakash Gupta, along with other officers and staff, paid homage to Swami Vivekananda's statue. Speakers highlighted his ideals, describing them as a constant source of inspiration for youth, guiding society with strong moral values and a sense of dedication towards nation-building. The University of Lucknow's cultural board, Sanskriti, also hosted a celebration on the occasion. The event began with Pro Vice-Chancellor Prof Manuka Khanna garlanding Swami Vivekananda's statue and sharing her thoughts on his philosophy.

Director of Sanskriti, Prof Anchal Srivastava, emphasised the importance of National Youth Day and how Vivekananda's teachings continue to inspire young people today. Despite the cold and rainy weather, a large number of teachers, staff, and students participated.

To further engage students, competitions in debates, extempore speeches, and essay writing were organised, though they will be held on January 15, 2025, due to ongoing examinations. These events are designed to encourage students to explore Swami Vivekananda's vision in greater depth. At Shakuntala Mishra National Rehabilitation University, the National Youth Festival was inaugurated at the Swami Vivekananda Central Library by Vice-Chancellor Sanjay Singh.

# Auto driver mistakenly killed in love affair revenge plot

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An auto driver fell victim to a case of mistaken identity when contract killers shot him dead instead of their intended target, the father of a young woman. The police solved the "blind murder" case after 13 days, revealing that the motive behind the crime stemmed from a love affair. On December 30, 2024, Mohammed Rizwan, a 35-year-old auto driver and resident of Bhikampur, Mahanagar, was shot dead in Madheganj, Lucknow.

Rizwan, who was known to have no enemies or disputes, was killed while transporting a passenger in his auto. Investigations by the police initially treated the case as an accidental firing by miscreants. However, the truth emerged during the inquiry. The police disclosed that Aftab Ahmed, an advocate, was the

mastermind behind the crime. Aftab, who was romantically involved with a former junior colleague, became distraught when she got married and moved to Delhi.

In a misguided attempt to rekindle the relationship, Aftab conspired to murder her father, who lived alone in Makkaganj. Aftab believed that eliminating the father would prompt the woman to return to Lucknow, giving him an opportunity to revive their love affair.

According to the police, Aftab recruited Mohammed Yasin, luring him with a promise of Rs 2 lakh and weapons. Yasin, in turn, brought in an accomplice, Krishnakant alias Sajjan. The duo conducted a reconnaissance of the target's house on December 29. However, the next day, they mistook Mohammed Rizwan for the woman's father, Irfan Ali, and shot him dead in Madheganj.

After the murder, Yasin and

Sajjan demanded payment from Aftab, who refused, claiming the intended target was still alive. This led to a dispute between Aftab and the hired killers. The police, using surveillance and by scanning over 200 CCTV cameras, tracked down the suspects. On Sunday, they arrested Aftab Ahmed (37) of Lalkothi Complex, Teji Kheda Para; Mohammed Yasin (35) of Lalkua Bhandi Mandi, Mazar Wali Gali, Hussainganj; and Krishnakant alias Sajjan (36) of Bhavanigar Shivgarh, Rae Bareilly.

In a separate incident on Sunday morning, a young man was found dead on a railway track near City railway station. The unidentified man, approximately 35 years old and wearing a blue jacket, was apparently hit by a train. Police have sent the body for a postmortem and are working to identify him based on photographs and other evidence.

## Two involved in drug, robbery case arrested in police encounter

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two accused involved in a drug and robbery case in Chinhat were arrested after they were injured in an encounter with police late on Saturday night in Para area here, officials said.

One of their accomplices managed to escape, taking advantage of the darkness. The encounter took place on the Agra Expressway, they added. The crime branch of Lucknow police stated that the accused were identified as Ajay and Kamlesh, and they were sent to the community health centre. Both are residents of Azamgarh.

To recall, a college principal, KK Singh, a resident of the Para police station area, was drugged and robbed a few days ago while on his way to his workplace in Gonda district. Singh is the principal of Nawabganj Gandhi Inter College in Gonda.

According to the Para police, the crime branch team received a tip-off from an informer during a check at the canal intersection. It was reported that a gang of notorious criminals was travelling from Mohan Road, and a

police check had been ordered at Mauda turn, near the zero point of the expressway.

During this, three suspects were seen in a car (Swift Desire). When they were stopped, the accused allegedly opened fire on the police.

Ajay and Kamlesh were injured in the retaliatory firing. DCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava said the accused had looted KK Singh in Kakori. After firing on the police, two pistols and cartridges were recovered. The police added that one pistol of 315 bore and live cartridges were recovered from the possession of the accused. Both had also been allegedly involved in the kidnapping and robbery incident in Nawabganj, Gonda, on January 7. The crime branch had also recovered the car from the accused.

ACP, Kakori, explained that the incident involved a teacher Krishna Kumar Singh, a resident of Paschim Vihar Colony, who was on his way to Gonda. The accused offered him a lift and made him sit in the car at the Polytechnic crossing. On the way, they gave him tea laced with a sedative and then robbed him of his mobile phone and purse.

## Nursing student alleges rape, threats by friend

Lucknow (PNS): A nursing student was allegedly raped by her friend after he lured her into meeting him in Chinhat, police said here on Sunday.

As per reports, following the assault, the accused recorded an obscene video of her and began threatening to make it viral. When the victim warned him that she would file a police complaint, he resorted to further intimidation by writing a suicide note mentioning her name.

The victim, fearing legal trouble and public humiliation, refrained from reporting the incident and started distancing herself from the accused. Despite this, the accused sent the obscene video to her parents, prompting the family to file an FIR at the Chinhat police station.

The accused, identified as Rahul, is also a nursing student and hails from Bahraich. The victim, a resident of Kushinagar, is pursuing the same course while staying at her uncle's house in Chinhat. The two became friends during their course.

According to the victim, Rahul gained her trust through friendly conversations and eventually convinced her to visit his room, where the incident occurred. The victim told police that he sent videos of the assault to her father's mobile phone.

## Government increases PRD personnel's honorarium

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, announced an increase in the daily honorarium for more than 35,000 personnel of the Provincial Rakshak Constabulary (PRD).

The honorarium has been raised to Rs 500 per day, reflecting the government's commitment to recognising their service and dedication. Speaking during an event on National Youth Day organised on Swami Vivekananda Jayanti here, the chief minister highlighted the role of the PRD personnel since its formation in 1948, and emphasised the importance of training PRD personnel to enhance their contribution during disasters.

He personally handed over appointment letters to dependents of deceased PRD personnel, including Mohammad Amir and Kamla Devi from Basti, Madhav Awasthi from Kanpur Nagar, Bhupendra from Amroha, and Chandrashekhar from Fatehpur.

He also launched the artificial intelligence-based integrated portal Yuva Saathi, designed to utilise AI to further enhance opportunities for the youth. The chief minister warned against the dangers of substance abuse, emphasising that addiction can destroy a young person's future. He urged the youth to take a stand against drugs, calling for active participation from Yuva Mangal Dal and Mahila Mangal Dal.

## TB campaign identifies 9,340 cases in first month

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The 100-day intensive tuberculosis screening campaign launched on December 7 in 15 districts of Uttar Pradesh has identified 9,340 TB-infected individuals within the first month and their treatment has already begun. State Tuberculosis Officer Dr Shailendra Bhatnagar informed that approximately 35 lakh people in these districts underwent screening based on potential TB symptoms. The screening confirmed TB infections in 9,340 individuals. Among the districts, Sitapur reported the highest number of cases with 1,175 patients,

while Amethi recorded the lowest with 258 cases. Other districts with significant numbers include Siddharthnagar (900), Rampur (858), Barabanki (800), and Rae Bareilly (711).

Dr Bhatnagar shared that 71,000 Nikshay Shivirs were organised across 15 districts to screen and raise awareness about TB. Of these, 3,723 camps were conducted using 52 Nikshay vans, with an average of 2,062 camps held daily. Additionally, 29,290 Nikshay Mitras have adopted 50,705 TB patients, and 2,201 nutrition kits have been distributed to support them. Dr Bhatnagar further added that following the Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath's directive, the TB campaign has now been launched in all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh. Alongside screening and treatment, the campaign emphasises widespread public awareness, with non-governmental organisations actively supporting the efforts.

He emphasised that the chief minister's visionary approach is making significant strides toward eradicating TB from the state. High-risk groups identified included people above 60 years of age, individuals with diabetes or HIV, malnourished individuals with a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and patients who smoke or consume intoxicants.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

NOTICE

I have changed my name from RAVENDRA KUMAR SINGH to RAVENDRA SINGH for all future purposes. Ravendra Singh S/o Sri Vindhyachal Singh R/o 27 A, Triveni Nagar, Meerpur Cantt Kanpur Nagar-208004

### आवश्यकता है

**आवश्यकता है**  
मदरसा हबीबिया लालगोपागंज प्रयागराज (उच्च आलिया) में सञ्चालित फोकनिया का एक पद रिक्त है। सञ्चालित फोकनिया हेतु शैक्षिक योग्यता स्नातक स्तर पर 50 प्रतिशत अंकों सहित तथा आलिया अथवा उर्दू सहित इण्टर का प्रमाण पत्र आवश्यक है। वेतनमान 44900-142400 लेवल-07 एवं अन्य भत्ते न्यूनतम आयु 20 वर्ष। इच्छुक अभ्यर्थी विज्ञापन की तिथि से 21 दिन के अन्दर अपना आवेदन पत्र समस्त शैक्षिक योग्यताओं के साथ प्रबन्धक के पदनाम से मदरसा उपरोक्त पर भेजें।

**प्रबन्धक**  
मदरसा हबीबिया लालगोपागंज प्रयागराज

### आवश्यकता है

**आवश्यकता है**  
यशराल इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ एजुकेशन, बाघामऊ, लखनऊ सन्त-लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय, लखनऊ बी०के०एम-सहायक आचार्य पद-04 योग्यता- एम०के०एम 55% व नेट/पी०एच०डी वेतनमान सेवा एवं शर्त- संकानन निकाय के मानकानुसार।  
नोट- इच्छुक अभ्यर्थी आवेदन पत्र के साथ 4 फोटो, आधार कार्ड, पैन कार्ड तथा शैक्षणिक योग्यता से सम्बन्धित समस्त सलनको सहित, विज्ञापन की तिथि से 15 दिनों के अन्दर कार्यालय में जमा करें। ई-मेल या पंजीकृत डाक से भेजें।  
ई-मेल- yashrajie@gmail.com पता-बाघामऊ, गौमीलीनगर, विस्तार-6, लखनऊ, उ०प्र०-226010 सचिव, मो०-9919931333, 8303700429

## Tajik Embassy hosts LU delegation

Lucknow (PNS): Habib Mirzodoza, the Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of Tajikistan, welcomed the Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University, Prof Alok Kumar Rai, and his delegation at the Tajik Embassy in New Delhi. This was followed by a meeting during which they deliberated on steps to strengthen educational ties between India and Tajikistan, particularly in the realm of education.

Rai briefed the charge d'affaires about the upcoming visit of a delegation from Lucknow University to Tajikistan. The delegation aims to explore opportunities for academic collaboration, cultural exchange, and building connections between students and academia in both countries' educational ecosystems. The discussion also delved into the rich cultural heritage and cuisine of both nations. Rai highlighted the similarities between Indian and Tajik cultures, emphasising the importance of cultural exchange programmes in fostering greater understanding and cooperation. The meeting served as a precursor to the LU delegation's visit to Tajikistan, which is expected to take place on Monday. The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan will welcome the delegation in Dushanbe and will coordinate the visit of the LU delegation to Tajikistan, the charge d'affaires said.

"It was quite a successful and productive



meeting. Our deliberations on academic and cultural dialogues have been fruitful. This adds not only to the academic and cultural bonds between the two academic cultures but also strengthens the relations between the two nations in general," Mirzodoza said. As part of a series of meetings, the delegation also met the Vice Rector for International Relations at the International University of Tourism and Entrepreneurship of Tajikistan, Jabarov Fathullo Amrievich, and Professor Umarov Mohammed Umarovich of Tajik National University. They discussed the prospects for collaborations and partnerships in dual degree programmes.

## Luxury hotel designed, developed by LDA to open by March-end

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The first luxury hotel designed and developed by Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) is set to open to the public by the end of March this year. The hotel will be operated through private partner participation, Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar said here on Sunday. He explained that the hotel would be a budget-friendly option, located in Vikrant Khand, Gomti Nagar. While it is a budget hotel, it will offer facilities comparable to those of a five-star establishment. The VC mentioned that ten-

ders for the hotel were floated in October last year. Over two dozen private partners participated in the bidding process, but only three parties were selected after a thorough review of their credibility. He emphasised that the credibility of the selected partners was assessed from all angles to ensure they were capable of managing the hotel efficiently and effectively. However, the VC refrained from disclosing the identities of the selected hotel owners, citing concerns that it could negatively impact the selection process. The LDA will lease the hotel and its premises to the selected private

partners for the next 50 years. The eight-storey structure was completed in the mid-1980s but has remained unused since then. The LDA had previously struggled to decide whether it should run the hotel itself or invite private partners. However, following a recent board meeting, it was decided to invite private partners through a tender process and select the best one to operate the hotel. The parking space will be located in the basement and at the rear of the building. The ground floor will feature shops and lounges, while there will be a restaurant on both the first and eighth floors.

## CISH addresses problem of wilting in Chausa trees

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The severe problem of wilting in Chausa mango trees, repeatedly reported by farmers over the last seven years, has been addressed by ICAR-CISH, Lucknow, under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) Project. The wilting of a large number of trees has already caused severe losses to mango crops in major mango-growing areas of Uttar Pradesh and India.

Senior scientist at Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture (CISH), PK Shukla, stated that wilt management technology was developed by them in 2018, which had been effective in the majority of places. "However, Chausa farmers reported that it was not working. The affected orchards were visited, and the reasons behind the failure were understood. In fact, the Chausa tree has a much larger root system compared to other mango cultivars, so our recommendations and the farmers' efforts were insufficient to properly treat it. After receiving the MIDH Project, systematic efforts were made by selecting affected orchards in the identified disease hotspots, such as Amroha, Barabanki, Bulandshahr, Meerut, and Pratapgarh districts. The work carried out during the last year has shown good success," he said. "Based on both past and recent experiences, we found that the majority of mango orchards are infected with the wilt fungus Ceratocystis, and if a single tree becomes wilted in an orchard, the entire orchard should be treated," he added.

## LMC defends house tax collection in expanded areas

Lucknow (PNS): Lucknow Municipal Commission (LMC) chief tax officer Ashok Singh stated here on Sunday that certain citizen committees are hindering the collection of house tax in the newly expanded areas.

"Various areas and villages were included within the limits of the Lucknow Municipal Corporation as a result of the expansion carried out on December 5, 2019 under the government's notification. After the expansion of the limits, the then municipal commissioner

took one year for arrangements and other related works and issued orders for tax assessment from December 2020. In this regard, camps are currently being organised in coordination with the citizen committees of the extended areas for the tax assessment of buildings. However, these camps, which are organised for house tax assessment, are being opposed by some people due to personal interests," he said. He further explained that Section 3 (2) of the UP Municipal Corporation Act,

1959 provides for the declaration of a larger urban area, which states that all types of taxes, fees, and charges are payable as per the rules on the areas included within the city limits. "Concerning the above, the objection raised by the citizens' committees—that in the absence of the transfer of the LDA/Housing Development Scheme in the areas included within the city limits, house tax is not payable or that house tax will be payable only from the date of transfer—is unjust and invalid," he said.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER CENTRAL IRRIGATION CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR 'e' Procurement Notice No. ACECIC - 11/ 2024-25										
Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Name of Work	Cost of Work (Rs. in Lakhs)	Bid Security (Rs.) E.M.D.	Cost of Bid (Rs.)	Class of Contractor	Bid documents available online for bidding From	Date of opening of Technical Bid	Period of completion of work	
A C C E I C B h u b a n e s w a r	NGR-02/2024-25	Improvement to Ambarpur Sub-Minor between RD.1100mtr to 1620m, Nandighore Minor, RD.1000mtr to 1400m, Kendaupalli Minor RD.2200mtr to 2600m and Goudaput Minor RD.2400m to 2900m of BBIP for the year 2024-25	100.76	100800/- (On Line)	10000/- (On Line)	"B" & "A" Class	16.01.2025 At 10.00 Hours	30.01.2025 At 17.00 Hours	31.01.2025 At 11.00 Hours	6 (Six Calendar Month)
	NGR-03/2024-25	Improvement to Sarangada S/M and Madhupur S/M of Left Distributary of KIP for the year 2024-25	177.47	177500/- (On Line)	10000/- (On Line)	"B" & "A" Class	16.01.2025 At 10.00 Hours	30.01.2025 At 17.00 Hours	31.01.2025 At 11.00 Hours	6 (Six Calendar Month)
	NGR-04/2024-25	Improvement to Madhyakhanda S/M and Karadapada S/M of Right Distributary of KIP for the year 2024-25	181.71	181800/- (On Line)	10000/- (On Line)	"B" & "A" Class	16.01.2025 At 10.00 Hours	30.01.2025 At 17.00 Hours	31.01.2025 At 11.00 Hours	6 (Six Calendar Month)
	NGR-05/2024-25	Improvement to Itamali Distributary in between RD.4200mtr. to 9415 mtr., Krushnagaras Minor 00 mtr to 400 mtr, Sanapanas Minor 00 mtr to 400 mtr & Balikua Minor RD.00 mtr to 200 mtr of DIP for the year 2024-25.	136.38	136400/- (On Line)	10000/- (On Line)	"B" & "A" Class	16.01.2025 At 10.00 Hours	30.01.2025 At 17.00 Hours	31.01.2025 At 11.00 Hours	6 (Six Calendar Month)
	PRD-06/2024-25	Construction of RCC trough in Niali Distributary from RD.24.00 Km to 26.50 Km.	211.80	211900/- (On Line)	10000/- (On Line)	"B" & "A" Class	16.01.2025 At 10.00 Hours	30.01.2025 At 17.00 Hours	31.01.2025 At 11.00 Hours	6 (Six Calendar Month)
	PRD-07/2024-25	Construction of RCC trough in Badaro Branch Canal from RD.08.85 Km to 3.40 Km	173.68	173700/- (On Line)	10000/- (On Line)	"B" & "A" Class	16.01.2025 At 10.00 Hours	30.01.2025 At 17.00 Hours	31.01.2025 At 11.00 Hours	6 (Six Calendar Month)

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# Kalpvas to begin with Amrit Snan on Paush Purnima

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Maha Kumbh 2025 will begin with the auspicious Paush Purnima bath, marking the start of Kalpvas with Amrit Snan at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj.

The grand spiritual festival of Sanatan faith, Maha Kumbh, is expected to attract 40 to 45 crore devotees, who will immerse themselves in the holy confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. Along with the ritual bath, millions of devotees will also observe the ancient tradition of Kalpvas at the Sangam. According to ancient beliefs, devotees will observe Kalpvas for one month, strictly adhering to the prescribed rituals. The Maha Kumbh Mela authority has made special arrangements to ensure a smooth and spiritual experience for the devotees during this sacred observance.

The Maha Kumbh is not only the largest event of Sanatan faith but also a carrier of many Sanatan traditions. One significant tradition of Maha Kumbh is the observance of Kalpvas at the Sangam. According to ancient beliefs, Kalpvas begins on Paush Purnima and continues for a month until Magh Purnima.

In this Maha Kumbh, Kalpvas will start on January 13 and continue until February 12 at the Sangam. During Kalpvas, devotees live at the Sangam for a month with dedication and discipline. They take three holy dips in the Ganga, engage in chanting, meditation, worship, and attend spiritual discourses. It is estimated that around 10 lakh devotees will observe Kalpvas during Maha Kumbh 2025.

To facilitate the observance of the special Maha Kumbh tradition of Kalpvas, the Maha Kumbh Mela authority has made all necessary arrangements. Around 1.6 lakh tents for Kalpvas have been set up along the banks of the Ganga, from Jhansi to Fafamau. These tents are equipped with electricity and water connections, along with toilets. Temporary roads, covering approximately 650 kilometres with checker plate and 30 pontoon bridges, have been built to ensure easy access to the tents. In line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directives, Kalpvas have access to ration and cylinders at affordable rates. Special ghats have been built for holy dips in the Ganga, with security measures like water police deployment and river barricades in place.

To protect devotees from the cold, arrangements for bonfires have been made, while hospitals have been set up within the Maha Kumbh Mela area to address health issues. The teeth purohiths and Prayagwasis conducting Kalpvas rituals have also been provided with special facilities.



Devotees take a holy dip in the Ganga river ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj on Sunday morning

PTI

## I was an Indian in my previous life, says Italian yoga instructor

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The grandeur and spiritual significance of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj continue to attract visitors not only from across India but also from around the world. Among the international visitors deeply influenced by Indian culture are three friends from Italy who have arrived to witness the divinity of the Maha Kumbh Mela. Staying in a camp in the meal area, they have fully embraced the experience, even dressing in traditional saffron attire.

One of the visitors, Emma, a yoga instructor, expressed her fascination with India's rich cultural heritage and spirituality. Sharing her sentiments, she remarked, "This is my first time visiting the Maha Kumbh. I am a yoga teacher, and many of my friends are Indians. I deeply admire Indian culture, and I feel as if I was Indian in my previous birth. I love Indian music, bhajans and kirtans. The arrangements here at the Maha Kumbh are excellent."

