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INSIDE

**MONEY 10**  
FM SITHARAMAN TAKES PART IN CUSTOMARY HALWA CEREMONY

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## ORDNANCE FACTORY BLAST, EIGHT KILLED



Rescue operation underway after a blast at the ordnance factory, in Bhandara district, Maharashtra PTL

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

At least eight people were killed and seven others injured when a massive explosion rocked an ordnance factory in Jawahar Nagar taluka of Bhandara district in eastern Maharashtra on Friday morning. Of the injured, the condition of five was reported to be serious. While the cause of the mishap has not been established, rescue and relief operations were still underway at the vast complex housing the Ordnance Factory in Bhandara until late evening. A press release issued by the National Disaster Response

Force (NDRF) earlier in the day stated that the incident took place at 10:30 am. "The incident resulted in a fire and a subsequent building collapse. Initially, 13 individuals were reported trapped at the site. The NDRF team was immediately deployed to the location and is working tirelessly to rescue those affected," the NDRF said. The Ordnance Factory, located in the Satpura Mountain ranges in Jawahar Nagar taluka of Bhandara, manufactures single-base propellant, double-base propellant (ballistite), double-base propellant (rocket), high explosives, and their compounds.

The explosion was so intense that its sound could be heard up to seven to ten kilometers away from the accident site. Objects from the exploded factory were flung several meters away, eyewitnesses said. The smoke from the explosion-hit factory continued to billow out for several hours and could be seen from a distance of two to three kilometers away. Confirming the deaths and injuries in the incident, Union Minister and MP from Nagpur Nitin Gadkari described the explosion as "unfortunate". He was speaking at an event in Nagpur. **Continued on page 8**

## MP enforces liquor ban in holy towns

GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government has announced the closure of liquor shops in 17 holy towns across the state to preserve the spiritual atmosphere of these religiously significant locations. These towns, home to sacred temples and attracting devotees from across the country, include Ujjain, Datia, Panna, Mandla, Multai, Mandasaur, Maihar, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, Mandleshwar, Orchha, Chitrakoot, Amarkantak, Salkanpur, Barman Kala, Linga, Kundalpur, Bandakpur, and Barmankhurd. Chief Minister (CM) Mohan Yadav, who hails from the religious city of Ujjain, emphasized the importance of these towns in the state's religious and cultural landscape. He highlighted their association with revered deities such as Lord Krishna and Lord Ram. Addressing the media, Yadav explained that the decision was motivated by the harmful effects of alcohol consumption on individuals and families. He stated that alcohol addiction has caused significant distress within families and that the



initiative aims to promote better governance and improve the lives of women, children, and farmers. The CM further underscored the government's commitment to creating a better environment for the youth, stressing their role as the future of the country. By restricting

alcohol sales in areas with high religious significance, the government seeks to align these regions with their sacred identity while curbing alcohol abuse. Yadav expressed hope that the decision would contribute to improving the overall quality of life in the state. After the State Cabinet approved the ban of liquor in 17 religious places, the Excise department would start process of closing down the existing shops at these places. The announcement also drew attention to longstanding demands for prohibition in Madhya Pradesh. Former CM Uma Bharti and former Lok Sabha member Sadhvi Pragya Bharti have long advocated for total prohibition. During a previous government, Uma Bharti had staged protests against the sale of liquor, even pelting stones at a liquor shop. However, her agitation failed to gain momentum, leading her to revise her demand to controlled liquor sales in the state. The previous Shivraj Singh Chouhan government had approved a new excise policy in 2023, aimed at discouraging liquor consumption, but refrained from implementing

total prohibition. Following the recent announcement by CM Mohan Yadav to ban liquor sales in 17 religious towns, Uma Bharti welcomed the move, describing it as a significant step toward achieving total prohibition in Madhya Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh Congress Media in-charge Mukesh Nayak has criticised the state government's decision to close liquor shops in 17 holy towns, alleging it could lead to illegal activities similar to those in Gujarat. Speaking to The Pioneer, Nayak claimed that in Gujarat, BJP leaders are allegedly involved in a liquor business worth Rs 10,000 crore despite the prohibition policy. He expressed concerns that a parallel network for the illegal sale of liquor might emerge in the 17 designated religious towns in Madhya Pradesh. Nayak further alleged that the ban could pave the way for clandestine operations, making liquor easily accessible through home delivery. "Currently, customers have to visit shops to buy liquor, but soon it might be delivered to their homes in these areas," he remarked, accusing the ruling party of exploiting the situation for profit.

## Kejriwal accuses BJP of bribing voters

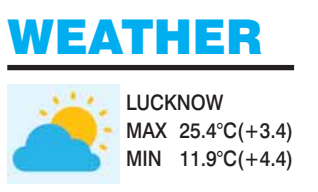
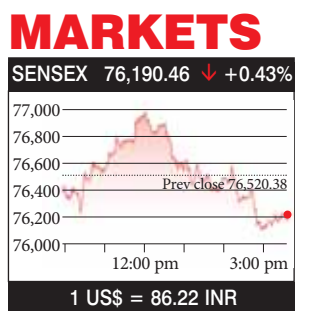
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The political battle for the Delhi Assembly elections is heating up with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Friday accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of trying to sway voters by distributing gold chains, sarees, shoes, and cash while urging voters to resist these attempts.

Dubbing BJP as 'Gali galoch party' and calling the individual who distribute money as a 'threat to the democracy', Kejriwal said, "Vote for whoever you want to, but the one who is trying to buy your vote and destroy this country, don't vote for him. The one who is distributing jackets, blankets and cash to you is a traitor of the country. Take all the money from him but swear to



God, never vote for him," he said, urging citizens in a video message to prioritise democracy over material offerings. He reminded voters of the sacrifices made by B R Ambedkar to secure their right to vote. "Babasaheb Ambedkar fought with everyone and said that every person in this country, whether literate or illiterate, whether rich or poor, every person should have the right to vote," he said. **Continued on page 8**



## Waqf panel meet ends in protests

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ten opposition members attending the Parliamentary panel meeting on the Waqf Amendment Bill were suspended for a day on Friday amid protests and accusations against Chairman Jagdambika Pal of steamrolling through the proceedings. While opposition members accused Pal of reducing the proceedings to a farce and alleged that he was acting on the government's directions, the chairman slammed their conduct aimed at disrupting the meeting. He accused Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee of hurling abuses at him and said he strove to bring the meeting to order, adjourning it twice but in vain. BJP member Nishikant Dubey moved the motion for suspending the opposition members which was adopted by the committee. The suspended members are Banerjee and Nadeem-ul



Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, left, the religious head of Kashmir, with Maulana Rehmatullah of Bandipora waits to appear before the parliamentary panel on Waqf Amendment Bill PTL

Haque (Trinamool Congress), Mohammad Jawed, Imran Masood and Syed Naseer Hussain (Congress), A Raja and Mohamed Abdullah (DMK), Asaduddin Owaisi (AIMIM), Mohibullah (SP) and Arvind Sawant (Shiv Sena-UBT). The suspension of the opposition members came on a day when a delegation from Jammu and Kashmir led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the religious head of Kashmir, appeared before the Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill to share their concerns about the draft legislation. **Continued on page 8**

## CBI uncovers ₹350 Crore crypto scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has conducted search operations across seven locations after registering a case of a Rs 350 crore crypto-ponzi scam against seven individuals, officials said on Friday. The accused were allegedly running seven separate modules based in the cities of Delhi, Hazaribag, Bathinda, Ratlam, Valsad, Pudukkottai, and Chittoargarh, collecting money from gullible investors by promising returns from cryptocurrency investments, they said. "These ponzi schemes were being promoted through multiple social media groups. An analysis of bank account transactions and cryptocurrency wallets has revealed that the illegal proceeds from these schemes were being converted into cryptocurrencies to obscure their origin," CBI's spokesperson said in a statement. It is alleged that the accused conducted transactions totaling over Rs 350 crore in these schemes, the officials said. On Thursday, the agency carried out operations in Delhi, Jharkhand, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan.