Her companion, Pietro, also captivated by the spiritual atmosphere, shared his perspective. "I am a yoga practitioner and have some knowledge of Indian culture. The Kumbh Mela is the largest spiritual event of Sanatan Dharma, and this is my first visit here. When my friends



planned this trip, I decided to join them to experience this extraordinary event."

Another member of the group, Stefano, mentioned that his curiosity about the Maha Kumbh was sparked by his friends from Russia who had

previously visited India and embraced the life of Naga sadhus. "This is my first visit to the Kumbh. Some of my sadhu friends from Russia shared their experiences about the event, which inspired me to come here," he explained.

## A saga of determination, sacrifice

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Maha Kumbh, held on the sacred banks of the Sangam, is a profound confluence of devotion, sacrifice and meditation. Among the lakhs of Kalpvas observing the ancient tradition, the story of Dinesh Swaroop Brahmachari stands out as a remarkable testament to unwavering determination and self-sacrifice.

The father of Dinesh Swaroop Brahmachari, hailing from Mahoba in Bundelkhand, was the son of a school principal. Brahmachari has been performing Kalpvas for the last 41 years. His spiritual journey began after the demise of his father. Offered a teaching job on compassionate grounds, he chose the path of renunciation,

dedicating his life to spiritual practice instead. His daily routine reflects extreme devotion and discipline. Rising in the Brahma muhurta, he bathes in the Ganga and performs his rituals. After this, he prepares food with his own hands for 51 Dandi Swami sadhus holding the stick. He feeds them but does not eat himself and sleeps on the ground at night. Dinesh Swaroop is the longest-serving Kalpvasi performing Kalpvas in the Maha Kumbh.

Since the day he began his 'akhand' Kalpvas 41 years ago, Dinesh Swaroop Brahmachari has abstained from both food and water, surviving solely on tea. That is why people also call him 'Payhari'.

The Mouni Maharaj, who has undergone two open-heart

bypass surgeries with only 20 per cent of his heart functioning, remains fit. The doctors themselves are astonished by his remarkable determination and will to live.

What sets Dinesh Swaroop apart is not just his spiritual austerity but also his contribution to society. His camp, located on Nagvasuki Marg in Sector 17 of the Kalpvas area, serves as a beacon of knowledge. Inspired by his devotion to Lord Balaji, he has made the unique decision to donate education as his form of charity. In his temple in the camp, he has assembled thousands of books essential for preparing for the PCS examination. A BSc graduate himself, he dedicates his time to preparing study materials and one-liner notes for

aspirants from economically weaker sections. He gives these notes as 'prasad' to the students preparing for administrative examinations. His notes, often described as concise and effective, have helped numerous students clear prestigious exams. For those unable to visit him in person, he distributes the study material digitally via WhatsApp. His disciple Bhartendu, an aspiring administrative officer, attests to the impact of these notes, while another disciple, Vikas, reveals that Maharaj has simplified the content of all NCERT and competitive exam books into easily understandable formats. His selfless service has already enabled several students to secure government jobs.

## Lakhs of youth gather at Sangam

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): A day before the Paush Purnima, the banks of Sangam witnessed an overwhelming surge of faith as on Sunday, lakhs of devotees, spanning all age groups – youth, elderly and children – gathered with immense enthusiasm to take a holy dip in the sacred waters.

The occasion also coincided with National Youth Day, further energising the youth, who embraced the festival as an opportunity to connect with their roots and traditions. Bathing at the VIP Ghat and Sangam Nose, they captured and shared their moments, symbolising a blend of ancient faith and modern connectivity. The vibrant atmosphere reflected the essence of Sanatan culture, with devotees showcasing unwavering faith and joy.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed unprecedented security measures to ensure the safety and comfort of pilgrims. The Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC) monitors every activity across Mahakumbh Nagar, complemented by artificial intelligence-enabled cameras for enhanced surveillance. DIG Vaibhav Krishna and SSP Rajesh Dwivedi are personally overseeing the arrangements, supported by an augmented police force providing real-time updates.

In the digital era, Maha Kumbh's fervour has extended to social media, with devotees sharing their experiences through videos and pictures. Many offered their families virtual 'darshan' of Maa Ganga via video calls. In contrast, group calls on platforms like Facebook Live and WhatsApp Live brought the divine celebration closer to distant loved ones.

## Turkish visitor immerses in India's spiritual heritage

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The grandeur and divinity of the Maha Kumbh have sparked immense excitement, not just in India but also internationally. Among the global visitors is Pinar, a Turkish citizen, who has come to Sangam for the first time to experience India's rich culture and traditions.

Pinar performed the sacred Ganga snan (holy dip in the Ganges), applied a tilak on her forehead, and immersed herself in the spiritual journey of Sanatan Dharma. Sharing her experience, Pinar said she first heard about the Maha Kumbh from friends and had long dreamed of witnessing it in per-



son. Deeply influenced by Indian culture, she described the atmosphere of the Maha Kumbh as "divine and majestic".

Walking on the sands of Sangam and taking the holy dip in the Ganga were unforgettable experiences for her.

## GRAND NAMAMI GANGE YAJNA HELD

A grand Namami Gange Yajna was conducted by the Namami Gange team on the banks of the sacred Sangam on the eve of the Amrit Snan at Maha Kumbh 2025 on Sunday.

This special event aimed to raise awareness about the purity, cleanliness and conservation of the Ganga while fostering a collective commitment to its preservation. During the yajna, devotees and Ganga Sevadoots made offerings, symbolising their dedication to ensuring the uninterrupted and pristine flow of the river. The event saw spirited participation from over 200 Ganga Sevadoots and thousands of devoted attendees.



Sadhus at their pandal at Sangam ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Sunday

PTI

## CM eyes transforming tourism into a thriving 'people's industry'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh, a land of rich cultural heritage and historical significance, holds immense tourism potential. From Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Ram, to Chitrakoot, where he spent his exile with Sita and Lakshman, the state is steeped in mythology and history.

The Braj region, including Mathura and Vrindavan, evokes the divine tales of Radha, Krishna, and the 'gopis'. Agra, home to the iconic Taj Mahal, and Bundelkhand, the land of the valorous Rani Lakshmbai, each offer a unique charm.

Prayagraj, renowned for the Kumbh and Maha Kumbh festivals, transforms into a global confluence of humanity. This spiritual landscape also includes the sacred teachings of Lord Buddha, Guru Gorakshanath's yoga tradition, and the Jain wisdom of Mahavir. Sonbadra, with its ancient fossils, adds a unique prehistoric element to the state's offerings.

Recognising this diversity, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath envisions making tourism a 'people's industry' to ensure that the maximum benefit reaches the residents of Uttar Pradesh.

Since local residents benefit the most from visiting tourists, Chief Minister Yogi encourages every local individual to act as a brand ambassador by extend-

ing better hospitality and offering proper support to tourists. This aligns with the traditional Indian ethos of 'Atithi Devo Bhava'.

By embracing this approach, tourists will feel welcomed and inspired to visit the place repeatedly. The chief minister consistently emphasises this message, urging citizens to uphold these values from every platform.

The government has been focusing on developing basic infrastructure and ensuring safety across major tourist destinations in the state. These efforts are reflected in the rising number of tourists and the growing income of local businesses. Uttar Pradesh has secured the top position for domestic tourist arrivals in India for the third consecutive year.

Highlighting the impact, Chief Minister Yogi mentioned that in 2016, Ayodhya welcomed an average of 2.83 lakh tourists annually. Following the construction of the Ram temple, this figure is expected to surge. Similarly, Varanasi, has witnessed a six-fold increase of tourists after the development of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor.

The economic benefits of tourism are substantial. On average, a tourist spends around Rs 5,000 on transportation, accommodation, food, prasad, and local products, directly benefiting local vendors, hoteliers, and artisans.

## Case registered for milk dairy irregularities in Jaunpur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The operator of Krishna Dairy, operating in Dadwa Kaderpur by the name of Krishna Dairy. When the operator Shrikant Yadav suspected irregularities in the accounts, he got it investigated thoroughly. In the investigation, it was found that three employees, accountant Ashwani, chemist Arvind and fourth class employee Pradyum committed a scam of about Rs 52 lakh. These people made more payment than the milk purchased from the account of the milk committee. On the other hand, the employees of Haripur Lohriyan and Gaddopur milk committee, Lohriyan milk committee secretary Anuj Maurya, Belwar secretary Ram Singh Yadav of Sujanganj police station area, Gaddopur secretary Abhishek Singh, Haripur secretary Shivam Singh, accountant Akhlesh Yadav of Neveda Badalpur and accountant Ashwani Singh and

driver Abhishek Singh of Ballia together committed a fraud of Rs 23 lakh. A total fraud of Rs 97 lakh took place. It is alleged that the accused used to commit fraud by increasing the milk by 100 litres in the morning and 150 litres in the evening in a fraudulent manner. Ram Singh (secretary) has admitted to committing the fraud in a video. On asking for the money, the said people abuse the firm owner and threaten to beat him up. The matter was going on continuously since the year 2020. After the complaint of the case, on the orders of the High Court, Circle Officer Pratima Singh ordered police station in-charge Om Prakash Pandey to investigate the matter and register a case. On this, the police station in-charge investigated the matter and started further action by registering a case against seven people under various sections including fraud.

## CPI (ML) flays arrest of party leader

Lucknow (PNS): The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) has strongly condemned the arrest of leaders, who were going to address a loan waiver conference held in Kushinagar on Sunday. The arrested leaders include Manoj Singh, national general secretary of Jan Sanskriti Manch (Jasam), farmer leader Shivaji Rai, CPI (ML) state standing committee member and state secretary of All India Agricultural and Rural Labourers Association (AIARLA) Rajesh Sahni and other leaders. CPI(ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav said today that a loan waiver conference was organised on Sunday by AIARLA in Suraji Bazaar located in Dudahi nagar

panchayat of Tamkuhi tehsil. He said police searched the house, misbehaved with the arrested leader's sick wife and threatened the leader. The CPI (ML) also said that incidents of attacks on Dalits had increased in Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's rule. The party demanded justice for the families of the deceased and the victims in three separate incidents of Dalit murder in Rae Bareilly. Yadav, quoting the report of the party's fact-finding team, said that three Dalits were murdered in Rae Bareilly within a week. The six-member fact-finding team was led by party's state committee member Vijay Vidrohi.

## Building collapse: All trapped workers rescued after 16-hour operation

Kannauj/Kanpur (PTI): All 28 workers trapped under the rubble of a collapsed under-construction building at Kannauj railway station were pulled out safely after a 16-hour-long overnight operation, officials said on Sunday. Of the rescued workers, 26 of them have been admitted to various hospitals in Kannauj, while the rest two with serious injuries shifted to the Lala Lajpat Rai (LLR) Hospital in Kanpur, they said.

The two workers admitted at the LLR Hospital are out of danger, hospital sources said. One of them has a head injury while another sustained leg injury, as per the sources. No fatalities have been reported, the officials said.

The shuttering of the under-construction building on the station premises had collapsed Saturday afternoon, trapping the workers. The rescue teams, including personnel from the national and state disaster response forces and the railways, worked through the cold night to clear the debris and safely pull out the trapped workers. Kannauj District Magistrate Shubhrant Kumar Shukl visited the site early on Sunday, expressing relief that no lives were lost in the tragic incident. CCTV footage from the site has surfaced, showing a labourer attempting to fix the shuttering (a temporary structure used to

support concrete) when the roof collapses. The footage suggests that a beam carried by the worker hit the shuttering, causing it to slip and ultimately collapse. The North Eastern Railway (NER) on Saturday formed a three-member committee to investigate the cause of the collapse. The committee will include the chief engineer (planning and design), the additional divisional railway manager (Izzatnagar) and the chief security commissioner of the Railway Protection Force.

The construction was being carried out as part of the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), aimed at enhancing the infrastructure of Kannauj railway station. NER officials have announced ex gratia for the injured workers: Rs 50,000 for those with minor injuries and up to Rs 2.5 lakh for those with serious injuries.

## INDIA bloc intact, will win Milkipur seat: Akhilesh

Lucknow (PNS): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav claimed that the opposition INDIA bloc is strong, intact and will win the by-election to Milkipur assembly seat.

He said the party cadre would have free hand to fight the highhandedness and misuse of the state machinery by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Akhilesh, on Sunday, said the party cadre had been given free hand to deal with as per the situation obtaining on the ground if they were obstructed by the police during the polling process.

He said that as agreed upon earlier all constituents of the INDIA bloc would support the dominant regional party to contest against the BJP.

He claimed that the BJP will again be defeated in Milkipur and SP cadre and its supporters are geared up for the electoral battle. The SP chief alleged that the BJP won the by-elections held in November last year through unfair means. "The BJP indulged in loot of votes in all the seven seats it won in the UP assembly by-elections. In many assembly constituencies it was the police which pushed the EVM button and this could be established by the forensic examination of the voting machines," Akhilesh Yadav claimed.

The SP chief alleged that the BJP had deployed ministers in Milkipur for booth capturing and was indulging in electoral malpractices. He alleged that all these ministers were corrupt and known for loot in their respective departments.



# Maha Kumbh: Focus on ensuring smooth experience for devotees visiting Kashi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A meeting was convened regarding preparations for the Maha Kumbh under the chairmanship of Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohit Agrawal and Divisional Commissioner (DC) Kaushal Raj Sharma. During it they took department-wise information from all the departments concerned regarding their preparations.

In it preparations of most of the departments were found to be complete. They asked the officers of Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC), Health and Electricity departments to continuously camp in the areas to ensure immediate solution to the problems. Along with fixing the fares of buses, auto rickshaws, e-rickshaws and boats, the officials were asked to ensure a beggary and plastic free city. Along with the road works, all development works should be completed within the stipulated time so that the devotees coming to Varanasi during the Maha Kumbh did not face any inconvenience. Besides it should be ensured that there is no problem of traffic jam anywhere in Varanasi between February 3 and 26 when major akharas and saints

will be arriving in the city in large numbers. They were told to ensure adequate arrangements now for all preparations. The DC first reviewed the works of Public Works Department (PWD) and directed the officers concerned to make all roads pothole free at a fast pace. He directed to complete the work on all the six under construction roads, expressing displeasure over the progress. Regarding road indicators and zebra lines, the PWD officers informed that along with installing indicators at 25 places on the roads, zebra lines have been made at 34 places and the work of painting stripes at the marked places is in progress. The DC directed the Transport department to ensure repair of black spots on all the highways along with the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) and also to take a list of the marked spots from all the police stations and ensure their repair with immediate effect. The officers of Transport department informed that the fitness check of auto rickshaws, e-rickshaws etc, verification of drivers and eye tests etc have been completed and proper arrangements of water, mobile toilets, cottages, blankets, quilts etc have been



CP Mohit Agrawal and DC KR Sharma reviewing preparations for Maha Kumbh in Varanasi

made at the temporary bus stands built at Harhua and Jagatpur. The Deputy Director (Tourism) informed that in view of Kumbh, nine helpdesks have been set up at major intersections on which duty has been assigned and the work of distributing pamphlets, leaflets etc has been expedited. He said people on duty at the helpdesk should be active and serve the general public. The CP directed the departments concerned to install CCTVs at the temporary bus stands. The DC asked to install reflectors on all vehicles and publicise the fixed fare of the buses in both Hindi and English languages at the bus stands, temporary bus stands, media, social media etc. He also

directed to ensure that no unfit vehicle is found running on the road. The Roadways officers informed that the schedule and list of buses have been released and if needed, buses will also be operated from Golgadda bus stand. The night shelters at both the places are functional for the convenience of the devotees and proper arrangements of toilets and bathrooms have also been made. The CP prohibited the Roadways buses from leaving the bus station and parking on the road and directed to impose duty to stop this. The DC directed to arrange ID cards for all Roadways employees and to give the same along with their phone numbers to

the traffic police. The VMC was asked to install floating jetties, deep water barricades along with water police at major ghats, on which the VMC informed that barricading has been done at 10 ghats. The Water Police was asked to keep jackets with whistles and 'Water Police' written on them. It was directed to establish lost and found centres at all the ghats. It was asked to be prepared for proper arrangement of quality food packets and drinking water in case of any emergency. The Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) was directed to install statues at major intersections and speed up the beautification work. The DC asked to ensure that there is no sewerage leakage along with running a special cleaning campaign in old city areas, Sarnath, Cantt, airport and hotel areas and streets and to be strict on garbage pickup and door-to-door garbage campaign, on which Additional Municipal Commissioner (AMC) Dushyant Maurya told about the cleaning system that 700 additional cleaning workers have been put on duty and cleaning is being done in three shifts at the ghats along with night cleaning in the city. The DC directed to make arrange-

ments for cleanliness on the other side of Ganga from the month of February. Regarding the plastic-free campaign, AMC Savita Yadav said by taking strict action on plastic-free city, 650 tonnes of plastic has been confiscated so far and one lakh free bags have been distributed. Municipal Commissioner Akshat Verma said 13 permanent and 19 temporary night shelters have been built and 15 more temporary night shelters have been made functional so that more and more people can be given shelter. The DC directed the VMC, Water Police and Traffic Police to ensure safety jackets, fixation of fare and crowd management during boat operation in Ganga. Along with strictly banning the use of soap, shampoo in the Ganga river, it should also ensure that no pouch is left. For community policing, instructions were given to add new members of Civil Defence and Red Cross at police station level so that their help can be taken on appropriate occasions. The Jalkal department informed that 39 water tankers are continuously operational which have been installed at various night shelters, temporary bus stands. Jal Nigam was directed to run con-

tinuous campaigns to ensure that there is no sewerage leakage. The Police department was asked to hold a meeting with the Vyapar Mandals and expect their cooperation in cleanliness, price control and good behaviour with the visiting devotees, pilgrims and help in making Kashi plastic free. The DC directed the police and administration to run a joint campaign to free the city from begging and to ensure that no one sleeps in the open. The Electricity department was directed to complete all the pole shifting and replacement of worn out wires with immediate effect. The Bhashini app was asked to be propagated among the maximum number of people. After the meeting, CP, DC and District Magistrate S Rajalingam inspected Kashi Vishwanath Temple and gave guidelines for making proper arrangements for the convenience of devotees from the temple to Ganga ghats. Additional Commissioner of Police (ACP) S Chinnappa, DCP (Traffic) Varanasi, along with officers of departments concerned and various officers of the police department were present in the meeting.

## Remain alert: CMO

Varanasi (PNS): Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said the number of patients with symptoms of cold, fever and seasonal influenza increases during the winter season. "Along with seasonal changes, less attention to personal hygiene, coughing or sneezing without proper protection while in close contact with other people and the spread of various viruses causing respiratory infections in meetings and gatherings held in closed places is commonly seen in the current season", the CMO said, adding that in such a situation be alert and contact the nearest government hospital immediately. The CMO said most of the seasonal influenza viruses cause mild and self-limiting respiratory diseases in which symptoms like fever and cough are found, but the symptoms of the disease can be severe in some patients, especially in elderly, people suffering from obesity or from other conditions such as COPD, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney or liver disease and pregnant women. "Young children, elderly and people suffering from infectious conditions fall in the high risk group for influenza virus infection", he said, adding that to prevent the spread of influenza, work is being done to increase awareness among the public.

## Traffic plan to ensure smooth movement & safety of devotees

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In view of the Paushi Purnima and Makar Sankranti festivals, the Traffic Police have devised a comprehensive traffic plan to ensure smooth movement and safety of the devotees visiting the Mela area. The plan includes traffic diversions and parking arrangements for all vehicles entering the Mela region. Notably, the entry route to the Sangam Mela area will be through Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg (Black Road), while the exit route will be via Triveni Marg. During the major bathing festivals, the Akshayavat Darshan will remain closed for visitors. Vehicles can be parked at designated parking areas. Parking lots for vehicles coming from Jaunpur include:- Chini Mill Parking; Purva Surdas Parking, Garapur Road; Samyama Temple Kachar parking and Badra Saunoti Rahimapur Marg, Northern/Southern parking. The vehicles from Jaunpur will be parked here and the devotees will walk via the Old GT Road to enter the Mela region. The vehicles coming from Varanasi will be parked at: Mahua Bagh police station Jhushi parking (Akhada Parking); Saraswati parking, Jhushi railway station; Nageshwar Temple parking;

Gyan Ganga Ghat, Chatnagar parking and Shiv Mandir Ustapur, Mahmoodabad parking. The vehicles from Varanasi will be parked here and the devotees will walk through Chatnagar Road to enter the Mela region. The vehicles coming from Mirzapur will be parked at: Devrakh Uparhar parking, Northern/Southern; Tent city parking, Madanua/Mawaiya/Devrakh; Omex City parking and Gaziya parking, Northern/Southern. The vehicles from Mirzapur will be parked here and the pilgrims will walk via Arail Bandh Road to enter the Mela region. Likewise vehicles coming from Rewa-Banda-Chitrakoot will be parked at: Navprayag parking, Eastern/Western/Expansion; Agricultural Institute parking, Yamuna Patti; Mahewa Purab/Paschim Parking and Meerkhpur Kachar parking. The vehicles from Rewa-Banda-Chitrakoot will be parked here and the devotees will walk via Old Rewa Road and New Rewa Road through Arail Bandh to enter the Mela region. The vehicles coming from Kanpur-Kausambi will be parked at the following parking lots: Kali Extension Plot No. 17 parking; Allahabad Degree College Ground park-

ing and Dadhikando ground parking. The vehicles from Kanpur-Kausambi will be parked here and devotees will walk via GT Jawahar Chauraha and Kali Marg to enter the Mela region. The vehicles coming from Lucknow-Pratapgarh will be parked at the following sites: Gangeshwar Mahadev Kachar parking; Nagvasuki parking; Bakshi Bandh Kachar parking; Bada Bagda parking 01/02/03 and IERT parking, Northern/Southern. The vehicles from Lucknow-Pratapgarh will be parked here and the pilgrims will walk via Nawas Ki Marg to enter the Mela region. The vehicles coming from Ayodhya-Pratapgarh will be parked at: Shiv Baba parking. The vehicles from Ayodhya-Pratapgarh will be parked here and the devotees will walk via Sangam Lower Marg to enter the Mela region. Pedestrian routes for devotees and bathers to enter and exit the Mela region: Entry route to Sangam — devotees/bathers will enter from GT Jawahar, go to Kali Road, use the Kali ramp and walk via the Sangam Upper Route to reach Sangam. The exit route from Sangam: devotees will exit through the Akshayvat route and follow the interlocking return route via Triveni Marg to return to their destinations.

## DM flags off road show

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the grand event of Maha Kumbh, the road show organised from Hotel Taj to Shastri Ghat was flagged off by District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam here on Sunday. Earlier, in view of Maha Kumbh-2025 starting from January 13 in Prayagraj, a large number of devotees as well as VIPs/special and foreign dignitaries can visit Prayagraj Maha Kumbh as well as Varanasi, Mirzapur and Ayodhya. In this context, as per the guidelines of the state government, a control room has been set up in the Disaster Control Room located at the Collectorate at the district level to ensure necessary security and other arrangements to the devotees and dignitaries as per their dignity in a short time. While making the protocol section functional effectively in Varanasi district, telephone number of this control room 0542-2970111 will remain functional for 24x7.



District Magistrate S Rajalingam has nominated Sushil Kumar Ganga Prasad, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police, Protocol Varanasi (9454404403) and Shantun Sinsinwar, Additional City Magistrate First (9454417033) as nodal officers for the protocol control room and has directed to operate the control room in three shifts for eight hours each and deploy an officer knowledgeable about protocol work in the protocol control room and has directed to ensure prompt disposal of the information received. The shift wise duty of officers/

employees has been assigned from January 11 to February 28. The DM directed the officers/employees nominated for shift wise duty that they will ensure to do duty in Maha Kumbh-2025 control room under the guidance of the nodal officer and will not leave duty without their replacement, headquarters without the permission of the undersigned and will also not keep their mobile switched off. "If any negligence is found in the said work, punitive action will be taken by holding the concerned responsible. For which the officer/employee concerned will be responsible", he added.

## Stress on imbibing ideals of Swami Vivekananda

Varanasi (PNS): To commemorate the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, basketball matches were organised at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) on the occasion of National Youth Day under the 100-day 'TB Free India Public Participation Campaign' here on Sunday. The main objective of this event was to inspire the youth to adopt a healthy lifestyle and give impetus to the TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan. The programme was inaugurated by General Manager (GM) Naresh Pal Singh. Exciting matches were played between the two teams of BLW Sports Academy, BLW Red and BLW Green. BLW Red performed brilliantly and won the final. The GM honoured the winners and runner-ups by giving them medals. In his address, the GM said, "On the occasion of National Youth Day, we should imbibe the

ideals of Swami Vivekananda. A healthy body and positive attitude lay the foundation of a strong youth nation. TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan is a powerful medium to make the youth aware and encourage them to take responsibility towards their health." Quoting lines of 'arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached' of Swami Vivekananda, Singh said the teaching inspires the youth to channelise their energy in a positive direction. PCMM Rajneesh Gupta, PCE Vinod Shukla and others were present. **Tribute paid to Shastri:** Rich tribute was paid to the second Prime Minister of the country and a symbol of simplicity, late Lal Bahadur Shastri, on his death anniversary in the premises of BLW here on Saturday. In his address, the GM referred to Shastri's famous slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'.

## Fire in waste material godown

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A waste material godown caught fire under mysterious circumstances in Koela Nagar early on Sunday morning. As many as half-a-dozen fire tenders rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control. Ankit Tripathi alias Vishal

of Barra owns a waste material godown in Koela Nagar, Chakeri, in the name of Ma Enterprises which suddenly caught fire on Sunday. On seeing the smoke, residents made a futile attempt to control the fire and informed the godown owner and fire brigade. With the help of JCB machine, spark-

ing waste material was removed. After departure of fire brigade, the fire in waste material was extinguished by pouring water from the submersible pump. Godown owner said the cause of incident could not be ascertained. However, goods worth around ₹10-15 lakh were gutted.

## Safety audit inspection of Banaras stn conducted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

To ensure safe operation of Kumbh Mela special trains, safety of fair passengers and fast rail travel by the railway administration, Executive Director (Safety), Ministry of Railways (New Delhi) Mukul Kumar conducted a safety audit inspection of Banaras station on Saturday. During it the safety related equipment, including route relay interlocking room, station panel, relay room, data logger, point crossing, block hut, block instrument, weeder counter, shunting facility, stabling facility, rack handling of Banaras station and the sequential maintenance of these equipment were reviewed. On the occasion Senior

Divisional Safety Officer (SDSO) Balendra Pal, Senior Divisional Signal and Telecommunication Engineer Rajat Priya, all counsellors of the Safety department and senior supervisors of all departments of Varanasi division of North Eastern Railway (NER) were present. The ED (Safety) enquired about the timely maintenance of the equipment and also tested the knowledge of security category employees working in Banaras regarding safety. For safe traffic management, the competency certificate and periodic medical examination report of the security related employees of engineering, signal and operating department were checked. Along with this, safety was

reviewed by thoroughly inspecting the berthing tracks, point machines, signals, height and approach of foot over bridges, platform length clearance, fire alarm, station working rule, relay room, point crossing and fail-safe side system of various equipment etc. installed in the station section. During his inspection, Kumar tested the gauge of manual point number 112 on line number 26 at Banaras railway station and also directed to inspect the points and crossings of housing and filler at all the points from time to time and get it repaired in a short time by giving priority. He informed that 80 per cent of the derailment incidents happen in the points zone, for

which the Railway Board is strictly getting the rectification done by running a drive on a wide scale. He stressed on increasing the shunting facility for the operation of a large number of Kumbh Mela special trains from Banaras station and directed the officials concerned to increase sand humps along with shunting nose and signal overlap. Earlier, Kumar thoroughly inspected the Banaras Diesel Lobby, Guard/Loco Pilot Running Room and enquired about the timely maintenance of the equipment. He also tested the safety knowledge of the employees working in the lobby and administered them an oath to always remain responsible towards safety.

## Blankets distributed

Kanpur (PNS): The Innerwheel Club of Kanpur Vidushi distributed blankets to the needy in the Robin Hood Academy Colony in Barra on Sunday to protect them from the cold. The programme was organized under the leadership of club president Dr Seema Verma. Blankets were distributed to about 100 people in the colony by the club members. Charter President of the club and ZPC of Innerwheel District 311 Dr Saba Yunus said for the last 12 years the club had been doing the noble work of distributing blankets every year during winter. Dr Manju Awasthi, Dr Manisha Shukla, Rati Gupta, Ruchi Agarwal, Dr Mohini Agarwal, Neerja Gupta and Archana Shukla were present.

## 'Vidyarthi' TBM launched for tunnel construction

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Metro launched 'Vidyarthi' Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) to begin tunnel construction on the 'down-line' underground section of Corridor-1 (IIT - Naubasta) over a 1.80 km stretch between the Transport Nagar station and Kanpur Central. Meanwhile, the 'Azad' TBM is already working on the 'up-line' tunnel for the same stretch. It is worth noting that the 'Azad' and 'Vidyarthi' TBMs, the third and fourth machines for the Kanpur Metro, previously completed the construction of a 1,250-metre-long tunnel between Kanpur Central and Nayaganj on both lines. Afterwards, both machines were retrieved from the retrieval shaft at Nayaganj and lowered into the launching shaft near the Swadeshi Cotton Mill. From there, they advanced towards Kanpur Central and arrived at their first destination, Transport Nagar station after completing a tunnel of approximately 330 metres. After arriving at Transport Nagar, both TBMs were 'dragged' about 215 metres across the station. This

method helped avoid the time-consuming process of retrieving and lowering each 80-metre-long machine through a retrieval shaft. In December last year the 'Azad' TBM machine was launched on the 'up-line' from Transport Nagar station after completion of 'dragging' process to the opposite end of the station. The 'Vidyarthi' TBM machine, which arrived at Transport Nagar station on November 24, was also dragged to the other end and launched for tunnel construction on the 'down-line'. The two machines will now progress towards the Jharkarkati underground station, constructing approximately 720 metres of tunnel in the coming days. Afterwards, they will be dragged back to the opposite end of the 158-metre-long Jharkarkati station. Once repositioned, the machines will be relaunched for the final launch to Kanpur Central, where they will complete a 940-meter tunnel. Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC), Sushil Kumar, said, "The underground section of Corridor-1 (IIT to Naubasta) includes a

total of seven stations: Chunniganj, Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha, Nayaganj, Kanpur Central, Jharkarkati and Transport Nagar. Kanpur Metro has already completed the tunnel construction from Motijheel to Kanpur Central in June 2024 and now preparing for passenger services on this stretch. The 'Azad' and 'Vidyarthi' TBMs are tunnelling towards Kanpur Central from another end and have made excellent progress after completing the stretch from the Swadeshi Cotton Mill ramp to Transport Nagar. I am pleased with the Kanpur Metro team's success in tackling the complex challenge of constructing tunnels beneath the city's busiest areas. This project will significantly enhance public transportation in the city in the future." **HONOURED:** Starting a new tradition, a felicitation programme was organised here at the NSI on Vishwa Hindi Divas. The NSI has decided to honour the 'Hindi Sevi' of the city every year on this occasion. Dr Kamal Musaddi, who has been making commendable contribution to Hindi for years through her poems and stories, was honoured by the

Director of the institute, Prof Seema Paroha. Director Prof Paroha felicitated Jagdish Narayan Singh by presenting him a shawl and a book. Assistant Director (Official Language) Mallika Dwivedi, highlighted the historical significance of celebrating Vishwa Hindi Divas every year on January 10 to commemorate the celebration of the first Vishwa Hindi Sammelan on January 10, 1975. More than 60 employees were present. The programme was inaugurated with garlanding the idol of Maa Veenapani and lighting of the lamp by the director. She read the message of PM Narendra Modi on Vishwa Hindi Divas. She said Hindi, the real sister of the Devbhasha (Sanskrit) is now crossing the global boundaries and moving towards becoming a world language. Hindi, the most spoken and understood language in the world after Chinese and English has all the qualities to become a world language. The day is not far when Hindi will be declared the world language. Celebrating Vishwa Hindi Divas is its beginning. Dr Kamal Musaddi said if any language has the maximum literature in the world, it is Hindi only. Most of the films made or watched today are Hindi films.

## Bulk drug pharma park being developed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Under the leadership of the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) is continuously working to upgrade the industrial infrastructure of the state, enabling Uttar Pradesh to achieve its goal of a \$1 trillion economy. In this direction, a new industrial area with focus on bulk drug production which aligns with the aim of India's being self-sufficient in bulk drugs/pharmaceutical sector and to sustain its position as the "Pharmacy to the World", a bulk drug pharma park is being developed on 1,472.33 acres in two phases. The initial phase is being developed in an area of 352.91 acres. This site is spread across two contiguous land parcels: the first - 1,028.32 acres is located in Rampur village, connected to MDR 35B through Karonda; the second - 444.01 acres, spans Garholi Kalan, Saidpur, Largan and Karonda villages. The development will focus on Saidpur and Gadolikalan in Mandawara tehsil and Largan, Karonda, and Rampur in Mehrauli tehsil at Lalitpur district, to accel-

erate industrial activity in the bulk drug/pharmaceutical sector in the state. The development of bulk drug pharma park gives new impetus to industrial development and would create an ecosystem suitable for bulk drug/pharmaceutical and associated industries in the Lalitpur region. The land necessary for this project is under the possession of UPSIDA and the necessary transfer process from Animal Husbandry department to UPSIDA was completed. The proposed site is strategically situated in northern India, the site can be accessed by rail, road and air. The nearest MDR 35B and NH 44, are accessible via MDR 30B from the site which is 45 kilometres away from NH 44, which forms a key part of the Delhi Nagpur Industrial Corridor (DNIC) facilitating efficient transportation for warehousing and storage needs. Rail network can be accessed through Tikamgarh railway station 35 kilometres and Lalitpur railway junction at 50 kilometres away from the site. The site is connected through air via Lalitpur airstrip managed by the Airports Authority of India (AAI). Additionally,

the government plans to establish a new greenfield airport near Jhansi. In terms of sea transport, the Jawahar Lal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) is the nearest major port, located approximately 870 kilometres away from the site. This strategic location provides better connectivity and transportation facilities for industries. In UPSIDA's Lalitpur Bulk Drug Pharma Park, demand for allocation of industrial land for interested parties has been received for 90 acres (from 14 companies) through the Expression of Interest (EOI) sought in January 2025. And for another 40 acres of land from six companies during stakeholders interaction with the industry during October and November 2024. In toto demand for around 60 to 65 per cent of the available land has been received till date. This new bulk drug/pharma industrial area will significantly contribute to the economic development of Lalitpur and surrounding areas and generates new employment opportunities. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) UPSIDA Mayur Maheshwari, said, "this industrial area will

further strengthen the 'Make in Uttar Pradesh' campaign. Our goal is to make Uttar Pradesh the leading industrial state in the country. UPSIDA is committed to taking the state's industrial development to new heights. We are moving rapidly towards achieving the target of a trillion-dollar economy. We are pleased to announce that around 24 companies have expressed their interest in investing the proposed bulk drug pharma park with state-of-the-art facilities like CETP, common steam generation and distribution network, solvent storage and common solvent recovery system required for bulk drug units and their associated industries. This project will involve a capital investment of ₹225-250 crore in Phase 1 (bulk drug, formulation and service industry) and around ₹2,100 crore in both the phases and expected to generate approximately 2,700+ employment (direct & indirect) opportunities for Phase I development. This industrial area will play a vital role in the economic development not only of Lalitpur but of the entire region. We invite investors to invest in Uttar Pradesh".



# Modi emphasises youth in achieving Viksit Bharat vision



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Sunday that the capabilities of India's young population will power the country's rise to becoming developed.

Addressing the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue here, he said some people may find the goal of India becoming developed difficult but it is not impossible. No power can stop India from becoming a developed country if the spirit of 'Viksit Bharat' guides its every step, policy and decision, he said, highlighting the strength and numbers of the country's young population.

"Big targets have to be set for a country to march forward..."

This is what today's India is doing," Modi said, adding that the country is accomplishing numerous goals in different sectors ahead of time.

India has set the target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2030 and will meet the goal before that, he said. The prime minister added that the government alone cannot drive the country forward and told youngsters drawn from across the country that the ownership in 'Viksit Bharat' is not Modi's alone but also of them. Their ideas will be part of the country's policies and give it direction, he said.

Achieving ambitious goals requires the active participation and collective effort of every citizen of the nation, he added. The prime minister cited the rise of the USA following its economic

crisis in the 1930s and Singapore's rise from a backward region lacking basic facilities to a major economic power to stress the need for setting big goals and sincerely working towards them.

He noted how India became an open defecation-free country, manufactured Covid vaccines and inoculated its population against the virus. Asserting that the 25 years till 2047 are India's golden period (Amrit Kaal), Modi said he has full confidence that the young population will realise the dream of 'Viksit Bharat'. This is the time for a quantum jump, he said.

The country also hopes to host the Olympics in the next decade and is working towards it with full dedication, he added. Swami Vivekananda had a lot of faith in

the young generation and said the youth will find solutions to all problems, Modi said. He added that he has absolute faith, "blind faith" in his words.

The event was held on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, which is observed as the National Youth Festival.

Stressing the role of high growth in India's development, Modi recounted how the country's capacity and budget in different fields have risen with the growth of its economy. The budget for infrastructure has grown six times in 10 years, he said.

Asserting that the Indian economy is on its way to becoming the third biggest in the world, the prime minister said it will cross USD 10 trillion by the next decade.

# Indonesian President set to grace Republic Day parade as chief guest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto is set to grace the upcoming Republic Day celebration in the national capital as the Chief Guest, people familiar with the matter said on Sunday. It is learnt that Subianto is unlikely to travel to Pakistan immediately after concluding his trip to India after New Delhi raised the issue. Jakarta planned a trip to Pakistan by the Indonesian President after his visit to New Delhi, Pakistan media had reported.

India is yet to formally announce this year's Republic Day chief guest.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold wide-ranging talks with Subianto during his visit. Every year, India invites world leaders to attend the Republic Day celebration. Last year, French President Emmanuel Macron was the chief guest.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah

El-Sisi graced the occasion in 2023. There was no Republic Day Chief guest in 2021 and 2022 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, then Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was the chief guest at the Republic Day celebration. In 2019, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was the chief guest at the Republic Day parade, while in 2018, leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries attended the event. In 2017, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan was the chief guest at the celebration, then French President Francois Hollande graced the occasion in 2016.

In 2015, then US President Barack Obama watched the parade. In 2014, ex-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the chief guest at the celebration, while Bhutan king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck attended the parade in 2013. The heads of state and Government who have attended the Republic Day celebrations include Nicolas

Sarkozy, Vladimir Putin, Nelson Mandela, John Major, Mohammed Khatami and Jacques Chirac.

The then British Prime Minister John Major had attended the R-Day celebration in 1993, Nelson Mandela participated as the then South African President in 1995, while South Korean President Lee Myung Bak witnessed the parade in 2010. In 2008, Sarkozy participated in the celebrations as French President, while his predecessor Chirac graced the occasion in 1998.

Other world leaders who have attended the celebration include Nepal's King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, who came here in 1999, Iran's then President Mohammed Khatami in 2003, then Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2011, and President of Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in 1991.

# New book reveals inside story of G20 negotiations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An hour before the start of the G20 Summit here on September 9, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked Sherpa Amitabh Kant the status of the leaders' declaration and when told there were some issues, he asserted he just wanted to see the result - a "consensus" - very soon.

Kant immediately went into a huddle with fellow Sherpas and managed to secure the final agreement.

These behind-the-scenes happenings find mention in Kant's new book "How India Scaled Mt G20: The Inside Story of the G20 Presidency".

India had pulled off a big diplomatic win after the G20 summit adopted a consensus declaration overcoming major differences on the Russia-Ukraine war.

Modi made the announcement about a consensus on the 37-page declaration and its subsequent adoption at the start of the second session on the opening day of the two-day summit of the grouping of major developed and developing countries.

Kant says the journey from the principles to the final draft of the NDDL (New Delhi G20 Leaders' Declaration) was, however, far from smooth.

"The text continued to face constant revisions and objections after 300 hours of negotiations over 250 bilateral meetings. The weight and seriousness of the negotiations were felt by all participants, but the pursuit of a mutually agreeable outcome still seemed far from reach," he writes in the book, published by Rupa.

# Kumbh set for global tourism boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An 'Incredible India Pavillion' showcasing cultural heritage and significance of the Kumbh Mela, luxury tents and enhanced air connectivity, the Ministry of Tourism is beckoning people to visit Prayagraj and explore the mega religious congregation that begins from Monday.

Expected to host over 40 crore devotees from across the globe,

this 45-day festival from January 13 to February 26 is also expected to draw a large number of tourists and cultural aficionados aiming to explore what is billed as one of the largest religious gatherings on earth.

The government on Sunday said the Ministry of Tourism is set to make the Maha Kumbh this year a "landmark event" not only for spiritual gatherings, but also for global tourism.

The ministry is rolling out sev-

eral initiatives to celebrate this momentous occasion, aimed at boosting both domestic and international tourism with the Maha Kumbh -- held every 12 years -- set to showcase India's rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. "To ensure seamless travel for tourists attending the Maha Kumbh, the Ministry of Tourism has partnered with Alliance Air to enhance air connectivity to Prayagraj from multiple cities across India.

# Center to revive district agrometeorological units to support farmers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government wants to establish a permanent framework to continue the work of district agrometeorological units (DAMUs), which had been operating in an ad-hoc manner until their closure last year, Ministry of Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran has said.

PTI had reported in August last year that the government intended to revive DAMUs, which provided block-level weather-related information to lakhs of farmers, before their closure last year following recommendations from Niti Aayog.

"As part of the pilot project, the Earth Sciences Ministry and the Agriculture Ministry provided weather information to farmers. Agricultural meteorologists in DAMUs analyze how weather conditions will affect crops. Their primary role is to offer advice to farmers. The system functioned well, but it should not remain ad-hoc; it needs to be made permanent," Ravichandran told PTI.

He said the government wants to establish a solid framework to carry out this vital work.

An official source told PTI that the Earth Sciences Ministry has also written to the Prime Minister's Office about the importance of reviving DAMUs and also voiced concerns related to their closure. Asked whether financial constraints were the main reason for winding up the project, the

source dismissed it as a "misunderstanding".