During the searches, the CBI seized digital virtual assets totaling approximately USD 38,414 in the cryptocurrency wallets of the accused, which have been digitally secured for investigation. "The searches resulted in the recovery of cash amounting to Rs 34.2 lakh (approx), along with significant digital evidence, including seven mobile phones, one laptop, one tablet, three hard disks, 10 pen drives, memory cards, SIM cards, ATM cards, debit cards, email accounts, and several incriminating documents," the statement said. The agency registered the case under Indian Penal Code Section 120-B (criminal conspiracy), Section 420 (cheating), and Section 66D of

## Prices for 1 litre Amul milk packs reduced by ₹1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets dairy products under the Amul brand, has reduced milk prices by Rs 1 per litre across India. However, the reduction in prices is only for one-litre packs. "We have reduced the prices of one-litre packs by Rs 1 per litre across India," GCMMF managing director Jayen Mehta told PTL. "This is to encourage consumers to buy larger packs of milk and get incentive for the same," he said. In Delhi, the rate of Amul Gold milk has been reduced to Rs 67 from Rs 68 per litre while price of Amul Taaza will now be Rs 55 from Rs 56 per litre earlier. GCMMF's turnover increased 8 per cent to Rs 59,445 crore in the 2023-24 financial year. Mehta had earlier said that the cooperative is expecting double-digit growth in revenue during this fiscal on strong demand. GCMMF handled 310 lakh litres of milk per day on average during the last fiscal. It has a total annual milk processing capacity of around 500 lakh litres. **Continued on page 8**

## Delhi: Man arrested for ₹15 Crore COVID-19 vaccine scam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Delhi Police has arrested a man who impersonated an officer from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and duped innocent people of over Rs 15 crore under the pretext of providing work orders for the transportation of COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic. According to the police on Friday, he had been absconding for nearly three years in a Rs 15 crore-fraud case. "The accused has been identified as 48-year-old Prafulla Kumar Nayak, who played a key role in duping victims by promising work orders related to COVID-19 vaccine transportation during the pandemic," the EOW statement read. The fraudulent scheme came to light when a complaint was lodged by Sunil Kaushik, stating that he had been duped of Rs 4 crore. The fraudsters promised to arrange work orders from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the transportation of COVID-19 vaccines across various states in 2021. Four more victims came forward with similar complaints, all revealing the same modus operandi. The EOW registered a case under sections 420, 406, 467, 468, 471, 120B IPC, and Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption Act. "Four additional complaints revealed a similar modus operandi, with the accused collectively duping victims of over Rs 15 crore," Additional Commissioner of Police (EOW) Amrutha Guguloth said in the statement. Investigations revealed that in May 2021, the accused contacted the victims and took them to Nirman Bhawan, the headquarters of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to gain



their trust. Forged work orders were issued, and trust was gained by leveraging illicit access to the government complex through a bribed ministry employee, the statement read. In exchange, the fraudsters collected Rs 15 crore from the victims. The key accused, including the kingpin Hermenn Sabherwal, were arrested in 2022. However, Prafulla Kumar Nayak had been evading arrest until he was apprehended on January 21. Nayak played a crucial role in facilitating the entry of victims and accomplices into Nirman Bhawan by bribing ministry employees. Three government employees, including a reception officer and two Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) members, were also arrested earlier for their involvement. "Previously, eight other accused, including the kingpin Hermenn Sabherwal, were arrested in 2022. Ministry employees, including a reception officer and two multi-tasking staff members, had already been apprehended for their involvement," the officer said in the statement. Nayak, a resident of Pandav Nagar in Delhi and originally from Odisha, facilitated the group's entry into Nirman Bhawan.

## Jail in Assam turns into organic farming success story

PTI ■ BARPETA

It might appear to be just another normal prison at first glance, but as one steps inside the Barpeta District Jail Superintendent Pranjal Kumar Sarma told PTL. Thanks to the new initiatives, the jail generated a revenue of over Rs 1 lakh for the government during the April-December period last year by selling agricultural produce alone, he said. "Apart from revenue generation, there was another reason for introducing year-long agriculture activities. The inmates are always mentally stressed due to their jail terms and for staying away from home. We tried to reduce their stress level by engaging them in productive work. They laugh and share jokes with each other while working in the fields," Sarma said.

He said all the produce is purely organic and no chemical or fertiliser is used during farming. What makes this transformation even more special is that the prisoners are engaged in all agrarian activities within the premises, which keeps them engaged and helps them learn a new skill for the life after release from jail. Jailer Nilotpal Kakati said multi-cropping started from April last year, after the authorities cleared the weeds from the unused barren lands and made them cultivable. "We could utilise only 35-40 bighas of land as there is shortage of manpower. Though we have over 300 inmates, we could engage only 20-25 of them serving rigorous imprisonment due to legal restrictions. The law does not



allow the rest to work in the fields," he said. Kakati, however, said the jail authorities are planning to expand the farming area this year by engaging a few more people, thereby increasing the produce. Asked about the marketing, he said, "So far, we have not marketed it outside Barpeta. Local vendors come and collect the vegetables from us. The jail inmates also consumed around 1,000 kgs of vegetables last year, resulting in savings for us." The jailer said that with expansion of produce and introduction of some cash crops, the authorities will explore outside markets later this year. Vegetables like lady finger, mustard, ginger, brinjal, cabbage, redidh and several

cruciferous ones, including perennial Indian favourites cauliflower and cabbages, are grown in the jail premises. Additionally, the compound houses a small fishery for inhouse consumption. Another highlight is a small berry farm, housing around 200 trees producing several precious variants of the fruit - Apple Berry, Miss India and Thailand Berry. Kakati also claimed that berry farming is the first of its kind in an Indian jail. The jail authorities have recently started planting strawberries and varieties of flowers in an effort to uplift the mood of the inmates as well as employees. "The multi-cropping farming was done as a pilot project this time. We wanted to check if the land is cultivable. As we got satisfactory results, we will try to do it in a more professional way in the next fiscal," he said. The Barpeta civil administration has taken note of the agricultural practices in the district jail and lauded the efforts of Sarma and Kakati. Barpeta Additional District Commissioner Jayanta Bora, who recently visited the facility, has stressed that being engaged with agriculture could inadvertently help the inmates step away from a life of crime and become honest citizens. "Apart from generating revenue for the government, agriculture in the jail will allow the prisoners to step out of their routine and motivate them to be more productive citizens," he said. Initially established as a makeshift jail in Barpeta town, it was relocated to its present location, just two kilometers outside the town, in 1970.