It was earlier reported that the Ministry of Earth Sciences wanted the Agriculture Ministry to bear the expenditure for DAMUs.

In August last year, a senior official had told PTI that the government intended to "formalize" DAMUs.

"DAMUs were temporary in nature, with staff hired on a per-project basis. The ad-hoc nature of posts affected the forecast quality. There will be a permanent structure in place this time. The manpower will include both permanent and contractual staff," the official had said.

In 2015, the government launched the Gramin Krishi Mausam Seva (GMSV) to provide crop and location-specific detailed advisories to farmers, helping them in day-to-day decision-making.

Over the years, 130 agromet field units (AMFUs) were set up in agro-climatic zones in the country in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Each AMFU caters to four to five districts.

In 2018, the government decided to extend the reach of the service by setting up 530 district agromet units on the premises of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK). However, the Covid pandemic impacted the process, and only 199 DAMUs could be set up, each with two contractual employees -- SMS Agromet and Agromet Observer.

In a meeting of the Expenditure Finance Committee held in February 2023, a senior Niti Aayog advisor suggested reevaluating the "necessity of providing staff at each DAMU". The official suggested the MoES may have "centralized units instead of field units as the collection of data is automated".

On January 17, 2024, the IMD wrote to all the DAMUs, asking them to wind up their operations by the end of the financial year 2023-24.

Several politicians, including Union minister Nitin Gadkari and Congress MP Jairam Ramesh, had opposed the move.

Over the last one year, the Maharashtra-based Agrometeorological Units Association has written to the prime minister, members of Parliament, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences, and Agriculture Ministry, requesting their intervention.

DAMU employees said lakhs of farmers depended on them for crucial agromet advisories, which have helped increase their resilience against worsening weather and climate impacts, reducing their losses and the claim amount under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

Agriculture in India continues to be vulnerable to weather vagaries despite self-sufficiency in food grain production, and uncertainty in the prediction of those events further add to the uncertainty.

# CBI Director hails Interpol's Silver Notice as an effective tool over MLATs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Termining the recently introduced Interpol 'Silver Notice' a "more effective" tool than the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) for gathering information on illicit assets parked offshore, CBI Director Praveen Sood has said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's idea, which has now been realised.

In an exclusive interaction with PTI, he said Prime Minister Modi had proposed in 2015 a system under the Interpol to trace money laundered offshore, and it has now taken shape as the Silver Notice.

The Notice, aimed at locating illicit assets laundered across borders, is the newest addition to the Interpol's suite of eight colour-coded Notices and Diffusions, which enable coun-

tries to share alerts and requests for information worldwide.

Conventionally, the information on illicit assets is gathered through MLATs which are treaties between two countries whereby they cooperate to provide and obtain formal assistance in the prevention, suppression, investigation, and prosecution of crime.

Common complaints under MLAT include requests being transferred from one agency to another or one bank to another. Sometimes difficulties arise in obtaining a response because of a large number of requests. India has MLATs with 45 countries, according to data on the Ministry of Home Affairs website.

"From MLAT, the stature has been increased to Interpol notice, which has a higher degree of emphasis than

MLAT. The sanctity of this process has increased; now it is through Interpol notices that are more acceptable to member countries. Possibly more information will come," the CBI chief said.

He, however, added that MLATs will continue to be an effective tool as they are easier and country-to-country level than Interpol notices which have a wider reach but are sparsely used.

Under the Interpol mechanism, states and central agencies can use the recently introduced Bharatpol to seamlessly send their requests for information through the CBI, which is designated as the National Central Bureau of India for all matters pertaining to the global organisation.

Addressing the Global Focal Conference on Asset Recovery

in 2015 hosted by the CBI and Interpol, the Prime Minister had said, "Targeting the proceeds of crime is an important element in this fight against crime. Hence, there is an imperative need to focus our efforts on enhancing international cooperation in the field of Asset Recovery to fight crime, corruption, and terrorism."

"The new Interpol Notice could add value to asset tracing investigations and facilitate real-time information sharing in complex cases," Modi had said.

The proposal took concrete form during the 2022 Interpol General Assembly hosted by India, where it was adopted as the first resolution.

The resolution recommended that an expert working group be established to assess various proposals devoted to exchange-

ing financial information and "tracing and recovery of criminal assets, including the 2015 General Assembly resolution to create a new Interpol notice named Silver Notice."

Interpol's 91st General Assembly, held in Vienna in 2023, outlined the development and implementation of the Silver Notice and Diffusion pilot through another resolution.

The 2023 resolution tasked the Expert Working Group on Asset Tracing and Recovery, in collaboration with the General Secretariat, with designing the pilot's scope, format, conditions, and safeguard measures.

India was part of the expert group, which was led by Italy. A pilot phase of the Silver Notice involving 52 countries and territories was launched on Friday and will run at least until November 2025.

# BJP to boost women leadership in party, prepares for 33% quota

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP is likely to have a higher representation of women in its organisational structures, compared to its outgoing committees at various levels from booth upwards, as it prepares for the implementation of the law reserving one-third seats Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women.

Sources said in a state like Madhya Pradesh, the BJP may have at least seven to eight women districts presidents in its 62 organisational districts against the none in the outgoing set-up.

Similarly, in Bihar, the BJP recently named two women district presidents amid its ongoing nationwide organisational election exercise.

Party sources said their national leadership is of the view that it is necessary to groom a crop of women leaders bottom-up so that able candidates are in place when the law reserving one-third of Lok Sabha and assembly seats come into force.

"In the absence of genuine women alternatives, dominant male leaders will prop up women linked to their families to fill the quota. The message to us is that we must cultivate



women leaders from booth upwards," a key state BJP leader said.

In Madhya Pradesh, considered a model BJP state organisation within the party, efforts have been made to ensure that at least three women are included in 11-member booth committees at most places, he said.

Similarly, the party is also continuing with its exercise to make its organisation more representative by incorporating adequate numbers of SCs, backwards and STs, sources added. The party sources noted that basic units of organisational structure, like mandal and district units, are the most fiercely contested, and women have traditionally had an disadvantage in the male-dominated local politics.

This is true for every party, as

strong local leaders want to control the areas they come from to pursue their political ambitions, they added.

The Bharatiya Janata Party is currently in the middle of its organisational election process in the run up to picking its new national president, who will replace J P Nadda. He has been at the helm since 2020 and is currently a Union minister as well.

The process to elect a new national president will begin when organisational elections are over in at least half of the states. Party sources said the process is expected to be over in at least 30 of the around 37 organisational states by the end of this month.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, better known as the women's reservation bill, was passed by Parliament last year. It reserves for women 33 per cent seats in state assemblies and Lok Sabha, and the provision will come into effect after the census and subsequent delimitation exercise.

The government is yet to announce the census, which was last held in 2011, but is tipped to do so sometime later this year.

# 13,000 trains to operate during Kumbh Mela

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With crores of pilgrims to converge at Prayagraj during the next one and a half month, the national transporter Indian Railways' have pulled up its socks to facilitate a smooth and memorable spiritual journey for people from length and breadth of the country.

During the last one month Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has inaugurated several key initiatives to enhance railways' readiness for the Maha Kumbh 2025 in the Prayagraj region.

These measures aim to provide safe, seamless, and technologically advanced services for millions of pilgrims. Some of the key announcements and inaugurations include launch of the Kumbh War Room which is a dedicated War Room at the Railway Board which will operate 24x7, with officials from Operations, Commercial, RPF, Mechanical, Engineering, and Electrical departments monitoring and coordinating activities.

A total of 1,176 CCTV cameras have been installed at nine stations in the Prayagraj region to provide live feeds for real-time monitoring viz monitoring structures like platforms, stations. The War Room will facilitate effective coordina-

tion between district authorities and railway officials, ensuring immediate assistance and operational efficiency.

Further a multilingual Communication Systems which will have 12-language announcement system inaugurated at Prayagraj, Naini, Cheeki, and Subedarganj stations to assist pilgrims besides the launch of a facilitation booklet in 22 languages, providing essential information for the pilgrims.

As part of the Rail Network Enhancements a total of 13,000 trains will operate during the Kumbh period which includes 10,000 regular trains; 3,134 special trains (4.5 times more than the previous Kumbh); 1,869 short-distance trains; 706 long-distance trains; 559 ring trains. Freight trains have been diverted to Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC) to ensure smooth passenger train operations.

Railway officials said an investment of Rs 5,000 crore has been made over the past three years for Kumbh-related projects like for passenger facilities like 48 platforms and 21 Foot Over Bridges (FoBs), 23 permanent holding areas with a combined capacity of over one lakh pilgrims, 554 ticketing counters, including 151 mobile UTS counters. 21 ROBs/RUBs to enhance road and rail mobility.

# EC defends Model Code of Conduct in polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

One of the key reasons cited by the government to push for simultaneous polls has been that frequent imposition of model code disrupts development work and normal public life, but the Election Commission has asserted it is a "vital instrumentality" aimed at providing level playing field in polls.

According to the bills brought by the government to implement 'one nation, one election', there is an imperative need for holding simultaneous elections for various reasons including polls becoming expensive and time-consuming.

The Constitution amendment bill to implement 'one nation, one election' said the imposition of a Model Code of Conduct in poll-bound parts of the country puts on hold the entire development programmes and causes disruption in normal public life.

It said that frequent poll code imposition also impacts the functioning of services and diverts the man manpower from their core activities to election duties for prolonged periods. But the poll authority is of the view that "it would not be correct to view the application of MCC in terms of disruption as it is a vital instrumentality aimed at providing level playing field to all stakeholders involved in campaign".

Responding to a questionnaire in March 2023 by the law commission on simultaneous polls, the EC had said the applicability of the model code depends on the cycle and frequency of elections and rationalisation of the same would, to that extent, curtail the time of MCC.

"It has been evolved by the Election Commission in consultation with political parties as a voluntarily code of conduct to be followed by all stakeholders and is an integral to the design of conducting free and fair elections and for credible outcomes," it said.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Rising drug menace

Amit Shah's contention that seven per cent of Indians are into substance abuse is an eye-opener; the Govt must act now

India is grappling with an escalating threat that cuts across social and economic lines: the increasing prevalence of drug abuse. With seven per cent of the population reportedly engaged in narcotics use, the issue has become a pressing concern for policymakers, law enforcement agencies and society at large. Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently underscored the severity of the problem, describing it as a "cancer" that could destroy the nation's future generations. Speaking at the 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' conference, Shah highlighted the government's intensified efforts against the drug menace. In 2024 alone, narcotics worth Rs16,914 crore were seized, a record-breaking figure. Comparing the past two decades, Shah noted that from 2004 to 2014, 3.63 lakh kilograms of drugs were seized, whereas from 2014 to 2024, the figure had risen seven-fold to 24 lakh kilograms. Despite this, the drug menace has only increased with even school going children also becoming drug addicts. The discovery of at least

50 illegal labs across the country underscores this issue. With stringent actions against traditional narcotics, there is a worrying shift towards the production and consumption of synthetic drugs, a trend that demands immediate intervention.

India's geographical location plays a significant role in its vulnerability to drug trafficking. Positioned near the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) and the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand), the country serves as both a transit and a destination hub for narcotics. Social factors such as unemployment, poverty, and peer pressure further exacerbate the issue, especially among the youth, creating a vicious cycle of addiction and criminality. Since 2019, the Modi government has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to tackle the drug crisis. Enhanced enforcement efforts have led to record-breaking seizures, reflecting improved coordination and action against traffickers. However, the drug menace has only increased. India needs to focus on strengthening its law enforcement framework, ensuring that agencies have access to advanced training, technology and resources to dismantle drug networks. The regulation of precursor chemicals must be tightened to prevent their misuse in synthetic drug production. Rehabilitation facilities must be expanded to provide holistic support to those battling addiction, while nationwide public awareness campaigns should be intensified to foster a culture of prevention. The fight against drugs also requires regional and global cooperation. Neighbouring countries must work together to address cross-border trafficking, share intelligence and coordinate enforcement actions. At the domestic level, fostering collaboration between governments, non-profits and local communities is essential to sustain long-term efforts. The drug menace in India is not merely a law enforcement challenge but a societal crisis that demands collective action. The government must step up the efforts before it becomes a full-blown crisis.



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# Pioneering meteorology and AQ management



RAJESH VERMA

IMD has evolved from focusing on weather forecasting to becoming a key player in climate research, disaster management and air quality monitoring

The completion of 150 years of establishment of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is a matter of great pride for every Indian. The India Meteorological Department (IMD), established in 1875, has played a pioneering role in meteorological and atmospheric studies in India. Initially focused on weather forecasting and seismology, the Department gradually expanded its scope to include climate research, disaster management, and environmental monitoring. IMD was perhaps the first institution in India to start systematic long-term measurement of solar radiation, precipitation chemistry, ozone, and aerosol optical and physical properties.

Recognising the importance of atmospheric composition, IMD became an active partner in global atmospheric environment monitoring and research programs and contributed significantly towards ozone hole, air quality, precipitation chemistry, climate change, solar dimming and brightening research. The Earth's climate system has demonstrably changed since the pre-industrial era. IMD has a key responsibility in understanding the science of climate change and variability as well as adaptation and mitigation strategies. It plays a prominent role in facilitating a broader use of climate information, products and services. IMD has been mandated to operate the national meteorological observing systems; develop and maintain data archives; undertake climate monitoring; and carry out climate diagnostics, climate analysis and climate assessment. All this reliable and authentic data and information collected over 150 years has provided a proper assessment of climate change in India and has also helped in developing policy formulation for adaptation and mitigation measures. The air quality forecast and assessment system helps CAQM and other pollution control authorities in the country to make decisions for air quality management including the implementation of GRAP. The problem associated with air pollution is very complex as



many factors contribute to changes in concentrations of the main pollutants. The major factors are anthropogenic emissions, urbanisation, specific topography, emissions sources, environmental factors and meteorology. The advances in computational resources allowed the use of advanced deterministic chemical transport models, leading to more accurate air quality forecasts, replacing the previous empirical and statistical approach which has some limitations.

The scientists at India Meteorological Department and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, Ministry of Earth Science jointly developed the advanced Air Quality Early Warning System (AQEWS). The advanced modelling framework consists of a high-resolution fully coupled state-of-the-science Weather Research and Forecasting model coupled with chemistry (commonly known as WRF-Chem), and ingest data from satellites on aerosol optical depth, surface data from air quality monitoring stations across India and high-resolution emissions from various anthropogenic and natural sources including dust and stubble burning, to create more accurate initial conditions using state-of-the-art data assimilation techniques,



THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL METEOROLOGY HAS WITNESSED TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATIONS, WITH CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGIES ENABLING PRECISE, REAL-TIME INSIGHTS INTO ATMOSPHERIC DYNAMICS AND AIR QUALITY

to improve forecasts. The chemical data assimilation is further integrated with dynamical downscaling at a 400-meter resolution to provide a very high spatial resolution air quality forecast for the Delhi region. The prediction part of the system consists of two modelling frameworks, one is based on the NCAR atmospheric chemistry transport model (WRF-Chem) and the second one is based on the Finnish Meteorological Institute model SILAM (System for Integrated modeling of Atmospheric composition). The models take into account the latest land use land cover (LULC) change information over Delhi, background aerosols and pollutants, long-range transport of dust from dust storms and particulate matter from stubble burning. The predictions are now available up to 72 hours lead time at 400 meter resolution and 10 days in advance at 10 km resolution for the Delhi region. The advanced warning system provides (a) an air quality forecast at 400 meters for the Delhi/ NCR region, (b) an air quality forecast on primary and secondary stress of Delhi/NCR at 400 meters resolution, (c) an air quality forecast at 10 km resolution for entire South Asian region, (d) real-time observations of air quality over Delhi/NCR region, (e) details about natural

aerosols like dust (from dust storms) and particulate matter using different satellite datasets, (f) Near real-time fire information over India, (g) forecast of the contribution of non-local fire emissions. Consistent efforts are required to further improve the model performance.

The field of environmental meteorology has witnessed transformative innovations, with cutting-edge technologies enabling precise, real-time insights into atmospheric dynamics and air quality. The accuracy of air quality forecasts is essential for mitigating the health impacts and economic costs of air pollution. IMD and associated institutions are continuously striving for improvement in environment monitoring and air quality prediction.

IMD's historical contributions have not only improved the scientific understanding of India's unique atmospheric conditions but have also played a critical role in global efforts to combat air pollution and climate change.

Many compliments to the meteorological community for their hard work in making IMD a global leader in the field of weather and climate. (The author is Chairperson of the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas; Views are personal)

## PICTALK



People buy kites ahead of 'Makar Sankranti' festival, in Amritsar

PTI

## Showcasing rural India's resilience and vision for Viksit Bharat 2047

From showcasing GI-certified products to championing organic farming, Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025 underscored rural India's vital role in nation building

Rural India, often described as the soul of the nation, has been a cornerstone of India's economic and cultural identity. The Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, organised by NABARD and inaugurated by the Prime Minister, illuminated the remarkable strides made by rural communities.



This event brought together policymakers, entrepreneurs, artisans, and thought leaders to celebrate and further the progress of rural India while envisioning a sustainable and inclusive future. Held under the theme 'Building a Resilient Rural India for a Viksit Bharat 2047', the Mahotsav provided a platform to showcase the diverse achievements of rural India. From GI-certified products and tribal crafts to organic agriculture and women-led entrepreneurship, the festival underscored the untapped economic and cultural potential of rural areas, particularly the North-Eastern region.

In his inaugural address, the Prime Minister emphasised the pivotal role of rural India in achieving a Viksit Bharat

by 2047. He highlighted the government's focus on enhancing rural infrastructure, promoting financial inclusion, and empowering marginalised communities. The Prime Minister's speech set the tone for the event, reinforcing the idea that the path to India's growth lies in the empowerment of its villages. NABARD Chairman, Shaji KV, delivered a compelling address, reflecting on the transformative journey of rural India over the past decade.

He pointed to significant advancements such as improved infrastructure through the Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojna, wide

spread electrification, digital connectivity, and the GI tagging of rural products. These initiatives, he stated, have bridged the gap between rural and urban areas, creating opportunities for inclusive economic growth. The Mahotsav also featured dynamic panel discussions that explored critical aspects of rural development. One panel delved into the potential of organic agriculture, discussing how climate-smart practices can address food security, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment. Highlights included the success of the "GOBAR-Dhan" Yojana, which has already established over 2,300 biogas units, and the expansion of the organic agriculture market, now valued at Rs16,800 crore.

Another panel emphasised the importance of empowering cooperatives, with NABARD's initiatives in digitising over 67,000 cooperative societies playing a transformative role in making banking more accessible and affordable for rural populations. The event wasn't just about discussions and

economic progress—it was also a celebration of India's rich cultural heritage. Vibrant performances brought to life the diverse artistic traditions of rural India. It provided rural entrepreneurs and artisans with access to broader markets, strengthened partnerships between stakeholders, and emphasised sustainable practices. The festival also resulted in actionable policy recommendations, including the promotion of digital literacy, enhanced support for organic farming, and initiatives to boost rural infrastructure and healthcare. As the event concluded, it left a resounding message: the future of India lies in the empowerment of its villages. With the collective efforts of organisations like NABARD and the unwavering support of the government, rural India is poised to lead the nation into a brighter, more sustainable future, aligning perfectly with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

(The writer is a development writer; views are personal)



PRABHA GUPTA

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CONGRESS CHALLENGES AAP

Madam — The Election Commission of India has announced the date for polling for 70 assembly seats in Delhi. Though a tough fight between the incumbent AAP and the BJP is on the cards, the Congress has thrown down the gauntlet by fielding strong candidates against the AAP heavyweights like Arvind Kejriwal and Atishi Marlena. Unlike the two previous occasions when it didn't contest assembly elections on a serious note and drew a blank, this time the Congress is leaving no stone unturned to corner the AAP on various issues such as the liquor scam and the Sheeshmahal row.

But the Congress' revival plan in Delhi has rattled the already crumbling INDIA bloc. Almost all parties of this bloc have openly thrown their weight behind the AAP. But for the Congress, the biggest shock has come from its oldest and most trusted ally, Lalu Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal. After Lalu Yadav backed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's willingness to lead the Opposition alliance instead of Congress leaders, his son Tejasvi Yadav dropped the bomb on the Congress by saying that the INDI alliance was only for Lok Sabha elections.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

### CEO CRITICISED FOR 90 HOUR PROPOSAL

Madam—L&T Chief has gone a few steps ahead of what Infosys's Narayana Murthy has prescribed and as expected, his suggestion of 90 hours a week and working even on Sundays has stirred up a debate. His remark to justify how long you can stare at your spouse is weird to say the least. Subrahmanyam should have looked at his former boss A N Naik's comment on regretting not spending enough time with his wife and children during his working life and after hanging up his boots, he was repenting it and said he is trying to wash his sins.

Ultimately, at the end of the day, it is all about productivity and creating a positive work environment in the organisation and not spending long hours at the office.

## Devastating wildfire in LA



In the wildfire that has engulfed Los Angeles in America, at least 11 people have died as the fire destroyed thousands of homes and more than 10,000 buildings, including schools, hospitals and so on. It has forced 180,000 people to evacuate their homes. The true death toll is not known. The fire, coupled with strong winds, has severely degraded air quality by releasing hazardous

smoke posing immediate and long-term risks to public health. The fire has already consumed around 22,000 acres of land. It is also said that climate change had made the grasses and shrubs that are fuelling the Los Angeles fire more vulnerable to the burning. Firefighters have been trying their level best to contain the spread of fire, but only 11 per cent of the fire had been contained to date.

It is estimated that the total damage and economic loss from this wildfire disaster could reach nearly 4 per cent of the annual GDP of the state of California. Heavy rain and a shift of wind direction alone could diminish the present situation. The wildfire in Los Angeles is a warning to other countries across the globe to be more cautious about climate change.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

These types of talks always come from the top, but implementation happens at the bottom, so if he really means what he said, he should walk the talk and work 90 hours a week for a year or two to set an example, and if it helps in improving business performance, then he should expect others to follow suit. In a top-down approach, if these CEOs push their employees beyond a point, it will only result in more burnout, and productivity is bound to suffer, needless to mention that mental and physical health will take a huge toll.

Bal Govind | Noida

### MINOR BEHIND SCHOOL BOMB THREATS

Madam—Sending fake bomb threats to more than 23 schools in Delhi by a minor student of class 12 is not only a grave crime but also poses a severe crisis for both society and the administration. Such baseless and deplorable acts create an atmosphere of tension in schools and spread chaos across the entire city. Security agencies are forced to waste their time and resources on non-existent threats, diverting their focus and strength from genuine emergen-

cies. This incident also highlights how excessive examination pressure can heavily impact students mentally. However, this does not justify the right of any student to spread terror in society.

If a student is experiencing mental stress due to exam pressure, they require guidance and proper mental support, not engagement in acts that cause fear and unrest in the community. In such cases, it is the responsibility of both the law and the education system to provide students with the right guidance. They must be taught that false threats are not only harmful to society but also leave an undesirable and severe impact on their personality and future. Despite being a minor, children must understand that their actions do not only affect their own future but also deeply impact the entire society. Education and guidance are the tools that can help in their development into responsible and sensitive citizens.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN

## THE CHAINS OF DEPRIVATION

The feeling of deprivation dominates most of us, leaving many of us caught in an endless cycle of unfulfilled desires



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Feeling of deprivation dominates life, one should not be surprised by this statement and this applies to all of us with some exceptions. You have guessed it. These fortunate souls are devotees of God. Let me substantiate what I have stated.

Do you agree that we have many unfulfilled desires; all of us have? Some of these are deep desires; those remain unfulfilled throughout our lives. The first one is to have plenty of money. What is plenty? Yes, it varies from person to person, but don't we change the quantum? I have done it throughout my life. What I had hoped for when I was a child has been exceeded many times over, but I still feel that more is what will really please me. By the way, I am one of those fortunate souls, whose needs have always been fulfilled, barring a few short spans. An extreme example is that of having a cycle and desiring a scooter. Once that is obtained, a car will be nice to have. This goes on till one gets to desire a private jet.

Then, come sexual feelings. From childhood, these feelings are never far away from our thoughts. And these are fanned by what we are exposed to by ads and what we choose to associate with like going on internet. Even children do so and giggle with friends. One may question why this feeling is so widespread. Because the creation can only be sustained by procreation. Even Lord Krishna has allowed this activity when He stated in the Bhagavad-Geeta, "I am passion in beings, according to religious principles," (7.11) But what human beings do not even animals do, i.e. make sex an overpowering urge. Even marriage does not satisfy it, though one feels in childhood that it would. Because sexual acts have a purpose, and cannot be made a burning desire.



The third enemy of us human beings are fearful thoughts. The underlying reason is our being small, very small in the overall context. We are also mostly ignorant, i.e., do not know what is good for us. Our intelligence is mostly flawed. There is spiritual intelligence, which is what the Bhagavad-Geeta is all about. Don't we avoid reading it? Because it will expose how little we know. This feeling of safety can only come from God, because only He can ensure it. Unfortunately, most of us avoid taking shelter of God, even though we know about Him.

Why don't we? Whatever we may say we really don't have much faith in God. Most of us feel that God is superior to us but not someone we must take shelter of, though God is everything. (7.19) Then, spiritual practices are considered utterly boring. Do we feel that they should be enjoyable like watching television? They are 'tapa' (austerities), as they should be. Our deeply embedded emotions like greed, lust and enviousness would not let us take shelter of God. The feeling that we can manage on our own also defeats us, even though we keep failing repeatedly in whatever we wish to achieve.

But everyone is not unintelligent. Many do take shelter of God and would never have second thoughts. Isn't this proof enough that they must be getting rewarded. Yes, God begins to guide and help them. One would know what is really desirable like peace, not unlimited sense enjoyment. God is so kind that He provides what we really need and He protects what is worth protecting. (9.22) God only can extricate us from our suffering caused by our past impious acts. (18.58) The list goes on, but one will only experience them if one gets started.

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

## Vivekananda: A vision for an inclusive world



AMAL CHANDRA

As we celebrate Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, it is crucial to revisit his teachings, not just as historical artefacts but as living ideas relevant for today



Swami Vivekananda, born Narendranath Datta on January 12, 1863, is one of India's most remarkable spiritual leaders and thinkers. His birth anniversary is more than a mere occasion to honour his memory; it is an invitation to reflect on his profound legacy and the enduring relevance of his ideas. While his role in revitalising Hinduism and introducing Indian philosophy to the Western world is well-documented, some aspects of Vivekananda's thought remain less explored yet deeply significant. In a world grappling with numerous social, ethical, and philosophical challenges, his teachings serve as a quintessential guide.

Vivekananda was much more than a spiritual icon; he was a pragmatic philosopher who firmly believed in the application of spiritual principles to practical life. His famous assertion that 'service to humans is service to God' exemplifies his view that spirituality should be lived, not merely theorised. He encouraged people to engage in social service, emphasising that true religion manifests in the form of compassion, kindness and action.

This perspective feels especially resonant in our modern times, where there is often a disconnection between spiritual practices and real-world issues. Vivekananda's message is a call to integrate spirituality with daily life, urging individuals to act with empathy and responsibility toward others.

One of the most forward-thinking aspects of Vivekananda's philosophy was his vision of education. He was deeply critical of the colonial education system, which he believed produced clerks rather than thinkers and visionaries. For Vivekananda, education was not merely about accumulating knowledge but about developing the whole person—intellectually, morally and spiritually. He emphasized the need for self-reliance and character-building, which he saw as the true objectives of education. In today's educa-



HE WAS A PATRIOT WHO DEEPLY LOVED INDIA, YET HIS NATIONALISM WAS INCLUSIVE, ROOTED IN THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL WEALTH OF THE NATION RATHER THAN IN AGGRESSION OR EXCLUSION

tional discourse, which increasingly values holistic development and critical thinking, Vivekananda's ideas are strikingly prescient. His approach encourages educators and policymakers to think beyond conventional curricula, fostering environments that nurture creativity, ethics, and personal growth. At a time when women's rights were severely restricted, he advocated for their education and empowerment, highlighting the significant role women could play in shaping society.

He often drew from India's spiritual heritage, pointing to historical examples of women who had achieved great intellectual and spiritual heights. In a world that continues to struggle with gender disparities, Vivekananda's vision offers a timeless reminder of the importance of creating opportunities for all, irrespective of gender. His thoughts encourage us to work towards dismantling barriers and fostering a society where everyone can achieve their potential. Another fascinating aspect of Vivekananda's thought was his balanced approach to nationalism and internationalism.

He was a patriot who deeply loved India, yet his nationalism was inclusive, rooted in the cultural and spiritual wealth of the nation rather than in aggression or exclusion.

His famous speech at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 exemplified his belief in the unity of humanity. In his view, true patriotism did not mean hostility toward others but an appreciation of one's culture while respecting and learning from others. This approach is particu-

larly relevant today, as we navigate the complexities of national pride in a globalised world. Vivekananda's inclusive nationalism provides a framework for fostering pride in one's heritage while promoting global solidarity. Less commonly discussed, yet equally significant, is Vivekananda's respect for science and rational inquiry. Unlike many of his contemporaries who saw religion and science as oppositional forces, Vivekananda believed they could complement each other. He encouraged the cultivation of a scientific temper, advocating for a worldview that embraced both rationality and spirituality.

His open-mindedness toward scientific discoveries and his belief in the power of reason present a balanced perspective that is incredibly relevant in today's age of rapid technological advancement. Vivekananda's stance reminds us that faith and reason need not be in conflict but can coalesce to enrich our understanding of the world. Vivekananda was also a pioneer of interfaith dialogue, advocating for the respect and understanding of all religious traditions. He saw the diversity of faiths not as a barrier but as a testament to the multifaceted nature of truth. His inclusive attitude towards different religions stands as a powerful counter to the sectarian violence and religious intolerance that plague many societies today. Vivekananda's vision of interfaith harmony reminds us of the need for empathy and respect in a world often divided along religious lines.

His approach encourages us to find common ground and to cel-

brate the richness that diverse spiritual traditions bring to humanity. The legacy of Swami Vivekananda is multifaceted.

He was a monk, a philosopher, a nationalist, and a reformer, whose ideas continue to inspire millions worldwide. His teachings invite us to reflect on our personal and collective responsibilities, urging us to work towards a world that is more just, compassionate, and inclusive. Vivekananda's emphasis on the practical application of spiritual principles, disagreement with the imposition of vegetarianism, advocacy for education that nurtures the whole person, progressive views on gender, inclusive nationalism, and respect for both science and interfaith dialogue, all remain remarkably relevant.

His vision offers solutions to many of the challenges we face today, from educational reforms to gender equality, from religious harmony to ethical living. As we celebrate his birth anniversary, it is crucial to revisit Swami Vivekananda's teachings, not just as historical artefacts but as living ideas that can guide us toward a better future. His message is clear: "Arise, awake" - true greatness lies in the ability to apply timeless principles to the needs of the present, to foster a world where humanity can thrive in all its diversity.

Swami Vivekananda's life and work remain a beacon, illuminating the path to a world that values compassion, justice, and the collective wellbeing of all its inhabitants.

(The writer is a policy analyst, political commentator, and columnist. Views expressed are personal)

## The future of turmeric exports: India's path to securing global market dominance

By adapting to domestic production practices with the changing global demand and fostering a collaborative ecosystem, India can secure its future exports in the global market

For centuries, India has been known as the 'Land of Spices,' producing and exporting a wide variety of products, renowned for their distinctive flavour, aroma and health benefits. One such spice is turmeric, known as the 'Golden Spice of India,' which has spread through trade beyond South Asia to different parts of the world. Today, turmeric is cultivated in many South Asian countries, China, Africa and the Caribbean and has multiple end-uses spanning industries such as food, condiment, dye, nutraceuticals, cosmetics and medicine. With global demand rising and growing demand for high-quality curcumin for preventive healthcare, sever-



ARPITA MUKHERJEE

al countries, such as Myanmar, Fiji, and Indonesia, are among the top five producers. India continues to be the largest exporter with close to 67 per cent of global exports in the year 2023. While the export value has increased from USD 182.53 million in 2017 to USD 212.65 million in 2023, the share in exports is showing a

slow decline, with new exporting countries like Fiji coming up. Global demand is also shifting towards turmeric, which has high curcumin content and organic varieties. Developed markets like the EU and the USA are emerging as key centres for the consumption of high-quality turmeric that meets stringent sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and quality standards. The share of the USA in the imports of turmeric increased from 13.80 per cent in 2017 to 18.98 per cent in 2023, making it the first largest importer followed by India. We continue to import significant amounts of turmeric (especially dry), mainly from Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Much of our

exports are in raw and powder format, where processing and further product developments are done in markets like the European Union (EU). Within the EU, countries like the Netherlands and Germany have become key exporters along with other countries like the USA. Some reasons for lower value addition in India include the inability to supply more than 10 per cent of the global requirement of turmeric with higher than 5 per cent curcumin, high use of pesticides and insecticides, lack of market knowledge and limited R&D and innovative products. The country must evolve from just a raw turmeric supplier by innovating, ensur-



ing quality, and adopting sustainable and good agricultural practices to maintain India's global dominance and move up the global value chain. Several companies have made strides in this direction by producing curcumin extracts for pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals. Products like Vicco Turmeric Cream combine turmeric with modern cosmetics, linking Ayurvedic

traditions with contemporary personal care. High-curcumin variants, such as Lakadong turmeric, are gaining international recognition for their medicinal benefits. The number of Geographical Indication (GI) turmeric has increased to six as of December 31, 2024. However, to achieve the Indian Government's objective of making India the global hub for turmeric production and to meet the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's projected target of turmeric exports of USD1 billion by 2030, further action is required. Establishing a National Turmeric Board, announced by the Prime Minister, is one such step towards consolidating and implementing com-

prehensive regulations governing the entire turmeric value chain, imperative to enhance the sector's global competitiveness. Additionally, although the standards of domestically produced turmeric align with international regulations, such as the CODEX, global turmeric users require higher curcumin content, with sustainable farming practices and for that targeted R&D is needed to improve the curcumin content of the produce. Export processes and compliance requirements need to be streamlined and simplified. Signing mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) for standards and organic may help. For example, the MRA for organic products signed

between India and Taiwan in 2024, is a step in the right direction. Similar MRAs need to be signed between India and its key turmeric export destinations like the EU and the USA, which will reduce the cost and time of certifications and testing. By aligning domestic production practices with the changing global demand and fostering a collaborative ecosystem, India can secure its future exports as a reliable and preferred supplier of high-quality turmeric in the global market. (The writer is professor, at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. With inputs from Eshana Mukherjee. Views are personal)



## BJP faces protest over Delhi candidate list, criticism grows

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the party announcing the names of 59 candidates for the upcoming Delhi assembly elections, resentment surfaced on Sunday over ticket distribution with a protest held outside its Delhi unit office and angry outburst by the outgoing MLA from Kaarwal Nagar who was not included in the candidates list.

A group of protesters from Tughlakabad in South Delhi held a dharna at the gate of Delhi BJP office, demanding a change in the candidate from the constituency. "Vikram Bidhuri Tum Sangharsh Karo; Modi Se Bair Nah, Rohtas Teri Khair Nah," the protesters, including mostly youngsters, chanted. Party leaders tried to pacify them.

In the second list of BJP candidates for the polls declared on Saturday, Rohtas Bidhuri was fielded from the Tughlakabad seat. In 2020 Assembly polls, Vikram Bidhuri who is a relative of senior party leader Ramesh Bidhuri, lost to AAP's Sahiram by over 13,000 votes.

A similar protest was also held by some party workers outside the Delhi BJP office against Mehrauli candidate Gajaindar Yadav after the announcement of the first list of candidates earlier this month. Mohan Singh Bisht, the

seniormost BJP MLA in the outgoing Assembly elected five times from Karwal Nagar, openly expressed unhappiness over being denied the ticket to contest from his stronghold. A senior party leader claimed he was pacified after a meeting with BJP chief JP Nadda. Earlier in the day Bisht said that the party's decision to replace him with Kapil Mishra was "wrong" and its consequences will be visible after voting on February 5. "You have challenged the 'samaj' (his Uttarakhandi community), not Mohan Singh Bisht. The BJP will lose at least 8-10 seats because of this decision, including Karawal Nagar, Burari, Mustafabad and Gokalpuri," Bisht warned.

He also was ambivalent on whether he will remain in the BJP or not.

The BJP legislator said he will open his cards on January 15, hinting he might file nomination papers from Karwal Nagar as an independent or after joining another party.

The last date for filing nomination papers for the Assembly polls is January 17. The BJP fielded Kapil Mishra, a Hindutva hardliner, from Karwal Nagar in North East Delhi, which was rocked by massive communal violence just after the 2020 Assembly polls.

## TMC MP suspended for protesting RG Kar rape and murder case

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Tension has erupted within the Trinamool Congress (TMC) following the suspension of senior party leader and former Rajya Sabha MP Dr Shantanu Sen, who has been vocal in his protests over the rape and murder case at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. Sen's suspension has sparked discontent among party members, with some alleging that the decision tacitly endorses the criminal activities of "mafia elements" that have been implicated in

the RG Kar campus scandal. A former TMC MLA, speaking on condition of anonymity, criticised the move, stating, "The suspension of Shantanu Sen seems to give a stamp of approval to the mafia elements responsible for tarnishing the RG Kar campus and disrupting the state's medical education system." Sen, a medical doctor who graduated from RG Kar, has long been an outspoken critic of corruption and malpractice within the state's healthcare system. His daughter, also an

RG Kar student, has been at the forefront of a movement against alleged mafia elements, including former principal Sandip Ghosh, who is currently incarcerated in connection with the case. Sources close to the TMC suggest that the suspension of Sen, known for his close ties to party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, is part of the leadership's broader efforts to enforce discipline within the party as it prepares for the 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections. However, Sen himself has

expressed confusion about the rationale behind his suspension. "I really don't know the reason behind my suspension. I am yet to receive any information about it from the party," Sen stated, adding that he trusts in his leadership, which he believes will always support standing up for the truth. The controversy surrounding Sen's suspension highlights growing divisions within the TMC, as political maneuvering intensifies ahead of the upcoming elections.

## BJP lists 59 candidates in new list, Bisht Defies Party

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP on Sunday released the third list of candidates for the upcoming Delhi elections featuring the name of sitting BJP MLA Mohan Singh Bisht from Mustafabad assembly constituency. This comes after the five time MLA on Sunday openly criticised the party leadership for not giving him ticket from Karawal Nagar, instead fielding Delhi BJP Vice-President from there. He had also claimed that he will not take ticket from any other seat and will file his candidature from Karawal Nagar only. "Clearly the party thinks it's a BJP seat and they think 'BJP

mei kisi aira gaira natthu khaira- kiso ko bhi lada denge who jeet jayega (they will field anyone from BJP and he will win)". This is a big mistake," Bisht remarked. He added that in the coming days, the party will know the importance of ground workers' existence in these elections. "Not just this election, be it Burari, Karawal Nagar, Ghonda, Seelampur, Gokalpuri and Nand Nagri seats; what'll happen on all these seats, only time will tell" he said. Further declaring his loyalty to Karawal Nagar, Bisht asserted, "I will not contest from any other seat. I will file my nomination from the Karawal Nagar seat."

## Global temperatures passed critical 1.5 C in 2024

PTI ■ OXFORD

The earth's climate experienced its hottest year in 2024. Extreme flooding in April killed hundreds of people in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A year-long drought has left Amazon river levels at an all-time low. And in Athens, Greece, the ancient Acropolis was closed in the afternoons to protect tourists from dangerous heat.

A new report from the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service confirms that 2024 was the first year on record with a global average temperature exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. All continents except Australasia and Antarctica experienced their hottest year on record, with 11 months of the year exceeding the 1.5

degrees Celsius level. Global temperatures have been at record levels – and still rising – for several years now. The previous hottest year on record was 2023. All ten of the hottest years on record have fallen within the last decade. But this is the first time a calendar year has exceeded the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold. Scientists at Copernicus used reanalysis to calculate the temperature rises and estimate changes to extreme events. Reanalysis is produced in real-time, combining observations from as many sources as possible – including satellites, weather stations and ships – with a state-of-the-art weather forecasting model, to build up a complete picture of the weather across the globe across the past year. The resulting dataset is one of

the key tools used by scientists globally to study weather and climate. Limiting sustained global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is a key target of the Paris agreement, the 2015 international treaty which aims to mitigate climate change. The 195 signatory nations pledged to "pursue efforts" to keep long-term average warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. While reaching 1.5 degrees Celsius in 2024 is a milestone, surpassing 1.5 degrees Celsius for a single year does not constitute crossing the Paris threshold. Year-to-year fluctuations in the weather mean that even if a single year surpasses 1.5 degrees Celsius, the long-term average may still lie below that.

## AAP Complains to EC Over BJP's False Video

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission of India against the BJP, accusing it of spreading misinformation and violating the Model Code of Conduct. The complaint alleges that the BJP shared a false video on social media, depicting pothole-ridden roads as being located in Delhi when they were actually from Faridabad, Haryana. "The party (BJP) has been spreading misinformation through a false video on their social media channels, showcasing roads in Delhi in a deplorable condition. However, it has been exposed that the road featured in the video is actually located in Faridabad, Haryana," said the AAP's complaint letter. The letter attaches screenshots of tweets posted from the BJP's Delhi handle, where the purported videos were shared. It also includes links to videos debunking

the claim, showing the actual location of the road. The AAP contended that such acts amount to a "blatant violation" of the Model Code of Conduct, which prohibits the dissemination of false propaganda. The party has requested the Election Commission of India (ECI) to take strict action, including the immediate removal of the video from the BJP's social media accounts, legal prosecution under Section 123(4) of the Representation of People Act, 1951, Section 340 of the BNS and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act, and measures to prevent the dissemination of such misinformation in future. "These acts destroy the sanctity of the election process, and parties committing such offences should be held accountable. An example should be set for the public to maintain the integrity of the electoral process," the letter states.

## SL Navy arrests eight Indian fishermen

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday said it has arrested eight Indian fishermen for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters and seized two fishing trawlers. The arrests took place on Saturday night "during a special operation conducted in the sea area north of Mannar", it said in a press statement. With this arrest, so far this year 18 Indian fishermen have been arrested and three trawlers confiscated, the statement said. The Navy said "in the dark hours of 11th January", the North Central Naval Command spotted a cluster of Indian fishing boats "engaging in illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters. In response, the Northern Naval Command deployed its Fast Attack Craft and North Central Naval Command its Inshore Patrol Craft to drive away those Indian fishing boats poaching in the sea area north of Mannar".