Law & order has strengthened in UP: Khanna

INAUGURATES UP DAY AT NAMO GHAT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Finance and Parliamentary Affairs Minister and minister in charge of the district Suresh Khanna inaugurated the Uttar Pradesh Day-2025 by lighting a lamp at Namoo Ghat here on Friday.



UP Minister Suresh Khanna looking at articles at a stall during UP Day programme at Namoo Ghat in Varanasi on Friday.

programmes were presented by the artistes. Addressing the people, the minister said that under the Chief Minister Yuva Udyam Vikas Yojana, loans were provided to 1,200 people in Varanasi during the day.

and order of the state has been strengthened and strict action has been ensured against the criminals. After the PM came to power, there has been a qualitative change in the development of the country and state.

government has done excellent work in various fields. He said the goal of the government is to provide basic facilities to the person sitting at the last rung and bring them into the mainstream.

Minister praises BLW's innovations & contribution to Atmanirbhar Bharat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Union Minister of State (MoS) for Railways and Jal Shakti V Somanna visited the Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) on Friday and appreciated its innovations, locomotive production capabilities and significant global contribution in realising the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.



Union Minister V Somanna inspecting BLW workshop in Varanasi on Friday.

After the workshop visit, he planted a sapling in the administrative building premises, promoting the message of a green environment. Subsequently, in a meeting held at the Hall of Fame in the Administrative Building here the GM welcomed the union minister with a sapling, and Principal Chief Electrical Engineer (PCEE) Sushil Kumar Srivastava presented detailed information through power point presentation, highlighting BLW's historic achievements, technical expertise and future plans.

employee representatives and assured them of all possible efforts to resolve their issues. The BLW GM stated, "BLW is the leading locomotive production unit of Indian Railways, having manufactured over 10,500 locomotives to date, elevating Indian Railways to new heights of excellence."

CMO flags off rally on Nat'l Girl Child Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A public awareness rally was taken out from on National Girl Child Day on Friday which was flagged off by Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary.



CMO Dr Sandeep Chaudhary flagging off a rally on National Girl Child Day in Varanasi on Friday.

success in various fields of the country like health, sports, education, industry, digital mission and space. He said there should not be any kind of discrimination between son and daughter in the society.

future", Dr Chaudhary stated. Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Nodal Officer of the programme Dr YB Pathak said that on the day, mainly PCP-NDT Act, 1994 and MTP Amendment Act, 2021 were discussed in detail.

Maha Kumbh: NER enhances security at stns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The North Eastern Railway (NER) has installed drones and 240 CCTVs at Prayagraj Rambagh and Jhusi stations for security purposes during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

Rambagh and Jhusi stations. They are multi-disciplinary teams comprising employees of Railway Protection Force (RPF), Medical, Commercial, Mechanical, Electrical and Signal and Telecom departments.

shelter centres, water booths, passenger reservation centres, ticket counters etc are being cleaned 24 hours a day in three shifts.

(GRP), fair administration and railway administration", he said, adding that the RPFs/RPSFs members deployed at Prayagraj Rambagh and Jhusi stations have been equipped with communication resources like VHF sets, walkie-talkies, mobiles, PA systems etc for proper management of security and maintaining coordination.

while the tiles area is being cleaned with walk-behind sweeping machines. "For safeguarding the health of passengers, anti-larvae spraying is being conducted by the EnHM wing at all public places of Prayagraj Rambagh and Jhusi stations during all three shifts and fogging is being done every second day to eliminate mosquitoes", he said.

'Make proper arrangements for Kashi Tamil Sangamam'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A meeting was convened regarding the preparations for Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0 under the chairmanship of Union Additional Secretary (Education) Sunil Kumar Barnwal, in which District Magistrate S Rajalingam informed him about preparations made during the earlier convened KTS 1 and 2 and various events.



Union Additional Secretary SK Barnwal reviewing preparations of KTS-3 in Varanasi on Friday.

The secretary asked to make proper arrangements for the safety of guests, medical facilities besides hygiene during the entire event. This time, the KTS is going to be organised from February 15 to 24 in which a total of six groups, including five regular and one student group, will participate.

Kumbh at Sangam, take bath and visit Akshayvat, Hanuman temple and other major places. After Prayagraj, the team of guests will go to Ayodhya where they will visit Ram Mandir, Kanak Bhavan besides ghats and then return to Varanasi. Later, from here they will depart for Tamil Nadu.

Information and Broadcasting etc and the Government of Uttar Pradesh. The objective of this programme is to provide an opportunity to scholars, students, philosophers, businessmen, artists, and people from other fields from both the regions to come together, share their knowledge, culture and best practices and learn from each other's experience.

(NEP) 2020's emphasis on integrating the wealth of Indian knowledge systems with modern systems of knowledge. IIT Madras and BHU Varanasi are the two implementing agencies for this programme.

ised in Kashi on various aspects of Rishi (sage) Agastyaar and his contribution to the world of health, philosophy, science, linguistics, literature, politics, culture, arts, especially Tamil and Tamil Nadu etc.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BALASORE. Procurement Notice for Bridge Work. Identification No. - Online Tender- Bridge NCB No. 21 of 2024-25. Letter No. 213 /WE. Date. 20.01.25.

Office of Nagar Palika Parishad Pithampur Distt. Dhar (M.P.). Notice Inviting Tender. Online Item Rate bids are invited from registered contractors/firms of repute for Sewerage Project of Pithampur town under AMRUT 2.0 NIT No: 2025\_UAD\_397964\_1 date: 23.01.2025 Probable amount Rs. 16504.05 Lacs, EMD Rs. 8252024/- Cost of bid document Rs. 50000/- Last date and time of submission of bid: 24.02.2025 & time: 17:30 Hrs.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BERHAMPUR. NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement. Bid Identification No. Online Tender/27-2024-25/BPR.

'Gomati' TBM achieves first tunnel breakthrough

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The 'Gomati' Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) achieved its first tunnel breakthrough on the 'up-line' under the underground section of Corridor-2 (CSA to Barra-8) of Kanpur Metro Rail Project.



TBM achieves first tunnel breakthrough under the underground section of Corridor-2 of Kanpur Metro Rail Project.

ground tunnel construction. The machine has erected a total of 437 rings while reaching the retrieval shaft. The TBM machine will now be retrieved from the retrieval shaft and lowered back to the launching shaft at Rawatpur underground station.