## Jaishankar to attend Trump's inauguration

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"During the visit, the external affairs minister will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming administration, as also some other dignitaries visiting the US on that occasion," the MEA said in a statement. There have been concerns in many countries over the Trump administration's policy over a range of sensitive issues including tariff, climate change and overall foreign policy priorities against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in West Asia. Before this Jaishankar is scheduled to visit Spain on January 13-14 during which he will meet the country's leadership and hold discussions with his Spanish counterpart Manuel Albares on the entire gamut of the bilateral ties, the MEA on Sunday said. This will be Jaishankar's first visit to Spain as an external affairs minister, it said. "External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar (EAM) will be on an official visit to the Kingdom of Spain on 13-14 January 2025. This will be his first visit as External Affairs Minister to Spain," the MEA said in a statement. MEA also said that he is scheduled to address the 9th Annual Conference of Spanish Ambassadors and meet the Indian community.

tariff, climate change and overall foreign policy priorities against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in West Asia. Before this Jaishankar is scheduled to visit Spain on January 13-14 during which he will meet the country's leadership and hold discussions with his Spanish counterpart Manuel Albares on the entire gamut of the bilateral ties, the MEA on Sunday said. This will be Jaishankar's first visit to Spain as an external affairs minister, it said. "External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar (EAM) will be on an official visit to the Kingdom of Spain on 13-14 January 2025. This will be his first visit as External Affairs Minister to Spain," the MEA said in a statement. MEA also said that he is scheduled to address the 9th Annual Conference of Spanish Ambassadors and meet the Indian community.

## Kolkata, Bengaluru, Pune slowest in traffic globally

From page 1

In Asia, Kyoto, Japan and Davao City, Philippines also figured in the top 10. The leading French city in the list is Bordeaux (24th), where it takes 31 minutes and 8 seconds to cover 10 km, while Paris (45th), it takes 28 minutes and 53 seconds. Other indicators measure the level of congestion in a city. Mexico City has a record congestion rate of 52%. This means that on all routes surveyed throughout the year on the entire road network, journey

times are 52% longer than they would be when traffic is free-flowing in the city. Mexico City is followed by Bangkok with a congestion rate of 50%. In Europe, Bucharest has a congestion rate of 48% to put it in fifth place while Dublin is in 10th position and Los Angeles in 20th). Finally, in terms of lost time, Lima, Peru, and Dublin, Ireland, were the places where motorists wasted the most time in congestion, with no less than 155 hours spent in traffic jams, on a typical 10-kilometer journey, made

every working day in the morning and evening rush hours. By comparison, drivers in New York lose an average of 98 hours per year in rush hour traffic, in Paris 101 hours, Tokyo 82 hours, in Rio de Janeiro 78, Sydney 75 and Hong Kong 71 hours. The TomTom Traffic Index 2024 covers a total of 500 cities in 62 countries. The data comes from over 600 million connected devices, starting with in-car navigation systems and smartphones using TomTom applications.

## BCCI names new secretary and treasurer

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Speaking to reporters after the SGM, BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla said apart from the election nothing was tabled in the meeting. "There was single point agenda (for the election of treasurer and secretary post). So nothing else was discussed at the SGM," Shukla. Following the SGM, Shukla

was also part of Women's Premier League Committee meeting. "The WPL venues have been almost finalised. They will be declared soon," said the BCCI vice-president. Shukla added that the selection meeting for the Champions Trophy will be held on January 18 or 19. The selectors had announced the squad for the five-match series against England on

Saturday but did not name the squad for the following three ODIs against England as well as the Champions Trophy beginning February 19. India play their Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh on February 20. Under the hybrid model, India will all play their games in Dubai while the other league games will be played in host country Pakistan.

## SKM to hold tractor marches on Republic Day

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The demands also include a comprehensive loan waiver scheme for farmers and farm workers, no privatisation of electricity, no smart metres, provision of free electricity up to 300 units and implementation of the LARR Act 2013, among others. All the State Coordination Committees (SCCs) of SKM will issue calls to protest against NPFAM by burning its copies. "SKM strongly

condemned the authoritarian, insensitive attitude of the Prime Minister for not willing to discuss with the Kisan organisations and to protect the life of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal," SKM said. The umbrella body of farmers' organisations, which led the 2020-21 farmers' protests against the now scrapped farm laws, alleged that the Supreme Court and the President of India have become "helpless to intervene

to save the farmer leader's life despite his fast-unto-death struggle crossing 46 days." "This is mainly due to the adamant stand of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is surrendering to the rapacious corporate forces that are hell-bent on imposing their dominance on agriculture, industry, and services by denying minimum support price to farmers, minimum wage to workers, and destroying productive employment for the youth,"

they said. "The people's livelihood is at stake due to the corporate onslaught through a series of pro-corporate reforms, the latest being the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, which challenges the federal structure of the Indian Union, one of the basic principles of the Indian Constitution," they added. They further announced that a coordination meeting of SKM with SKM (Non-

Political) and KMM will be held on 13th January at Patran, a town near Khanauri. A six-member committee of SKM visited the Khanauri protest site on Friday and invited SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha for a meeting to unify farmer bodies for a joint fight against the Centre to secure farmers' demands. The meeting was initially scheduled for January 15 in Patiala but was rescheduled due to Dallewal's health condition.

## Dhaka opposes India's border fencing

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"He emphasised that the construction of barbed wire fences without proper authorisation undermines the spirit of cooperation and friendly relations between the two neighbouring countries. He hoped that the upcoming BGB-BSF DG Level Talks would be able to discuss the matter at length," it added. Referring to the recent killing of a Bangladesh citizen at Sunamganj by BSF, the foreign secretary expressed deep concern and disappointment over such repetition of border killings, it said. He "strongly resented these acts of killing and called for urgent action by the Indian authorities to stop recurrence of such incidents and conduct enquiries into all these border killings and take actions against those responsible," the statement said. The foreign secretary mentioned that it is also "a matter of grave concern that despite repeated firm commitments from the Indian authorities to pursue non-lethal strategy and to stop killings, such incidents of killing have been continuing," it added. Jashim Uddin called upon the Indian government to "advise all concerned authorities in India to refrain from any provocative actions that could escalate tensions along the shared border". He also said that Bangladesh believes that "such issues should be resolved through

constructive dialogue, in accordance with existing bilateral agreements, and in a way that upholds peace and tranquility along the border," the statement added. Earlier in the day, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd.) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said that India halted construction of barbed wire fencing along the border due to the strong opposition from the Border Guard Bangladesh and locals. Addressing a media briefing, Chowdhury said that due to some unequal agreements signed during the previous government's tenure, several issues have arisen along the Bangladesh-India border. "However, the efforts of our people and the BGB have forced India to stop certain activities, including the construction of barbed wire fences." Chowdhury said Bangladesh and India have four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) to govern border activities. Of these, the 1975 MoU specifies that no development with defence potential can take place within 150 yards of the zero line. Another MoU states that no development activities can occur within this boundary without mutual consent. Any such work requires prior agreement between the two nations," he said. The adviser said India has already fenced 3,271 kilometres of the 4,156-kilometer-long border with

Bangladesh, leaving approximately 885 kilometres unfenced. He accused the previous government led by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina of granting India unequal opportunities, which led to disputes over barbed wire fencing at 160 locations between 2010 and 2023. "Recently, conflicts have surfaced in five areas, including (northwestern) Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Lalmonirhat, and the Tin Bigha Corridor. Thanks to the strong position of the BGB and locals, India has been forced to halt its activities," he added. He said that under the 1974 agreement, Bangladesh handed over Berubari to India after parliamentary ratification. In return, India was supposed to provide Bangladesh access to the Tin Bigha Corridor, but it failed to fulfil this commitment or ratify the agreement in its parliament, he added. "They used to open the corridor for an hour and then close it for another hour. Finally, in 2010, an agreement was reached to keep the corridor open 24 hours. However, this agreement also allowed India to construct a border fence on the zero line at Angarpota, violating the 150-yard rule," he said. "Now, while we oppose this construction, we face challenges as Bangladesh is a signatory to the 2010 agreement," he said, adding that the foreign ministry took up the matter for diplomatic engagement.

## Congress promises ₹8,500 to educated unemployed youth

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He said that this help will not be just financial. Instead, he added that they will try that people are absorbed in those fields where they have received training so that they can improve their skill set. Terming the politics in Delhi as one of 'allegations and counter-allegations', the senior Congress leader said, "Creating employment should be the first priority of any government, but both the central and state governments ignored the unemployed. Congress has always worked for the people. The Congress government did excellent work in the field of IT, in which I myself was a minister." "Today politics in Delhi is just about allegations and counter-allegations, but now people want a better alternative. We hope that in the coming elections, people

will choose the Congress party and form the government," he said. "Yes, this is a guarantee that if there is a person who is not able to be absorbed in any factory or company, then we are ready to bear. This is an encouragement for one year so that they can stand on their feet," Pilot said. During the press conference, AICC Delhi in-charge Qazi Nizamuddin, Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav and NSUI, Congress' student wing, President Varun Chaudhary were also present. Congress' Badli candidate Yadav said, "We have very thoughtfully introduced the 'Yuva Udaan Yojana'. This scheme is for those educated youth who are facing unemployment because drug addiction is a big problem in Delhi today. We want to give direction to the youth through Yuva Udaan Yojana. Under this scheme, registered

educated unemployed youth will get Rs 8,500 every month. Our government will try to ensure skill development of the youth so that they can get employment as per their skills." The leaders also launched the poster of the scheme during the press conference. "I have full confidence that on February 5, people will give the Congress a chance to serve in the national capital with a good majority," Pilot added. On January 6, the Congress announced the 'Pyaari Didi Yojana', promising a monthly financial assistance of Rs 2,500 for women if it is voted to power. On January 8, the party announced the 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana', under which it promised to provide free health insurance of up to Rs 25 lakh. Polling for the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5 and votes will be counted on February 8.

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The play also attacks the former chief minister on pollution, Yamuna river not being cleaned, water scarcity, Mohalla clinic, expenditure on advertisement, and Sheeshmahal among other things. They also call him 'Farjiwala', while making a vote appeal for the party's candidate from the district. About 140 teams, two in each district, will hold multiple performances to woo the public. This will begin after the nomination process which will take place on January 15. Moreover, it will also use attractive ways to connect to the larger public with the party also organizing flash malls in crowded places like malls, markets and other such places. "We are using a fusion of five to six songs that show our love to the country and also the election song of BJP 'Bahane nahi Badlav chahiye, Delhi me BJP sarkar chahiye' (We don't need excuses we need change, we need BJP government in Delhi)," a participant who will be doing flash mob said, adding that they will perform

this dance at different places to spread the party's narrative. In musical performances, teams have come up with different songs centered around the theme of bring out the failures of the AAP government and telling them that BJP is the best alternative. In one of the songs presented by the teams, the lines were 'Kehte ki Yamuna ji me gote sab lagayege, saf pani Delhi ko nalo se pilayenge, Kichad kar diya Yamuna ko, Delhi ban gayi dal dal, O dum tor rahi hai pardushan se Delhi har ek pal' (They used to say we all will take a dive in Yamuna river together, they will make Delhi drink clean water from the taps, but they turned Yamuna into mud, Delhi has become a mere mortal, Delhi is losing its breath due to the pollution every single moment) The BJP is vying to end their drought of more than two decades of not being in power in the national Capital while AAP is looking to have a third full term government in Delhi. The counting for the elections are slated to be held on February 8.



# Malala slams Afghan Taliban for 'gender apartheid' against women

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD



Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai on Sunday slammed the Afghan Taliban regime for instituting a system of "gender apartheid" against women by disguising their crimes in the cloak of culture and religion. "Simply put, the Taliban do not see women as human beings. They cloak their crimes in cultural and religious justification. These policies are a violation of human rights and have no basis in Islamic teachings," she said while speaking on girls' education in Muslim nations on the second and final day of an international conference in Islamabad. Taliban recaptured power in 2021 by toppling the government of Ashraf Ghani and since then ruled Afghanistan with impunity, by legalising several anti-women policies, including denying them the right to education. The 27-year-old Nobel laureate even questioned the Afghan government on the claim of

their introducing Islamic system in the country. "They are violations of human rights, and no cultural or religious excuse can justify them," she said. She urged Muslim leaders to avoid giving recognition to the Taliban's government in Afghanistan and to demonstrate genuine leadership by standing up against their policies limiting education for women and girls. "Do not legitimize them," she asked the Muslim leaders, as she termed the Taliban regime as "perpetrators of gender

apartheid." She said that an entire generation of girls is being robbed of their future in Afghanistan. "The Taliban have ripped away the right to learn from every Afghan girl and they want to eliminate women and girls from every aspect of public life and erase them from society," she said. Malala also said that 12 million Pakistani girls were out of school, one of the highest numbers in the world, but expressed satisfaction that the conference was taking place here in Pakistan.

She also criticised Israeli actions in Gaza, accusing it of dismantling the region's education system and committing human rights violations. "In Gaza, Israel has decimated the entire education system," she said. "They have bombed all universities, destroyed more than 90% of schools, and indiscriminately attacked civilians sheltering in school buildings..." She urged international solidarity to support education in conflict zones and end discriminatory practices against women and girls. Malala was shot in the face by the Pakistani Taliban at the age of 15 for opposing them but survived to become a global symbol of resilience and advocacy for girls' education. She came to Pakistan to attend the two-day summit, which aimed to address challenges in girls' education across Muslim communities and explore international leadership's role in ensuring equal access to education.

# Bangladesh's Yunus asks UK to investigate graft scandal of Sheikh Hasina's niece

PTI ■ DHAKA

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has called for an investigation into the properties of British minister Tulip Siddiq and her family, indicating that they may have acquired them through unlawful means during her aunt Sheikh Hasina's tenure as Bangladesh premier, reports said on Sunday. In an interview with the Times newspaper, Yunus condemned the use of properties gifted to Siddiq and her family by "allies of her aunt's deposed regime". He demanded the return of the assets to Bangladesh if she is found to have benefited from "plain robbery". "It's about plain robbery," Yunus said, accusing the previous government of embezzling funds through fraudulent practices that have had long-lasting effects on the country.

Siddiq, a member of Britain's Labour Cabinet, serves as the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and City Minister, responsible for addressing corruption within the UK's financial markets. A day after publishing Yunus' interview, the British newspaper on Sunday carried another report titled "(UK) PM urged to sack Tulip Siddiq after Bangladesh leader's rebuke". It said the "anti-corruption minister is facing calls to resign after the leader of Bangladesh condemned the use of properties gifted to her and her family by its former regime". According to the Sunday Times, Yunus' comments on the scandal engulfing Siddiq, 42, will add to the pressure on her to resign, though there are suggestions that Downing

Street is already looking for a replacement. Yunus' intervention came as a Sunday Times investigation found Siddiq spent years living in a Hampstead property bought by an offshore company named in the Panama Papers and connected to two Bangladeshi businessmen. In his interview with the Times, Yunus said it was an "irony" that Siddiq had been accused of corruption. Yunus referred to a recent official report that found the people connected with the Awami League regime had taken billions of dollars a year out of Bangladesh, with some funds used to buy assets, including properties abroad. "They pointed out how money is stolen, but it's not stealing — when you steal, you hide it. It's a robbery," he said. Asked if it could apply to prop-

erties used by members of Hasina's family in London, Chief Adviser Yunus said, "Absolutely, it's about plain robbery. Nothing else." "If a UK parliament member is involved, definitely it's a big issue... We got used to (the previous regime) taking away everything, so we feel relieved that you're bringing this [issue] to the attention of the world," he said. Yunus also said that if feasible, the properties bought by the Awami League allies should be returned to Bangladesh. He said his officials aimed to recover cash and assets held overseas but originating from funds in Bangladesh. According to the Sunday Times, the National Crime Agency, Britain's equivalent of the FBI, indicated its willingness to help Bangladesh recover certain assets.

# 'Give your head a shake!': Canada's former leader Chretien tells Trump

AP ■ VANCOUVER

President-elect Donald Trump's remarks that Canada should become the 51st state drew condemnation and a patriotic outburst on Saturday from a former Canadian prime minister who offered blunt advice to the incoming US leader — "Give your head a shake!" Jean Chretien, who was Canada's prime minister from 1993 to 2003, joined a chorus of officials from the northern US neighbour who say Trump's remarks are no longer a joke and may undermine America's closest ally. Canada would never agree to become part of the US, Chretien wrote in an article published in The Globe and Mail newspaper, celebrating his 91st birthday. He extolled his nation's love of independence and said Trump's remarks amounted to "totally

unacceptable insults and unprecedented threats" to Canadian sovereignty. "To Donald Trump, from one old guy to another, give your head a shake!" Chretien said. "What could make you think that Canadians would ever give up the best country in the world — and make no mistake that is what we are — to join the United States?" Trump has tossed expansionist rhetoric not just at Canada but also at other US allies, with arguments that the frontiers of American power need to be extended to the Danish territory of Greenland, and southward to include the Panama Canal. And while many European leaders have been measured in their response, Canadians have not held back. "If you think that threatening and insulting us is going to win us over, you really don't know a thing about us," Chretien

wrote in the article. "We may look easy-going, mild-mannered. But make no mistake, we have spine and toughness." The US imports approximately 60 per cent of its crude oil from Canada, which is also the top export destination for 36 US states. Nearly USD 2.7 billion worth of goods and services cross the border each day. Canadian officials have been talking to incoming Trump administration officials about increasing border security in an effort to avoid a sweeping 25 per cent tariff that Trump has threatened to impose on all Canadian products. When Trump imposed higher tariffs during his first term in office, other countries responded with retaliatory tariffs of their own. Canada announced billions of new duties in 2018 against the US in a tit-for-tat response to new taxes on Canadian steel and aluminium.

# Gas station blast kills 15 in Yemen

AP ■ CAIRO

An explosion at a gas station triggered a massive fire in central Yemen, killing at least 15 people, health officials said on Sunday. The explosion occurred Saturday at the Zaher district in the province of Bayda, the Houthi rebel-run Health Ministry said in a statement. At least 67 others were injured, including 40 in critical condition. The ministry said rescue teams were searching for those reported missing. It wasn't immediately clear what caused the explosion. Footage circulated online showing a massive fire that sent columns of smoke into the sky and left vehicles charred and burning. Bayda is controlled by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have been at war with Yemen's internationally recognised government for more than a decade. Yemen's civil war began in 2014, when the rebels took control of the capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north, forcing the government to flee to the south, then to Saudi Arabia.

# LA wildfires death toll rises as crews fight heavy winds to save homes, landmarks

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

The death toll from the wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area rose to 16 as crews battling to cut off the spreading blazes before potentially strong winds return that could push the flames toward some of the city's most famous landmarks. Five of the deaths were attributed to the Palisades Fire and 11 resulted from the Eaton Fire, the Los Angeles County coroner's office said in a statement Saturday evening. The previous number of confirmed fatalities before Saturday was 11, but officials said they expected that figure to rise as teams with cadaver dogs conduct systematic grid searches in levelled neighbourhoods. Authorities have established a centre where people can report the missing. There were fears that winds could move the fires toward the J Paul Getty Museum and the University of California, Los Angeles, while new evacuation warnings left more homeowners on edge. By Saturday evening, Cal Fire reported the Palisades, Eaton, Kenneth and Hurst fires had consumed about 62 square miles, an area larger than San Francisco. The Palisades and Eaton fires accounted for 59 square miles. In a briefing posted online Saturday evening, Michael Traum of the California Office of Emergency Services said 150,000 people in Los Angeles County were under evacuation orders, with more than 700 people taking refuge in nine shelters. Crews from California and nine other states are part of the ongoing response that includes 1,354 fire engines, 84 aircraft and more than 14,000 personnel, including newly arrived firefighters from Mexico, he said. With Cal Fire reporting containment of the Palisades Fire at 11% and the Eaton Fire at 15% on Saturday night, the fight is set to continue. "Weather conditions are still critical and another round of strong winds is expected starting Monday," Traum said. **Fighting to save public and private areas:** A fierce battle

occurred Saturday in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities not far from the Pacific coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill. Firefighters on the ground used hoses in an attempt to beat back leaping flames as thick smoke blanketed the chaparral-covered hillside. CalFire Operations Chief Christian Litz said Saturday that a main focus was the Palisades Fire burning in the canyon area, not far from the UCLA campus. New evacuations were ordered

made progress Friday afternoon on the Eaton Fire north of Pasadena, which has burned more than 7,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. Most evacuation orders for the area were lifted, officials said. No cause has been determined for the largest fires and early estimates indicate the wildfires could be the nation's costliest ever. A preliminary estimate by AccuWeather put the damage and economic losses so far between \$135 billion and \$150 billion. **Overflowing kindness:**

Residents will be allowed to sift through rubble for keepsakes. "We have people driving up and around trying to get in just to look. Stay away," Luna said, urging people to abide by curfews. Officials on Saturday warned the ash can contain lead, arsenic, asbestos and other harmful materials. "If you're kicking that stuff up, you're breathing it in," said Chris Thomas, a spokesman for the unified incident command at the Palisades Fire who warned the material was "toxic".



Volunteers overflowed donation centres and some had to be turned away at locations including the Santa Anita Park horse racing track, where people who lost their homes sifted through stacks of donated shirts, blankets and other household goods. Altadena resident Jose Luis Godinez said three homes occupied by more than a dozen of his family members were destroyed. "Everything is gone," he said, speaking in Spanish. "All my family lived in those three houses and now we have nothing." **Officials warn against returning:** Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna warned residents against venturing

return with protective gear after damage teams evaluate their properties, Thomas said. **Leadership accused of skimping:** LA Mayor Karen Bass faces a critical test of her leadership during the city's greatest crisis in decades, but allegations of leadership failures, political blame and investigations have begun. Gov Gavin Newsom on Friday ordered state officials to determine why a 117 million-gallon reservoir was out of service and some hydrants had run dry. Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said city leadership failed her department by not providing enough money for firefighting. She also criticised the lack of water.

# Rate of HMPV infections in northern China declining

AP ■ BEIJING

The rate of infections with the flu-like human metapneumovirus (HMPV) in northern China is declining, a health official said Sunday, amid some international concern over a potential pandemic. HMPV, which belongs to the same family as the respiratory syncytial virus, causes flu or cold-like symptoms including fever, cough and nasal congestion. The symptoms often clear up by themselves, though they can cause lower respiratory tract infections among children, older adults and those immunocompromised. "The human metapneumovirus is not a new virus, and has been with humans for at

least several decades," said Wang Liping, a researcher at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, during a press briefing by China's National Health Commission. Wang added that the increase in recent years in the number of cases of the virus, first detected in the Netherlands in 2001, is due to better detection methods. "At present, the rate of positive cases in human metapneumovirus detection is fluctuating, and the rate of positive cases in northern provinces is declining, and the rate of positive cases among patients aged 14 and below has started to decline," she said. Concerns surfaced in recent days over a surge in HMPV

infections in northern China after images circulated online of hospitals overrun with masked patients. The World Health Organisation said it has not received reports of unusual outbreaks in China or elsewhere. Experts say HMPV is unlike COVID-19 in that it has been around for decades and there is some built-in immunity to it. Most children are infected with the virus by the age of 5. Wang said respiratory diseases currently affecting people in China are caused by known pathogens, and no new infectious diseases have emerged. The number of patients in fever clinics and emergency departments across the country has been rising but is still

generally lower compared to the same period last year, said Gao Xinqiang, deputy director of the Department of Medical Emergency Response of the health commission. "There is no obvious shortage of medical resources," Gao said. Flu infections across the country are expected to gradually decline in mid-to-late January, said commission spokesperson Hu Qiangqiang. There are no vaccines or drugs available for HMPV. Experts recommend precautions against catching the virus and other respiratory diseases including washing one's hands regularly, avoiding crowds if possible, and wearing a mask in crowded places.

# Long wait for those whose homes destroyed in Lebanese war

AP ■ BEIRUT

Six weeks into a ceasefire that halted the war between Israel and Hezbollah, many displaced Lebanese whose homes were destroyed in the fighting want to rebuild — but reconstruction and compensation are slow in coming. Large swaths of southern and eastern Lebanon, as well as Beirut's southern suburbs, lie in ruins, tens of thousands of houses reduced to rubble in Israeli airstrikes. The World Bank estimated in a report in November — before the ceasefire later that month — that losses to Lebanon's infrastructure amount to some USD 3.4 billion. In the south, residents of dozens of villages along the Lebanon-Israel border can't go back because Israeli soldiers are still there. Under the US-negotiated ceasefire deal, Israeli forces are supposed to with-

draw by January 26 but there are doubts they will. Other terms of the deal are also uncertain — after Hezbollah's withdrawal, the Lebanese army is to step in and dismantle the militants' combat positions in the south. Israeli officials have complained the Lebanese troops are not moving in fast enough — to which they say the Israeli troops need to get out first. Reconstruction prospects — and who will foot the bill — remain unclear. In 2006, after the monthlong Israel-Hezbollah war, Hezbollah financed much of the USD 2.8 billion reconstruction with ally Iran's support. The Lebanese militant group has said it would do so again and has begun making some payments. But Hezbollah, which is also a powerful political party, has suffered significant losses in this latest war and for its part, Iran is now mired

in a crippling economic crisis. The cash-strapped and long paralysed Lebanese government is in little position to help and international donors may be stretched by the post-war needs in the Gaza Strip and neighbouring Syria. Many Lebanese say they are waiting for Hezbollah's promised compensation. Others say they received some money from the group — much less than the cost of the damage to their homes. Manal, a 53-year-old mother of four from the southern village of Marjayoun has been displaced with her family for over a year, since Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on October 8, 2023, in support of its ally Hamas in Gaza. Israel responded with shelling and airstrikes in southern Lebanon. In July, Manal's family heard that their home was destroyed. The family has now sought compensation from

Hezbollah. "We haven't received any money yet," said Manal, giving only her first name for fear of reprisals. "Maybe our turn hasn't arrived." On a recent day in southern Beirut, where airstrikes had hit just 100 metres (yards) away from his home, Mohammad watched as an excavator cleared debris, dust swirling in the air. He said his father went to Hezbollah officials and got USD 2,500 — not enough to cover USD 4,000 worth of damage to their home. "Dad took the money and left, thinking it was pointless to argue," said Mohammad, who also gave only his first name for fear of repercussions. He said his uncle was offered only USD 194 for a similarly damaged home. When the uncle complained, Mohammad said, Hezbollah asked him, "We sacrificed our blood, what did you do in the

war?" Others, however, say Hezbollah has compensated them fairly. Abdallah Skaiki, whose home — also in southern Beirut — was completely destroyed, said he received USD 14,000 from Qard Al-Hasan, a Hezbollah-linked microfinance institution. Hussein Khairredine, director of Jihad Binaa, the construction arm of Hezbollah, said the group is doing as much as it can. Its teams have surveyed over 80 per cent of damaged houses across Lebanon, he said. "We have begun compensating families," he said. "We have also started providing payments for a year's rent and compensations for furniture." Khairredin said their payments include USD 8,000 for furniture and USD 6,000 for a year's rent for those living in Beirut. Those who are staying elsewhere get USD 4,000 in money for rent.

Blueprints for each house are being prepared, he said, declining to elaborate on reconstruction plans. "We are not waiting for the government," he added. "But of course, we urge the state to act." There is little the government can do. The World Bank's report from mid-November said Lebanon's infrastructure and economic losses from the war amount to USD 8.5 billion. And that estimate doesn't take into account the last month of the war, Deputy Prime Minister Saadi Chami told The Associated Press. "The government does not have the financial resources for reconstruction," he said bluntly. The World Bank said 99,209 housing units were damaged — and 18 per cent of them were completely destroyed. In southern Beirut suburbs alone, satellite analysis by Lebanon's National Centre for Natural Hazards and Early Warning identified 353 build-

ings completely destroyed and over 6,000 homes damaged. Lebanese officials have appealed to the international community for funding. The government is working with the World Bank to get an updated damage assessment and hopes to set up a multi-donor trust fund. The World Bank is also exploring an "emergency project for Lebanon", focused on targeted assistance for areas most in need, Chami said, though no concrete plan has yet emerged. "If the World Bank gets involved, it will hopefully encourage the international community to donate money," Chami said. Ali Daamouh, a Hezbollah official, said earlier this month that the group has mobilized 145 reconstruction teams, which include 1,250 engineers, 300 data analysts and hundreds of auditors — many apparently volunteers. The compensations paid so

far have come from "the Iranian people", Daamouh said, without specifying if the money was from Iran's government or private donors. Jana, a 29-year-old architect, is volunteering with Hezbollah teams to survey the damage to her hometown of Nabatiyeh in southern Lebanon. Much of the city is destroyed, including an Ottoman-era market. Her father's warehouse was hit by airstrikes, and all the medical supplies stored there were consumed by a fire. Hezbollah officials "told us not to promise people or discuss reconstruction because there is no clear plan or funding for it yet", she told the AP. She did not give her last name because she wasn't authorised to talk about Hezbollah's actions. "They advised us to offer support and show the people that someone genuinely cares about their situation," she added.



# FinMin to meet heads of banks to review financial inclusion schemes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Ministry has called a meeting of heads of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) on Wednesday to review progress of various financial inclusion schemes, including Jan Suraksha and Mudra Yojana. The meeting, which would see participation from representatives of private sector banks, is scheduled to be chaired by Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju.

According to sources, the meeting to be chaired by the Secretary would also discuss and review the progress of various financial inclusion schemes including PM SVANidhi Schemes.

The Finance ministry from time to time launched various drives to achieve saturation under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana



(PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY). The PMJJBY offers life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh, in case of death due to any reason, to people in the age group of 18-50 years having a bank or post office account, who give their consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

On the other hand, the PMSBY offers insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh for accidental death or total permanent disability and Rs 1 lakh for partial permanent disability to people in the age group of 18-70 years with a bank or post office account, who give their consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

StandUp India Scheme,

launched on April 5, 2016, with a focus on economic empowerment and job creation, has been extended up to 2025.

The scheme aims to encourage all bank branches in extending loans to borrowers belonging to SC, ST and women borrowers in setting up their own greenfield enterprises.

Last year, the government approved the continuation of the Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme till December 2024.

The PM SVANidhi Scheme was launched in June 2020 by the government as a micro-credit facility with an aim to empower street vendors to recover losses incurred as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through PM SVANidhi, affordable collateral-free loans are given to street vendors.

# CII suggests 10-point agenda on ease of biz reforms ahead of Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the upcoming Budget, industry body CII on Sunday suggested a 10-point agenda to drive ease of doing business reforms, aimed at reducing compliance burden, simplifying regulatory frameworks, and improving transparency.

Among the "urgent policy interventions", the industry body has recommended that all regulatory approvals -- central, state and local levels -- must mandatorily be provided only through the National Single Window System.

It has also pitched for expediting the process of dispute resolution by improving the capacity of courts and placing greater reliance on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism.

For streamlining environmental compliances, Confederation of Indian



Industry (CII) said, a unified framework could be introduced, which consolidates all requirements into a single document.

Emphasising that easy access to land is important to facilitate new or expanding businesses, it said that states may be incentivised to develop an online integrated land authority with an objective to streamline land banks, digitise and integrate land records, provide information on disputed land and guide necessary reforms.

To assist industry in land acquisition across nation, the India Industrial Land Bank (IILB), which provides information on land across majority of states, can be evolved into a national-level land bank, with dedicated central budget support, it said.

While India has over the last decade remained focused on improving ease of doing business (EoDB), there is a need to maintain the momentum, especially in certain specific areas, the CII

said.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said, "Simplifying regulatory frameworks, reducing compliance burdens, and enhancing transparency should continue to remain our focus agenda for next several years. Compliances for industry related to various areas such as land, labour, dispute resolution, paying taxes and environment offer a vast scope for reduction, vital for boosting competitiveness, driving economic growth and employment generation."

To ensure timely processing of industry applications and delivery of services from the central ministries, an Act, imposing statutory obligation on all public authorities for time-bound delivery of services and redressal of grievances, could be passed, with provision of deemed approval beyond the prescribed timeline, CII suggested.

# India's coal import rises two per cent to 182 MT in April-November period

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's coal import rose by two per cent to 182.02 million tonnes (MT) in the April-November period of the current fiscal year.

The country's coal import was at 178.17 MT in the year-ago period, according to data compiled by business-to-business e-commerce company mjunction services ltd.

However, the country's coal import dropped to 19.57 MT in the month of November, over 22.30 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal.

"There was a drop in volumes, which was in line with market expectation. Ample availability in the domestic market reduced import demand from consuming sectors such as sponge iron and steel. Also, the



comfortable stock position at power plants resulted in muted demand for imports," mjunction MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said.

This trend is likely to continue in the coming months, he said.

During April-November 2024, non-cooking coal import was at 117.73 MT, lower than 118 MT imported during the same period last year. Coking coal import was at 36.93 MT during April-November period, down against 37.97 MT recorded in the year-ago

period. The government had earlier stressed on augmenting coal production and reducing the imports of dry-fuel.

As per the present import policy, coal can be freely imported by the consumers themselves considering their needs, based on their commercial prudence.

Coking Coal is being imported by Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) and other steel manufacturing units mainly to bridge the gap between the requirement and indigenous availability and to improve the quality.

Coal-based power plants, cement plants, captive power plants, sponge iron plants, industrial consumers and coal traders are importing non-cooking coal.

Coke is imported mainly by pig-iron manufacturers and iron and steel sector consumers using mini-blast furnaces.

# Amnesty Scheme for customs may be announced in Budget 2025-26 to reduce litigation: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to reduce litigation, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the upcoming Budget may announce an Amnesty Scheme for customs to foster ease of doing business.

"The main asks of the industry would certainly be aligned with the objectives of the government and one objective of the government has been litigation reduction. On that front, having an amnesty scheme for customs especially covering pre-GST legacy taxes like additional duty, special additional duty has been one of the asks of the industry," Price Waterhouse & Co LLP managing director Anurag Sehgal said.

The government had in the past announced amnesty schemes for excise and



service tax and even for the income tax but not for customs. There are estimates that over 40,000 cases were pending in various courts and tribunals pertaining to customs duty alone.

Another consultancy firm EY India said customs litigations are pending at various forums for a very long time and the same require time and effort to be spent by both the taxpayer and the

government in resolving them.

EY India also suggested that a one-time dispute/litigation resolution/settlement scheme should be introduced under the Customs Law to settle and resolve pending disputes.

According to Deloitte India partner Mahesh Jaising, the government should end long-drawn litigation to resolve long-standing disputes, alleviate the burdened

judicial pipeline and upgrade the law to keep pace with technological advancements and international best practices.

"An amnesty scheme, along the lines of Sab ka Vishwas, will be a welcome decision. The industry has been waiting for such a scheme for years to address pending litigation matters under customs. This will especially help small businesses avoid past disputes and move ahead with a clean slate," Jaising said.

Another important wishlist of the industry on customs would be rate rationalization to support the Make in India initiative, Sehgal said.

"You have PLI, Phased Manufacturing Programme coming up in many sectors. So rate rationalization would help promote investment in India," he said.

# Adani announces ₹65,000 Crore investment in energy, cement

Raipur, Jan 12 (PTI)

Industrialist Gautam Adani on Sunday called on Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and announced an investment of Rs 65,000 crore in the Adani Group's energy and cement projects in the state, officials said.

Adani met Sai at the latter's official residence in Chhattisgarh capital Raipur, a statement issued by the state's public relations department said.

During the meeting, Adani announced a planned investment of Rs 60,000 crore to expand the group's power plants in Raipur, Korba and Raigarh in the state.

# Inflation data, Q3 earnings, FII trading key factors to drive markets this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors will take cues from the December quarter corporate earnings, with blue-chips like Infosys, Reliance Industries scheduled to report their results this week, in addition, inflation data and trading activity of foreign investors will also be crucial in dictating market trends, analysts said.

Movement of crude oil prices and the dollar index will also be tracked by investors. The strengthening of the US dollar, along with rising US bond yields, impacted investors' confidence last week.

"The Indian equity markets are poised for a volatile week ahead, as investors eagerly await the release of Q3 earnings reports from major companies."

"Prominent names such as Infosys, Reliance Industries, HCL Technologies, HDFC AMC, HDFC Life Insurance Company, and Axis Bank are set to unveil their financial performance, which is likely to



significantly impact market sentiment," Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Adding to the market's dynamic, a tug-of-war between Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) continues to unfold, he said.

"India's CPI release on Monday will be a key factor," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

WPI inflation data is

scheduled to be announced on Tuesday.

Last week, the BSE benchmark slumped 1,844.2 points or 2.32 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 573.25 points or 2.38 per cent.

"The sharp decline in the market is attributed to multiple factors, including sustained foreign fund outflows, subdued expectations for Q3 earnings, continued weakness in the Indian rupee against the US dollar, and rising US 10-year bond yields."

"Additionally, a strengthening

dollar index and a sharp rebound in crude oil prices, raising inflationary concerns, further dampened investor sentiment," Puneet Singhania, Director at Master Trust Group, said.

India's industrial production (IIP) growth accelerated to a six-month high of 5.2 per cent year-on-year in November 2024, riding on the increased festive demand and pick up in the manufacturing sector, according to the official data released on Friday.

"Looking ahead, corporate earnings will be in the spotlight, with major companies, including IT giants, releasing their Q3 results. Macroeconomic data, such as India's inflation rate will also play a crucial role in shaping market direction.

On the global front, updates on the US economy, particularly labour market data and inflation trends, may impact FII flows. A spike in crude oil prices will add inflationary pressure.

# Falling rupee puts pressure on Air India's cost structure, says company official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Falling rupee puts pressure on Air India's cost structure and profitability but the airline has some natural hedge as it can charge more for international flights where tickets are priced in foreign currencies, according to a senior company official.

In recent weeks, Indian rupee has been on a decline and touched a record low of 86.04 against the US dollar on January 10. A weak rupee results in higher operational expenses for airlines as most of their costs are in dollars.

Air India's Chief Commercial Officer Nipun Aggarwal said the declining rupee definitely poses a challenge to the industry and to Air India, and the situation has to be dealt with by improving productivity and taking other initiatives.

"Falling rupee does put pressure on our cost structure because most of our cost is dollarised barring the manpower cost which is in local currency. The more the rupee falls, the more the pressure it puts on our cost structure, on our profitability," he said at a media briefing.

Air India Group operates 1,168 daily



flights, including 313 services to international destinations. Of those overseas flights, 244 are short haul and 69 are long haul. The group comprises Air India and low-cost carrier Air India Express.

Last year, Air India merged Vistara with itself and AIX Connect was integrated with Air India Express.

According to Aggarwal, the airline has some natural hedge as it flies international lot more than other airlines.

"So, we are able to charge in international currency for international flights and we are able to pass on some of that impact to our customers because we are pricing in dollars or whatever currency is there," he

said. At the same time, Aggarwal noted that not everything is priced in overseas currencies.

"Even on international flights, we do have some impact but some of those are mitigated with the hedge we have but it impacts our profitability and puts pressure on the fares in the market."

Increasing airfares is not easy as the industry is very competitive and the demand is sensitive to pricing, Aggarwal said, seeking to highlight the low profitability of the airline industry.

"We do have to fill the aircraft and if we had so much pricing power, the airline industry's profitability would not be what it is today. This makes it very challenging for us to operate... It (falling rupee) will put pressure on our cost structure, impact profitability and demand," he noted.

In December, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) projected global airline industry's net profit at USD 36.6 billion this year for a 3.6 per cent net profit margin.

"Average net profit per passenger is expected to be USD 7 (below the USD 7.9 high in 2023 but an improvement from USD 6.4 in 2024)," IATA said in its financial outlook for 2025.

# Government partially restores gas supply to IGL, Adani-Total

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has increased cheaper gas supply to city gas retailers IGL, Adani-Total, and Mahanagar Gas, restoring a major part of the allocation that was cut in 2024, according to regulatory filings by the companies.

The government, in October and November last year, had cut supplies of the so-called APM Gas (low-priced natural gas coming from old fields such as Mumbai High and Bassein fields in the Bay of Bengal) to city gas retailers by as much as 40 per cent in view of limited output.

This led to city gas retailers hiking CNG prices by Rs 2-3 per kg and planning more increases as they replaced lost volumes with higher-priced input fuel.

The price hike made CNG less attractive when compared to alternate fuels like diesel.

Following this, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in a December 31, 2024 order rejiggered some allocations of gas produced from below ground and undersea.

The ministry ordered a cut in gas supplied to state-owned GAIL and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) for production of LPG and diverting those volumes to city gas entities.

Out of a total 2.55 million standard cubic meters per day of gas usage for LPG production, 1.27 mmscmd (0.637 mmscmd each for GAIL and ONGC) was ordered to be diverted for consumption in the CNG/piped cooking gas segment in January-March quarter, according to the order reviewed by PTI.

City gas retailers in regulatory filings said increased volumes of APM gas will start from January 16.

"As per the communication



received from GAIL (India) Ltd (the nodal agency for domestic gas allocation), this is to inform that the domestic gas allocations to IGL have been revised upwards by 31 per cent with effect from January 16, 2025, increasing the share of domestic gas in the CNG segment from 37 per cent to 51 per cent," Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) said in a filing.

The company has also tied-up additional volumes of imported LNG at "competitive prices", with one of the major suppliers (around 1.0 million standard cubic meters per day).

"The above revision and signing of additional volumes shall have a positive impact on profitability of the company," IGL, which retails CNG to automobiles and piped

cooking gas to households in the national capital and adjoining cities, said.

Adani-Total Gas Ltd, the CNG retailers in cities in Gujarat and elsewhere, said "the allocation of APM gas has been revised upwards by 20 per cent effective January 16, 2025."

"This upward revision will have a positive impact on the company and will help in stabilizing the retail prices to end-consumers," it added.

Mahanagar Gas Ltd, the firm that retails CNG in Mumbai and other cities, said its allocation of the domestic gas at APM price has been increased by 26 per cent, thus increasing allocation for CNG from 37 per cent to 51 per cent.

GAIL and ONGC will have to use either higher-priced gas produced from new fields or rely on imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) to volumes lost to city gas retailers.