From here, this machine will be re-launched in the direction of Kakadeo, where this machine will construct a tunnel up to the Double Pulia ramp passing through Kakadeo and Double Pulia station. Tunnel construction will also be started on the 'down-line' of Corridor-2 in the coming days. Under the 8.60 km long Corridor-2 (CSA to Barra-

8), about 4.10 km long underground and about 4.50 km long elevated section is being constructed. Three stations in the underground section of Corridor-2 will be Rawatpur, Kakadeo and Double Pulia. The number of stations in the elevated section of this corridor will be five, namely Agriculture University, Vijayanagar Chauraha, Shastri Chowk, Barra-7 and Barra-8. The train going from CSA in the direction of Barra-8 will enter the underground tunnel from the under-construction Corridor-2 depot ramp located near the Agricultural University and after crossing Rawatpur,

under-construction stations of Kanpur Metro after the tunnel breakthrough and took stock of the progress of the project. AWARDED: Dr Nandini Rastogi has been conferred the Best IMA President Award by the IMA Headquarters for her exceptional performance, hard work and dedication.

Another national award for IMACGP was received by assistant director Dr Vikas Shukla and assistant secretary Dr Vikas Mishra, honorary secretary, IMA Kanpur, for successfully organising the scientific programmes during IMACGP 2024.

# Illegal compensation to land owners: SC appoints SIT to probe NOIDA functioning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Dissatisfied with a UP government-appointed panel probing the issue of illegal compensation to land owners paid by NOIDA officials, the Supreme Court has appointed an SIT to look into it. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh ruled while hearing the anticipatory bail pleas of the legal advisor and one of the law officers of NOIDA who were accused of corruption.

It said the allegations related to the release of huge amounts of compensation in favour of some landowners, who were allegedly not entitled to seek such a higher compensation for their acquired land.

The top court constituted the special investigation team (SIT) comprising IPS officer and Additional General of Police, Lucknow zone S B Shiradkar, Inspector General CBCID Modak Rajesh D Rao and Hemant Kutiyal, Commandant



of UP Special Range Security Battalion.

"The special investigation team shall, inter alia, look into the issues of compensation paid to the landowners who were allegedly not entitled to seek such a higher compensation for their acquired land. (i) whether the quantum of compensation paid to the landowners was higher than they are entitled to in terms of the judgments passed by the courts from time to time; (ii) if so, who were the officers/officials responsible for such exorbitant payment; (iii) whether there was any collusion or con-

spiration between the beneficiaries and officers/officials of NOIDA; and (iv) whether the overall functioning of NOIDA lacks transparency, fairness and commitment to the cause of public interest," it said on January 23. Directing the SIT to file its report in a sealed cover within two months, the bench said the team was free to look into any other allied issue during the investigation. The bench however pro-

hibited the beneficiaries, farmers and landowners, who were paid the extra compensation from any coercive or penal action without its permission.

It observed on September 14, 2023, when the matter was heard, it was learnt that the FIR in the case was not a solitary instance of alleged excess payment of compensation to the landowners but there were numerous instances of such payments, prima facie, for

# Defence Ministry unveils new system to boost reconnaissance capabilities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday here flagged-off 'SANJAY - The Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS)'. It is an automated system which integrates the inputs from all ground and aerial battlefield sensors, processing them to confirm their veracity, preventing duplication and fusing them to produce a Common Surveillance Picture of the battlefield over secured Army Data Network and Satellite Communication Network.

These systems will be inducted to all operational Brigades, Divisions and Corps of the Indian Army in three phases from March to October. This system has been developed under the Buy (Indian) category at a cost of Rs 2,402 crore.

This system will enhance battlefield transparency and transform the future battlefield through a Centralised Web Application which will provide inputs to Command and Army Headquarters, and the Indian Army Decision Support



System.

The BSS is equipped with state-of-the-art sensors and cutting-edge analytics. It will monitor the vast land borders, prevent intrusions, assess situations with unparalleled accuracy and prove to be a force multiplier in Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.

This would enable commanders to operate in both conventional and sub-conventional operations in a Network Centric Environment. Its induction will be an extraordinary leap towards data and network centricity in the Indian Army.

SANJAY has been indigenously and jointly developed by the

Indian Army and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) creating a conducive ecosystem towards achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' as a follow up to the Indian Army's 'Year of Technology Absorption'. Minister of state for defence Sanjay Seth, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary (Defence Production) Sanjeev Kumar, Chairman & Managing Director, BEL Manoj Jain and other senior officials of defence ministry and BEL were present on the during the flagging-off ceremony.

# CEC Rajiv Kumar slams social media platforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Friday lamented that social media platforms were not blocking or at least labelling easily detectable fakes and leaving it to poll bodies to engage fact checkers to rescue themselves.

"Business interest appears to be at work here. It is like first spreading the disease and then selling medicines. The casualty is a fair election process and purity of democracy," he said.

Delivering his valedictory speech on the conclusion of an international conference of election management bodies here, Kumar said social media companies need



to introspect before it is "too late".

"Let the social media platforms, which have been instrumental in providing a critical space for free expression, especially to voices not heard, not be clouded by the shadows of fake, unverified

and misleading narratives, disruptive by design," he said.

The CEC was of the view that it is in the interest of social media platforms that fake clutter is detected and blocked before it is too late. "Do not help forces disrupt-

ing democracies and thereby freedom of speech, which is the basic tenet of intermediaries as well," he cautioned. He said election management bodies must devise and adopt a framework to manage these challenges.

As technologies evolve, Kumar noted, artificial intelligence (AI) will play a critical role. AI can help poll bodies refine voter rolls, detect irregularities, and manage polling logistics more effectively, he said.

"It can help in optimising resource allocation and fostering greater efficiency. However, these advancements come with challenges that demand vigilance, particularly as we strive to balance innovation with inclusivity, facts with fake," he pointed out.

# Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Goa among top-performing states in fiscal health index

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mineral-rich Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Goa and Jharkhand have emerged as top-performing 'achievers' among the states listed in NITI Aayog's first Fiscal Health Index (FHI) report released on Friday. The report titled 'Fiscal Health Index 2025' ranked states for 2022-23, covered 18 major states that drive the Indian economy in terms of their contribution to India's GDP, demography, total public expenditure, revenues, and overall fiscal stability.

According to the report, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala were worst-performing states in Fiscal

Health Index (FHI), each focusing significant fiscal challenges, and listed under 'aspirational' category.

The report which aims to evolve an understanding of the fiscal health of states in the country has listed Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka under 'front-runners' category. Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana were classified as performers.

As per report, released by Chairman of 16th Finance Commission Arvind Panagariya, Odisha excelled in fiscal health with the highest overall index score of 67.8. Referring to top five achiever states, the Aayog said these

states have higher capital outlay of up to 4 per cent of GDP, effective mobilization of non-tax revenue, are revenue surplus and have low interest payments, which is up to 7 per cent of revenue receipts.

Analysing the performance of front runners, the government think tank said these states reported high total developmental expenditure up to 73 per cent, witnessed consistent growth in own tax revenue, had balanced fiscal management and improved debt sustainability with debt-to-GSDP ratio of 24 per cent.

The report noted that, the aspirational (Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab) states are struggling to meet the

fiscal and revenue deficit targets, have low revenue mobilization, witnessing a growing debt burden with debt sustainability a concern in these states.

As per the report, Odisha tops the debt index (99.0) and debt sustainability (64.0) rankings with better than average scores under quality of expenditure and revenue mobilization. Odisha has maintained low fiscal deficits, a good debt profile, and an above average capital outlay/GSDP ratio.

While Kerala and Punjab struggle with low quality of expenditure and debt sustainability, the report said, West Bengal faces revenue mobilisation and debt index issues.

# PM Modi pledges support for girl child empowerment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his message on National Girl Child Day said on Friday that India is proud of the accomplishments of its girls across all fields. He also said his government is equally resolute in ensuring no discrimination happens against the girl child.

In a social media post, Modi said, "Today, on National Girl Child Day, we reiterate our commitment to keep empowering the girl child and ensure a wide range of opportunities for her.

India is proud of the accomplishments of the girl child across all fields." Their feats continue to inspire us all, the prime minister added.

Modi said his government has focused on sectors like education, technology, skills and healthcare among others which have contributed to empowering the girl child. Union Women and Child Development Minister Annappurna Devi urged for a

collective commitment to their education, safety and empowerment. In a series of social media posts, the minister emphasised the importance of creating an environment that would allow every girl child to thrive and fulfil her dreams.

She said in one post, "On National Girl Child Day, I extend my endless good wishes for a bright future to all daughters. Let us take a pledge today to remain committed to the education, safety, and empowerment of our girls."

In another post, the minister reiterated the need for societal support. "Balika Devo Bhava: On this occasion of National Girl Child Day, let us resolve to provide every girl the opportunity to fulfil her dreams and create an environment where they feel free, empowered, and respected," she said.

Observed every year on this day, National Girl Child Day highlights the importance of addressing issues such as gender inequality, access to education, and safety for girls.

# Defence Secretary flags off school band competition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the 76th Republic Day celebrations, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh on Friday said the National School Band Competition is being held here to evoke a feeling of oneness and foster a sense of pride and patriotism among children towards the country.

Singh was addressing a gathering at the front lawns of the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium where the top 16 school bands selected from across the country are battling it out in the grand finale.

The National School Band Competition 2024-25 is being jointly organised by the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education. The defence secretary addressed students participating as members of contesting teams and others at the venue.

In the grand finale, 16 teams spanning 466 school students are taking part, who have been selected after a "rigorous scrutiny", he said.



Referring to the participation of military bands in the annual ceremonial parade, Singh said the armed forces have a very vibrant tradition of military music. This tradition boosts morale, gives dignity to ceremonies and gives talented people opportunities to display their talent, he said.

The defence secretary said in the last couple of years, the government has made efforts to "involve and encourage

"talented school children" to become co-participants in Republic Day celebrations. "The wonderful, visual spectacle of marching school bands...rouses patriotic passion and courage among children and adults alike, thus evoking a feeling of oneness, belonging and national pride," he said.

"The aim behind conducting the National School Band Competition is to evoke a feeling of oneness, of esprit

de corps, and a deep sense of pride among children towards their schools and the country, thus rejuvenating and rekindling the spirit of contributational values, patriotism and unity, and motivate them to walk the path of becoming patriotic and useful citizens of the country," he said.

The students who are part of the finalist teams have been invited to witness the Republic Day ceremony on

January 26, as special guests, the defence ministry earlier said.

The first performance by a pipe band of girl students from PM SHRI KGBV Patama, East Singhbhum, Jharkhand was an instant winner, as they delighted the audience with their swinging moves and lilting tunes.

A pipe band of boys followed PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 2 Belagavi, Karnataka. A brass band of girls from a government school in Gangtok, Sikkim and a pipe band of boys from a private school in North Sikkim are also among the finalists and their performances left the crowd spellbound.

'Sare Jahan Se Achha', 'Ae Watan Tere Liye' tunes were also played by several bands. A brass band of girls from St. Joseph Anglo-Indian Girl's Higher Secondary School, Kozhikode, Kerala belted out patriotic tunes and also played 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram' and 'Vande Mataram'.

The competition is being held over two days, ending on January 25.

# PM Narendra Modi congratulates Ireland's re-elected PM Micheál Martin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday congratulated newly-elected Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin and said he is committed to working together to further strengthen the partnership between India and Ireland.

Martin has been elected Irish prime minister for the second time. Martin is one of the longest serving MPs in the Dáil (lower house of Irish Parliament) having been first elected in 1989.

"Congratulations @MichealMartinTD on assuming the office of Prime Minister of Ireland," Modi said in a social media post.

"Committed to work together to further strengthen our bilateral partnership that is based on strong foundation of shared values and deep people to people connect," the prime minister said.

# India condemns disruption of 'Emergency' screenings in UK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/LONDON

Taking strong exception to pro-Khalistani extremists who stormed movie theatres across UK and disrupted screening of film 'Emergency', India on Friday said these elements should be held accountable. New Delhi also hoped the UK government would take appropriate action against the culprits.

The film, which sees actor and BJP MP Kangana Ranaut playing the role of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, focuses on 21 months of Emergency from 1975 to 1977. The film ran into controversy over allegations that it misrepresents the Sikh community. "We've also



seen several reports on how the film 'Emergency', which was being screened in several halls, was being obstructed.

We consistently raise concerns with the UK government regarding incidents of violent protests and intimidation by anti-India limits. Freedom of speech and expression cannot be applied selectively, and those

obstructing it must be held accountable," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said here at a weekly press briefing.

"We hope that the UK side will take appropriate action against those responsible. Our mission is that our High Commission in London remains in touch and it is in regular communication with our community members for their safety and welfare," he added.

This strong reaction came after pro-Khalistani protesters organised protests against Ranaut's 'Emergency', disrupting the film's screening at some cinemas in the UK during its opening weekend. Community organisation Insight UK posted a video on

its social media platform, showing protesters interrupting a screening of the film, directed by Ranaut, at a cinema in Harrow in north-west London.

News agency PTI reported from London an Opposition Conservative Party Member of Parliament has urged the UK Home Secretary to intervene after his constituents in north-west London were threatened by "masked Khalistani terrorists" who burst into a screening of Kangana Ranaut's film 'Emergency'.

Bob Blackman told the House of Commons that similar disruption of the screenings of the "very controversial" film took place in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Slough, Staines

and Manchester. It has resulted in the Vue and Cineworld cinema chains deciding to pull the film from many theatres in the UK. "On Sunday, many of my constituents gathered and paid for a screening of the film 'Emergency' in the Harrow Vue cinema.

At about 30 or 40 minutes into the screening of the film, masked Khalistani terrorists burst in, threatened members of the audience and forced the screening to end," Blackman said in Parliament.

"The film is very controversial, and I am not commenting on its quality or content, but I defend the right of my constituents and other members' constituents to be able to view it and make a decision on it. It covers the period

when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India," he said.

The MP noted that there are certain views in the UK that it is an "anti-Sikh film" but asserted that his constituents should be able to judge for themselves and not be "threatened by thugs who want to disrupt democratic opportunities to see public films".