The LPG they make is supplied to fuel retailers like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) for sale to households as domestic cooking gas LPG in cylinders.

The government subsidises domestic cooking gas LPG and hence the higher cost of production is likely to be borne by it.

In two allocation cuts, the government had reduced supplies of domestically produced gas to city gas retailers by 5-5.25 mmscmd. Half of this is being immediately restored and more will come once the gas from Ramnad field and new wells flows.

Natural gas pumped from below the ground and from under the seabed from sites ranging from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal within India is the raw material that is turned into CNG for sale to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households.

## IN BRIEF

### SWACHHATA DIDIS EARNED MORE THAN ONE CRORE 37 LAKH RUPEES BY SELLING GARBAGE

**RAIGARH:** Municipal Corporation Raigarh is continuously progressing from waste to wealth. Swachhata didis have earned more than one crore 37 lakh rupees so far by selling dry garbage collected from door-to-door garbage collection, which includes sacks, plastic items, tin-iron items, bottles, newspapers, i.e. garbage coming out of houses. Apart from the monthly salary, Swachhata didis are getting additional profit of two to ten thousand rupees by selling dry garbage collected from door-to-door.

### USA DELEGATES VISITED GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

**AMRITSAR:** Guru Nanak Dev University hosted a distinguished delegation from the United States, in a significant step towards fostering international academic collaboration. The delegation represents various Historically significant Colleges, Universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions from the U.S., focusing on urban sustainability issues in India. GNDU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Karanjeet Singh shared his views regarding Amritsar as a temporal seat of Sikhism and Sikhism as a religion Emphasizing peace, Coexistence, Sustainability by giving due importance to environment.







## MANAGE PAIN WITH YOGA



YOGA TRANSCENDS PHYSICAL POSTURES TO HEAL THE MIND, REJUVENATE THE BODY, AND CREATE INNER BALANCE, EMPOWERING YOU TO LEAD A STRESS-FREE AND FULFILLING LIFE, WRITES **YASH GUPTA**

Let us understand the word *yoga* and what it means. It means the union of the self. So as per the *yoga*, many pains are not just in the body but in the mind and the memory as well. Have you ever wondered why you feel so lethargic even after you've not done anything in a day because your mind is tired? There is an old saying that says a weak mind cannot carry a strong body but a strong mind can have a weak body.

*Yoga* also includes some parts of astrology so at some point like at the full moon or maybe on the new moon day you might feel different from the rest of the days but practising *yoga* means simply surpassing everything because the self is beyond everything and with the natural healing process, there are some techniques that help you to become a younger version or maybe a better version of yourself.

*Yoga* acts like the white blood cells in the body as soon as the pain arrives, it eliminates or with some breathing techniques and pranayam and some techniques it helps you relieve all the stress. Like if you go to a physiotherapist and you have a lower back issue or like a back issue the most common answer for



them will be the cobra pose the moment you start doing the cobra pose it helps you have the posture and once you have a good posture it also helps you have a better confidence while travelling while walking even while sitting. So it focuses not just on the aspect of the physical body but on the mental level as well *yoga* helps you relieve every sort of stress. Also, the major cause once the digestion is improved while doing the surrender Namaskar it helps you relieve



all the problems related to your stomach and you move naturally becoming fresh & light. It is also said by *Maharishi Patanjali* that *yoga* not only removes the stress and pain but also blocks the pain and the stress coming towards you. There are yoga postures that people do and names like *Ashtanga Yoga*, *Hat Yoga* and what not but the major concern is that you listen to your body and you start responding the same way also once you start responding the same way you start

listening to you which will produce harmony in your life and will help you grow in your career for sure. People often say that they don't have the time to meditate or do *yoga* but remember it is always to have the pain of discipline rather than having the pain of regret so you're not late anymore you can start now you can join yoga schools, online classes for better postures and training.  
— *The author is an Art of Living faculty, meditation and mind coach and professional yoga trainer*

## It all starts with the Water You Drink

We've known since childhood that water is life. But have we ever stopped to question the quality of water we consume today? To sustain life, we need three basic necessities: food, air and water. Unfortunately, the food we eat is often laden with pesticides, the air we breathe is heavily polluted, and water? Whether it's packaged bottled water, RO water, or even tap water, the reality is grim. Bottled water often lacks essential minerals, RO water strips away necessary nutrients, and tap water is contaminated with harmful chemicals like chlorine and ammonia. So, what should we drink to ensure good health? We know that our body is made up of 70% water. This emphasises the importance of consuming clean and healthy water. But how do we solve this pressing issue? The answer lies in Ionised Water. Yes, Ionised Water possesses extraordinary health properties, often found naturally only in pristine locations like the *glaciers of Hunza Valley* in POK. Through a special process, ionised water transforms ordinary drinkable water into healthy water with incredible qualities such as being anti-oxidant, alkalised, and most importantly, micro-clustered. This process also produces hydrogen-rich water, which boosts the immune system and supports smooth digestion. Drinking ionised water offers a multitude of health benefits, especially in maintaining the acid-alkaline balance in the body. Many health problems we face today arise from chronic dehydration – insufficient water intake over an extended period. Conditions like fatigue, premature aging, asthma, inflammation, dry skin and even diabetes are often linked to inadequate

hydration. Without water, our cells, tissues, and organs cannot receive the oxygen and nutrients they need to function properly. Chronic dehydration is a silent yet pervasive issue, making ionised water a highly effective way to improve overall health. Symptoms of low water levels in the body include chronic pain, digestive issues, dry skin and eyes, fatigue, headaches, muscle soreness, sinus pressure, and more. The simplest way to prevent these symptoms is by drinking pure, healthy water throughout the day.



### Tips for Staying Hydrated with Ionised Water:

- ❑ Avoid soda and sugary drinks.
  - ❑ Be cautious of bottled water, as it often lacks essential nutrients.
  - ❑ Drink a glass or two of water before and 30-40 minutes after each meal.
  - ❑ Limit the consumption of tea, coffee, and alcoholic beverages.
  - ❑ Take regular "water breaks" during the day.
- Incorporate water-rich foods into your diet, such as fruits and vegetables to maintain proper hydration levels.

Even leading medical institutions like the *American Anti-Cancer Institute* and *Tata Memorial Cancer Institute* not only use but also recommend ionised water for their cancer patients as a lifelong practice. In conclusion, change your water, and you can change your life. By switching to ionised water, you're taking a significant step towards a healthier, more balanced life. Don't just drink water but choose water that truly supports your well-being.

— *The author is a leading educator in ionised water*





# Manchester City wins 8-0 against Salford City in FA Cup

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City routed fourth-division Salford City 8-0 in the FA Cup as Premier League teams flexed their muscles against lower league opposition. Shocks were in short supply as Liverpool and Chelsea booked their place in the next round with heavy wins. Brighton, Bournemouth and Leicester also romped to victories. Those six clubs scored a combined 32 goals. The third round is traditionally one of the most anticipated weekends in English soccer as top flight clubs enter the competition with the prospect of upsets. But it was a day when the might of the Premier League was underlined, with high-flying Nottingham Forest and Wolverhampton also going through. The biggest shock was Brentford's 1-0 loss to the bottom team in division two, Plymouth. United greats humbled City showed no mercy against neighbor Salford, which is co-owned by Manchester United icons David Beckham, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Gary and Phil Neville and Nicky Butt. Despite

resting a number of star players, Pep Guardiola's four-time defending Premier League champion was rampant at Etihad Stadium, with rising talent James McAtee hitting a second half hat trick. City prospects Divin Mubama and Nico O'Reilly also made the score sheet. "They were incredible — commitment, aggressive — there were so many things that I liked," Guardiola said. "With everyone (there) was respect. You cannot win by that margin if you don't respect the opponent." Jack Grealish was also on target for City, scoring his first goal for the club in 38 games. His last goal for City was in December 2023. Giggs, who is also Salford's director of football, was on the touchline to watch the action and had to endure taunts from the home fans. Scholes and Butt, meanwhile, looked glum when television cameras focused on them in the executive seats. Promotion-chasing Salford had won its last six games without conceding a goal. "You always know you're at the mercy of the quality of the competition. Man City and Pep have never disrespected anybody



and tonight they showed us why they are what they are and why he is who he is," manager Karl Robinson said. "I said to the players

I would have taken eight goals conceded in seven games, I just didn't expect them to all come in one."

Quad chasing Liverpool's bid to win an unprecedented quadruple is still on after a 4-0 victory over Accrington Stanley.

The Premier League and Champions League leader is also into the semifinals of the English League Cup. Fourth-division Accrington was never expected to prevent Arne Slot's team from advancing to the fourth round and Diogo Jota, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Jayden Danns and Federico Chiesa scored for Liverpool at Anfield. Rio Ngunuwa, aged 16, became Liverpool's second youngest debutant. Chiesa's goal was his first since joining Liverpool from Juventus in the offseason following an injury-disrupted start at Anfield. Big wins Chelsea won 5-0 against fourth-division Morecambe at Stamford Bridge. Tosin Adarabioyo and Joao Felix scored two goals each for the eight-time winner. Leicester was fighting relegation but thrashed second-tier Queens Park Rangers 6-2 for only its second win under manager Ruud van Nistelrooy. The Dutch coach hadn't won since his first game in charge at the start of December against West Ham. James Justin scored twice and Jamie Vardy converted a second-half penalty.

Georginio Rutter scored twice in Brighton's 4-0 win at Norwich. Norwich's American striker Josh Sargent went on as a 79th-minute substitute after recovering from groin surgery that had sidelined him since Oct. 27. Bournemouth's Dango Ouattara struck a double in a 5-1 victory against West Brom. Forest advances sitting third in the Premier League, Forest notched its seventh straight win by beating Luton 2-0. Ryan Yates and Ramon Sosa scored. Wolverhampton advanced 2-1 at second-division Bristol City. Plymouth shocks at the bottom of the second division, Plymouth is in danger of being relegated to the third tier and last month parted ways with manager Wayne Rooney. But it turned giant-killer with a late winner against Brentford. Morgan Whittaker's 82nd-minute strike ended Plymouth's 11-game winless run and secured a famous Cup upset. Former Manchester United prospect Demetri Mitchell scored twice to help third-division Exeter beat second-division Oxford 3-1 and reach the fourth round for the first time in 44 years.



## Australian Open: Zheng Qinwen starts her bid for another final

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Zheng Qinwen's tennis resume is quite different from what it was when she showed up at the Australian Open a full year ago. No matter everything she accomplished in 2024 — a runner-up finish at Melbourne Park; an Olympic gold medal for China — she felt jitters before entering Rod Laver Arena on Sunday. After overcoming some hiccups late in the opening set of her first-round match on a stormy Day 1 at the season's first major tennis tournament, Zheng came through with a 7-6 (3), 6-1 victory against Anca Todoni, a 20-year-old qualifier from Romania who has won one Grand Slam match in her career. "Actually, I feel really nervous," said Zheng, who is seeded No. 5. "I started to feel nervous already since yesterday, 'cause I felt special emotion for the Australian Open. ... I really like it here." As well she should. It was 12 months ago on Melbourne's hard courts that Zheng made it all the way to the final before losing to Aryna Sabalenka. The two-time champion began her bid for a third consecutive title with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over 2017 U.S. Open title winner Sloane Stephens. Alexander Zverev, the men's No. 2 seed, faced Lucas Pouille in the last match at Rod Laver Arena. Two of the first three men's

contests to conclude both went five sets. Kei Nishikori, the 2014 U.S. Open runner-up, saved a pair of match points in the third set and came all the way back to beat qualifier Thiago Monteiro 4-6, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-2, 6-3, while No. 6 Casper Ruud, a three-time finalist at majors, defeated Jaume Munar 6-3, 1-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-1. Nishikori, competing in Melbourne for the first time in four years after a series of hip, ankle and knee injuries, raised his arms and threw his head back, causing his black hat to fall off, after improving to 29-8 in five-sets, including 8-1 at the Australian Open. Before her run in Australia last January, Zheng had only played in eight major tournaments, making one quarterfinal. Her big-hitting breakthrough opened a season in which she wound up with a gold draped around her neck at the Paris Games in August. The 22-year-old Zheng's power-based game is best suited for hard courts, and playing indoors doesn't hurt, either, so she eventually was quite comfortable against Todoni under a closed retractable roof, while thunder and lightning and a serious downpour suspended action on the courts that can't be covered. Still, Zheng frittered away set points while serving for the opener at 5-4, then was forced to save set points for Todoni later. Afterward, Zheng said

that being nervous usually makes her focus better, but this time, it didn't make "me play my best tennis out there." Maybe that's because it was her first match of the season. Still, she was good enough on this day. The second set was more one-sided, and Todoni took a medical timeout for treatment on her lower back after three games. Zheng was among only a handful of players able to complete matches in the early going at what is now a 15-day tournament after a Sunday start was instituted last year. That extra time, which spreads out the first round across three days, could be particularly helpful this week, when Monday's packed program already included matches for Novak Djokovic, Jannik Sinner, Carlos Alcaraz, Coco Gauff and Iga Swiatek. No. 29 Linda Noskova was the first seeded player to exit the bracket, just a year after she stunned Iga Swiatek in Melbourne. Noskova lost 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 to Clara Tauson, while seeds who won Sunday included No. 11 Paula Badosa; No. 14 Mirra Andreeva, No. 18 Donna Vekic; and No. 30 Leylah Fernandez, the 2021 U.S. Open runner-up. "To be able to play a match and to finish a match with a roof, it's much more easy than ... To stop with the rain," said the 20th-seeded man, Arthur Fils, who eliminated Otto Virtanen of Finland 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4, 6-4.

## Bangladesh omit Shakib Al Hasan, Litton Das from Champions Trophy squad

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh on Sunday omitted former skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who has been suspended from bowling in international and domestic cricket because of an illegal action, from their Champions Trophy squad. Shakib, who failed a test of his bowling action at the Loughborough University in England last month, also could not procure a positive assessment in a second independent test conducted at the Sri Ramachandra Centre for Sports Science in Chennai recently. The omission from the 15-member Champions Trophy squad could also mark the end of the 37-year-old's ODI career. The tournament begins on February 19. Shakib, who was retired from Test and T20I formats, was reported for a suspect bowling



action during a one-off appearance for Surrey in the County Championship in September last. On-field umpires Steve O'Shaughnessy and David Millns made the report, which was termed "shocking" by Bangladesh Cricket Board officials. No place for Litton also Bangladesh, who will open their Champions Trophy

campaign against India in Dubai on February 20, have also left out seasoned wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das after his recent modest outings. Das could not make a fifty in his last 13 ODI innings. His last 50-plus score was against India at Pune in October 2023. In fact, the 30-year-old's last seven innings read: 6, 1, 0, 0, 2, 4, 0.

Other than these two big names, all-rounder Afif Hossain, and pacers Shoriful Islam and Hasan Mahmud too failed to get a place in the squad which will be led by Najmul Hossain Shanto. Najmul is returning to the side after missing the home ODIs last year against the West Indies due to a hamstring injury. Along with Najmul, experienced Mushfiqur Rahim and Mustafizur Rahman and promising top-order batter Towhid Hridoy too have made a comeback. Bangladesh squad: Najmul Hossain Shanto (capt), Mushfiqur Rahim (wk), Towhid Hridoy, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan, Mahmudullah, Jaker Ali, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan, Nahid Rana.



## Sumit Nagal knocked in opening round

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A profligate Sumit Nagal's Australian Open campaign ended in a straight-set defeat against world number 25 Tomas Machac in the men's singles event here on Sunday. The top Indian singles player failed to capitalise on his chances, losing 3-6 1-6 5-7 to his opponent from Czech Republic, who dominated with his superior consistency and precision. Nagal, ranked 91st, started the match confidently, dropping just two points in his first three service games. However, a double fault and a string of forced and unforced errors saw him lose his serve in the seventh and ninth games, handing Machac the opening set. In the second set, Nagal had an early chance to break Machac in the opening game, but the Czech player held firm, saving the breakpoint. From there, Machac seized control, wrapping up the set in just 36 minutes as Nagal struggled to keep up. Trailing by two sets, Nagal mounted a spirited fightback in the third set, securing an early break and racing to a 3-0 lead, which he extended to 5-3. However, a flurry of errors, including another double fault, allowed Machac to stage a comeback with a crucial break. The Czech player capitalised on the momentum, closing out the match and ending Nagal's campaign.

## India defeat Ireland by 116 runs, take 2-0 lead in Women's ODI series

PTI ■ RAJKOT

A collective batting performance headlined by Jemimah Rodrigues' maiden hundred formed the cornerstone of India's commanding 116-run win against Ireland in the second women's ODI here on Sunday as the hosts took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. India scored a massive 370 for five riding on three half-centuries and a ton before restricting Ireland to 254 for 7 in the stipulated 50 overs. It was the elegant skipper Smriti Mandhana, who was first off the blocks with an attacking 73 off just 54 balls, while Rodrigues' first hundred (102 off 91 balls) ensured a smooth finish for the hosts. Newcomer Pratika Rawal (67 off 61 balls) and seasoned Harleen Deol (89 off 84 balls) also made merry on a sub-par bowling attack. Ireland batted steadily but never had the



firepower to surpass a gigantic Indian total. Save Christina Coulter Reilly's 80, there wasn't much fight from the other batters as off-spinner Deepti Sharma emerged as the pick of the Indian bowlers with figures of 3 for 37. Seamer Titas Sadhu got 1 for 48 in 10 overs. Earlier, India's total was based on two big stands -- 156 off 19 overs between Mandhana and Rawal and 183 off 28

overs between Rodrigues and Deol. In all, Indian batters smashed an astounding 44 boundaries and three sixes in 50 overs. As far as Rodrigues was concerned, her record has been one that flattered to deceive with just six half-centuries across 40 games. But once she got the boundary off medium pacer Arlene Kelly, the relief was palpable as she did a mock guitar-playing act with her willow. "It has been a long wait to get this hundred. Glad that the team gave me a role at No. 4 and I could deliver," Rodrigues told broadcasters Star Sports at the innings break. "Today, the important thing for me was to be till the 50th over. Getting runs is not a problem, I am good at that, but being till the end was important and glad I could do that." She said during their 183-run stand, it took some time for her and Deol to assess the nature of the track.

## Gavaskar, Kamblī among stalwarts felicitated as Wankhede's 50th anniversary celebration begins

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Some of Mumbai's cricketing heroes, including legendary batter Sunil Gavaskar and former player Vinod Kamblī, were on Sunday felicitated by the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) at the opening event of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Wankhede Stadium. The main event will be held on January 19 at the Wankhede Stadium. A host of other cricketing stalwarts, including Sanjay Manjrekar, Wasim Jaffer, Raju Kulkarni, Chandrakant Pandit, Lalchand Rajput, Shobha Pandit and Arundhati Ghosh, who all had contributed to the rich legacy of Mumbai cricket,

were also felicitated. Gavaskar was the first Mumbai captain to be felicitated on Sunday. He was presented a memento by MCA President Ajinkya Naik. "It is indeed a very big honour for me to be here at this iconic venue that has given Indian cricket so much, the 2011 Cricket World Cup being the icing on the cake, and to be part of the start of the celebrations of 50 years of Wankhede Stadium," Gavaskar said. "As an opening batter, I couldn't miss the start so I am here. I want to wish the MCA all the best and also want to express my deepest sense of gratitude for giving me opportunities since school

cricket. "I am what I am because MCA lifted me and helped me to take those steps and subsequently supported me even when I was playing for India... I want to thank you all for having me here," he said. Gavaskar was also a member of the Indian team that played the inaugural Test at the Wankhede Stadium against the West Indies in 1974. Kamblī, who was recently discharged from a local hospital after being admitted to the ICU on December 21 due to health complications, was also present on the occasion. He was seen being escorted around as he is still on the recovery path. After his felicitation, Kamblī



spoke about his playing days at the iconic venue. "I remember I smashed my first double hundred here against England and then went on to score many more

hundreds in my career," he said. "If anyone wants to play for India like me or Sachin (Tendulkar), then I would advise that you should keep

working hard and never leave doing that because that's what Sachin and me did since our childhood days." Speaking on the occasion, MCA President Naik said, "Wankhede Stadium's 50th anniversary is a special occasion for us. Today was the start of the grand celebration. "Our main goal behind this week-long event is to inform the next generation about Mumbai's cricket history and contributions of men's and women's players who played for Mumbai and inspire the young generation to take forward this legacy." Former MCA President Vijay Patil was also felicitated. The Sports Journalists Association of Mumbai

(SJM) was also felicitated for the support and contribution to Mumbai cricket. As part of the week-long celebrations, two exciting cricket matches involving teams from MCA, SJM, Consul Generals and IAS Officers were held. Legends like Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma and Dilip Vengsarkar will also be part of the grand celebrations. The other stalwarts who are expected to join the celebrations are former India skipper Ravi Shastri, Ajinkya Rahane, current T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav and former national women's team captain Diana Edulji. The main event will also feature Mumbai's legendary

men's and women's players from domestic and international cricket. The 50th anniversary celebrations will continue throughout the week. MCA will felicitate the groundsmen of clubs and grounds, and organise Polly Umrigar Health Camp and special lunch for them on January 15. This will be followed by felicitation of the members of the Mumbai team which played the first First-Class match at the Wankhede Stadium in 1974. The MCA will also release a coffee table book on January 19, while a commemorative postal stamp will also be issued.

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