"May we have a statement from the Home Secretary (Yvette Cooper) next week on what will be done to ensure that people who want to see such films, which have been passed by censors, can do so in peace and harmony? I absolutely defend the right of people to demonstrate outside cinemas, but not to disrupt viewings," he added.

# Gurugram police arrest five criminals after encounter

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A crime branch team of the Gurugram police have arrested five dreaded criminals after an encounter from Golf Course Extension Road on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday, police said.

The accused was present in the city to commit theft, police said on Friday.

According to the police, the police received information regarding four to five youths coming towards Golf Course Extension Road with illegal weapons, riding in a CNG auto rickshaw to commit a crime. Based on an information, a police team blocked the Golf Course Extension Road from

Village Ghata to Faridabad Road. After some time, an auto rickshaw without a number plate was seen coming towards the police check point. When the police team signalled the CNG auto rickshaw driver to stop the auto-rickshaw, the auto-rickshaw driver tried to escape by increasing the speed of the auto-rickshaw and hitting the barricade and police vehicle. "Five persons got down from the auto-rickshaw and started firing at the police team and running towards the forest. During this, One bullet hit the bulletproof jacket of the in-charge of crime branch sector-39, and one bullet hit the window of the police car," Inspector Vishwa Gaurav, In-Charge of Crime Branch Sector-39, said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Rekindling historic ties

The President of Indonesia is the chief guest at the Republic Day, a fitting tribute to the friendship between two nations

India will celebrate its 76th Republic Day on January 26, 2025, marking a moment to reflect on the country's remarkable journey since its first Republic Day in 1950. This year's celebrations will have a special touch as Prabowo Subianto, President of Indonesia, will be the chief guest. His presence is a reminder of the deep historical and cultural ties between the two nations, which have seen their share of highs and lows but continue to thrive. Incidentally, the chief guest at the first Republic Day parade was President Sukarno of Indonesia, highlighting the camaraderie between two newly independent nations that had emerged from colonial rule. The relations between the two countries have come a full circle. The early years of India-Indonesia relations were marked by solidarity and mutual support. Biju Patnaik, a prominent Indian freedom fighter, played a key role in aiding Indonesia's struggle for independence, even flying its leaders to safety during critical moments. This partnership extended to global platforms like the Bandung



Conference of 1955, which laid the groundwork for the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), co-sponsored by India and Indonesia.

India has come a long way since 1950. From grappling with post-independence challenges like poverty, illiteracy and infrastructural deficits, the nation has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing economies. It boasts advancements in science, technology, space exploration and global diplomacy, while remaining rooted in its democratic ethos. Similarly, Indonesia has evolved into a vibrant democracy and a leading voice in Southeast Asia. Both nations share a legacy of anti-colonial struggles and have worked

together in various domains, including trade, culture and defence. The partnership between India and Indonesia has seen its ups and downs. In the 1950s, ties were warm and cooperative, but by the 1960s, geopolitical differences, particularly over relations with China and the 1965 India-Pakistan war, strained the relationship. Indonesia's support for Pakistan during that conflict and claims over parts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands led to significant diplomatic tensions. However, the 1970s marked a period of reconciliation, with agreements on maritime boundaries and a renewed focus on cooperation. Today, Indonesia is one of India's largest trading partners in Southeast Asia, with bilateral trade reaching nearly \$30 billion in 2023-24. The two nations have also strengthened defence ties, including a Defence Cooperation Agreement signed in 2018, signalling a strategic partnership in a region increasingly shaped by competition with China. Prabowo Subianto's visit as the chief guest at India's Republic Day parade holds symbolic and strategic importance. This visit underscores the growing warmth in India-Indonesia relations. The presence of the Indonesian president at this year's parade is a tribute to the enduring friendship between two nations that have weathered challenges and found common ground in their aspirations for peace, prosperity and global cooperation.

### PICTALK



Children holding national flags in a mustard field ahead of Republic Day 2025, at a village near Baturghat

# The complex terrain of relationships

Relationships, whether personal or professional, are a delicate balancing act of emotions, perspectives and communication



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Relationships are a tricky business. Two people who, at one stage of life, can agree so well that they cannot see or believe in having any difference in the point of view that they will hold. Different perspectives are an enigma; affection, agreement and endorsement are all rolled into one. Identification with each other is more important than identity any day. Very often, it is the bedrock of affection and togetherness in action. The same couple, as time passes and because of hormonal changes in their systems, can and do start having different points of view. What is initially a pleasant disagreement can soon become an assertion of identity. Personality conflicts follow.

These personality conflicts can be a logical derivation, and very often, it is difficult to find the origin of the derivation itself. Coherent dialogue in a spirit of give and take can often be substituted by the urge not only to protect one's turf but also to prove oneself more talented and resourceful. It can often become the source of further identity conflicts. The skill to handle such disagreements cannot be taught and is often taken over by other habits.

These habits may include being short-tempered, incoherent talking and having a high pitch in conversation, which is seen as an extension of good logic. The aberrations are far too many to be recounted, and the results are easy to identify. Instead of working together to resolve the differences, it becomes a battleground to show who can prevail. The rest, as they say, is history. In an era, that is full of talk about skills, it is important at this stage of dialogue to focus on life skills. Two people who cannot get together try to demonstrate who has the right of way in a marital relationship.

The life story moves from one end of the spectrum to an often incoherent hurtling down the slope of not only a difference of opinion but also a difference in personalities. The analysis can go only so far because then logic gives way to preferences and pas-



sion. This is at the root of many marital discords, and it is difficult to reverse the gears and change the pitch. Unfortunately, while there are numerous dissertations in psychology and elsewhere on relationships, practical-oriented thinking in handling relationships is few and at best, commonsensical. One is merely indicating the value of focused research and showing how a structured approach to problem-solving, even in everyday life, can be very valuable. There is a need to see research as an enabling situation for problem-solving, and many use the phrase 'applied research' for it. In the present day and age, more of the fashion world is about skill, and it is being generously used because of its attractive value in situations that cannot be practically handled. Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not.

The important thing is to realise that research requires insights and the adoption of a structured methodology, even in commonsensical situations. It is this aspect of research that can lead to a better quality of life, which can be termed as enabling research and it has to do with life skills. Solving this situation, which afflicts many interpersonal relationships, is simultaneously easy and yet difficult. It is easy to control if one can limit one's communication and how



THE LIFE STORY MOVES FROM ONE END OF THE SPECTRUM TO AN OFTEN INCOHERENT HURLING DOWN THE SLOPE OF NOT ONLY A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BUT ALSO A DIFFERENCE IN PERSONALITIES

much one talks more wisely, keeping the number of words used in a conversation minimal. The truth is, that the more one seeks to talk and explain, the more complex it can become. Let simple things remain simple; it is a significant strategic choice.

This approach works because passion subsides, irritations sort itself out and the choice of words and pitch of the voice can be better controlled. One only has to look around to notice how talking less is such an asset in keeping relationships positive. Interpersonal relationships apart, work relationships, also get affected and the impression of losing an argument, even in work-spaces, is a personal defeat. This, by itself, is a self-defeating proposition. It is self-defeating because even if one wins the argument due to positional power or manipulative skills, the scars of a lost argument leave long-lasting damage to relationships. One can indeed often lose a battle to win the war. As indicated earlier, this applies to work situations as much as to real-life, non-work situations. Gentleness and soft words go far, especially when gentleness is received not as a proposition of the weaker person, but as a characteristic and indicator of mutual respect.

The best solution to many conflicts is when both come out as winners, and no one is

growing, smitten by the dangerous feeling of having 'lost one's face'. Be that as it may, it is necessary to reduce differences, not to personalities, but to find the best way forward. This best way forward must focus on protecting everyone's ego and be in the interest of the larger good. Much will depend on the personality elements of the players in the situation and indeed the time available to sort it out. Many times, a shortage of time necessitates two decisions that are suboptimal and more to 'get along with a job' than 'finding the best option'. Using tentative words and a hypothesis open to correction and improvement may be the best recipe for conflict resolution. In such situations, the personalities do not win or lose; it is the cause that is handled in a far-sighted way. Examples can be many, and one has to see what the issue at stake is how people perceive the result of the outcome and how they interpret it. In all cases, if there is a loser in an argument, it is best to make him feel that he has not 'lost' and that no personalities are involved. This can be a useful approach to handling institutional issues because every resolution of a conflict should be for the institutional good.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TRUMP'S HYPOCRISY EXPOSED

Madam — The ultimatum from Trump to end the prolonging Ukraine-Russia war exposes his hypocrisy. He is aware that it is with the pumping of arms by his country and its allies in Europe that Ukraine is continuing the war. He is also aware that the sanction imposed on Russia had failed miserably, as the same EU partners are buying the same Russian oil from different sources like India. Pumping arms and funds into Ukraine on one hand and giving an ultimatum to end the war on the other is rightly understood by one and all as meaningless, non-serious, and merely publicity-orientated. The entire world knows that maximum wars are waged or promoted by his country.

Even while addressing after assuming office, he had demonstrated his imperial thirst by expressing his policy to take over the Panama Canal and Greenland, besides arbitrarily changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico into the Gulf of America. His threat to wage a tariff war goes against the very basic principles of globalisation that promote the free movement of goods, labour, and capital. The world also knows the key role played by the production of arms and promotion of arms trade in the economy of America. Therefore, America needs a war between some countries or the other. Mr. Trump speaking with concern over the huge human loss in Ukraine and Russia due to war is another display of his hypocrisy. Because more devastating impacts are experienced due to climate change, and his actions are hostile to the global efforts to overcome this serious issue. Therefore, one need not attach so much importance to his utterances or Quixotic actions.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

### LIQUOR BAN AT RELIGIOUS SITES

Madam—CM of Madhya Pradesh Mohan Yadav has formally announced in Narsinghpur district that a liquor ban

## UNESCO honours Mahakumbh



To foster the honour and delight of every Indian, the 45-day-long Mahakumbh Festival was listed in the UNESCO list as the largest peaceful religious congregation of pilgrims on earth. To disperse the Hindu aesthetic religious and spiritualism at the next

level, Maha Kumbh is truly a festival of positivity and spiritualism in India. From Naga Sadhus to Aghoris to all the other pilgrims, Kumbh is an auspicious celebration of Hindu devotees to enchant spirituality for developing godly connection, inner peace, and spiritual harmony.

A dip in the Triveni Sangam of the three rivers of Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati will be considered as the precursor of all devil deeds done during the lifetime. A congregation of 450 million, including people from local and global communities, is one of a kind incidence. It is welcoming that UNESCO added this one-of-a-kind religious festivity to its list. It is a moment of extreme celebration and glee for every Indian back at home. We all welcome the UNESCO listing favourably and positively with utmost joy in our hearts.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

will be implemented in 17 religious places in 11 districts of the state. It is believed that the government will send an order to the administration of the cities of the districts where the liquor ban is to be implemented, and the licensed liquor shops will be closed. He also said that liquor will not be allowed to be sold at any cost in the places where God Ram and Krishna set foot.

These include Ujjain, Amarkantak, Maheshwar, Omkareshwar, Chitrakoot, Mandasaur, etc. In the Narsinghpur program, he also talked about the harm caused to the health of the family due to alcohol. I do not understand one thing: more or less all the politicians in India, in their speeches, there is a lot of mention of the ill effects & demerits of alcohol and the diseases caused by it. All those smart politicians are found appealing to the people that 'please stay away from consuming alcohol; it harms your health. Hey, when these leaders are so concerned about the health of the people, then why do they not declare a complete ban on the production and

marketing of alcohol?

Jang Bahadur Singh | jamshedpur

### SCAMMERS TARGET JOB SEEKERS

Madam — The rise of job scams has become a significant problem, with scammers deceiving job seekers by creating fake job postings. These scammers often promise unsuspecting victims the opportunity to work from home and earn a high income, but only after paying for training or equipment. Research the company thoroughly to verify its legitimacy and reputation. Use reputable job boards and websites to search for job openings.

Report any suspicious activities or job postings to the relevant authorities. By being aware of these job scam tactics and taking the necessary precautions, job seekers can protect themselves from falling victim to these fraudulent schemes.

Khushi Uchenia | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Cooperative commodities exchange: A global vision for farmer empowerment

This initiative leverages technology, blockchain and India's PACS network to empower farmers with fair pricing, sustainability and direct market access

The agricultural sector is the backbone of many economies, particularly in India, where nearly 60 per cent of the population depends on farming for their livelihood. Yet, smallholder farmers often remain at the mercy of intermediaries, fluctuating market prices and unequal access to global markets.

To address these challenges and promote equity, sustainability and growth, a bold initiative is proposed: the establishment of a Global Farmer-Centric Cooperative Commodities Exchange (GFCCE). This platform, rooted in the cooperative model, aims to empower farmers by ensuring fair pricing, direct market access, and sustainable practices. This ambitious project resonates with the global agenda of the World Cooperation Economic Forum to foster inclusive economic growth and social equity. **Empowering Farmers Through Technology** APEX Integration at the heart of this initiative lies technology—a powerful enabler that can bridge the gap between farmers and markets. The



GFCCE will leverage the Government of India's support to develop a robust and accessible digital platform integrated with blockchain technology to ensure transparency and reduce pilferage in the supply chain. Blockchain will create a tamper-proof record of transactions, from production to storage and distribution, enhancing trust and accountability.

The project will adopt a PACS-to-APEX (Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies to Apex-level organisations) approach, leveraging India's extensive network of over 95,000 PACS. These societies will act as the foundational nodes, aggregating produce from farmers at the village level. The commodities will then be funnelled through district and state-level federations, culminating

at the national apex organisation, which will oversee operations, ensure fair pricing and manage exports. To address storage issues, a network of modern warehouses will be constructed and integrated with blockchain systems. These warehouses, equipped with real-time inventory tracking, temperature controls and pest management systems, will be strategically located across key agricultural regions. Blockchain connectivity across warehouses will enable seamless tracking of stored produce, ensuring reduced wastage and pilferage. Farmers will also receive warehouse receipts, which can be used as collateral for loans, providing them with immediate financial support.

This interconnected system will not only provide farmers with better access to markets but also ensure that the supply chain is efficient, transparent and secure. It will serve as the backbone for procurement planning and play a vital role in stabilising food prices. **Impact on Food Inflation** The GFCCE's blockchain-enabled supply chain and warehouse network will rev-

olutionise procurement planning and control food inflation. With real-time data on production, storage, and distribution, government agencies will have accurate insights into commodity availability and demand patterns. This data-driven approach will enable timely procurement decisions, ensuring that food stocks are adequately replenished and distributed. By reducing post-harvest losses and pilferage, the initiative will improve the efficiency of the Public Distribution System (PDS), preventing artificial shortages that often lead to price spikes. Additionally, the transparent pricing mechanism of the exchange will curb hoarding and speculation.

This system will also facilitate targeted interventions during periods of surplus or deficit. For instance, in the case of bumper harvests, surplus stocks can be stored efficiently and exported strategically to global markets, preventing a price crash domestically.

(The writer was a member of the high level MSP committee, Ministry of Agriculture; views are personal)



BINOD ANAND



## FIRST COLUMN

## SEEKING TRUE SHELTER IN THE DIVINE

Amid the chaos of desires, ego and karmaphal, how do we find lasting peace



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We are small, ignorant, helpless and unsafe. There should not be any doubt about our smallness with eight billion of us on the earth's planet itself. How knowledgeable we are or can be? Knowledge is unlimited. How much can we learn in one lifetime? Helpless we are from the time we are born till the time comes to dispose of our bodies. Just count how many people we need daily to survive well. And unsafe all of us are, as the Covid-19 pandemic proved. Therefore, we instinctively seek shelter all the time. An infant needs his parents. As one grows, one takes shelter from education to maintain oneself. Education/training over, time comes to seek shelter in a job or a business.

The idea is to have the shelter of enough money to be able to survive decently. Sex overpowers thinking beginning from a young age. Some are drawn towards fame like a sports person, while others get into politics, etc. for power. The most fortunate seek the shelter of God. Shelter of God is crucial to exist well. Let us see the degree of difficulty for a quality life. Our nature ('svabhava') is a huge handicap. Something or other from lust, anger, greed, jealousy, ego, etc. predominates if not more than one.

What chance is there to have a quality life? Lust derails almost everyone. One assumes that sex is pleasure, and it has so many forms. The worst thing is it's possessing our minds. Ego is not far behind. Have you met anyone who does not feel his or her superiority vis-



à-vis others? Greed does not allow us to assess our needs sensibly. More is better is the desire and there is no satisfaction. Anger is always lurking near the surface. It surfaces at the drop of a hat, literally. Then, there are karmaphalas always ready to manifest. We know how bad ones hurt. What most people don't realise are the ill effects of good karmaphalas. This is when one gets the feeling of invincibility and makes big mistakes.

People look for rewards during success, and we know what these rewards do to us. The third big enemy is old age, when we become weak and are mostly written off. Are we stuck? Far from it. God would not have made such a sorry Creation. Guidance and help are available to all of us if we accept the role of God in our lives. Ignorance, false pride or laziness stops us from taking God's help, who is the owner, controller and everything. You seek guidance sincerely and see what happens. But we don't; we prefer to be in cyclic thinking short-circuiting our own lives. We condemn ourselves by our obstinate attitude. God is prepared to help all of us at any time, but there is a rider.

We must deserve such help. How to determine who should get or who shouldn't? Therefore, the question everyone should be asking is: how do we become deserving of God's 'kripa' (favour)? Simply, you recognise yourself as a soul - part of God. Then, all spiritual activities will make sense.

Shouldn't parts take shelter from God? Shouldn't we be very respectful to God and pay obeisance to Him? What about the 'dhyani' (meditation) of the entity, who is everything? How about thanking God for all that He does for everyone like providing air, water and sunlight free. In short, we should stop taking shelter of anyone or anything except God, and remain there.

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

## Winter's tale in Northern India: A season of discontent



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Northern India's winter is more than just a fleeting season; it is a relentless narrative of marrow-freezing cold, breath-choking pollution and a grim forecast for years to come



Of freezing marrows and choking breaths William Shakespeare, emperor of narratives, master of metaphors, celebrated craftsman of sentences and acclaimed presenter of deep insights into human nature, had a way of coming up with expressions surviving the passage of time. One of them is "winter of our discontent." Richard, Duke of Gloucester, says in Richard III, "Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this sun of York;/ And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house/ In the deep bosom of the ocean buried." The expression, which adorns one of John Steinbeck's most famous novels as its title, should resonate particularly strongly with people in northern India still in the grip of a winter that is cold, damp and utterly polluted. The chances of things improving in the next few years, are, to put it mildly, bleak.

As the chilling flipside of global warming, the cold months will continue to be increasingly marrow-freezing, since, with Donald Trump taking over as the United States' president, the chances of a deceleration in the pace of climate change, have diminished significantly. This is not to look wistfully back over one's shoulder to a mythical place like the island valley of Avilion, where, pace Alfred Tennyson in a very different context, "falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, / Nor ever wind blows loudly." Climates and the weather have been notoriously fickle cousins throughout history. If any part of the past seems golden, it is because of the distance in time which lends it enchantment.

It had, when it was the present, its warts, some of them rather large and ugly. Floods and droughts took very heavy tolls when meteorological devices and skills for predicting their advent and coping with their aftermath, were far less advanced. In the absence of electrical heating devices, which we have, life could not have been terribly pleasant during the last ice age which had covered



AS THE CHILLING FLIP SIDE OF GLOBAL WARMING, THE COLD MONTHS WILL CONTINUE TO BE INCREASINGLY MARROW-FREEZING, SINCE, WITH DONALD TRUMP TAKING OVER AS THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENT, THE CHANCES OF A DECELERATION IN THE PACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, HAVE DIMINISHED SIGNIFICANTLY

about 30 per cent of the earth's surface and ended 15, 000 to 20,000 years ago. On a more specific note, slavery was legal in most parts of the world—including the chest-thumping democracies of the West—as late as the second half of the 19th century. The weather, doubtless, has an impact on life and its moods, which influence thought, speech and feeling which, in turn, trigger action.

All of these, at a certain elevated level, power the wheels of history. These also affect inter-personal relations, causing friction and hostility arising from anger and discontent, or cordiality and warmth caused by harmony. The sum total of the interaction among these factors determines the quality of a community's social existence in terms of tensions between collective bodies like class and caste, and stress caused by individual actions like crime, which is often caused by alienation resulting from marginalisation, poverty and anonymity in impersonal societies. A crime can be a perverse act of self-assertion, a sub-conscious statement like, "I kill, therefore I exist"—a variant of Rene Descartes much-quoted assertion, "Cogito ergo sum (literally, "I think, therefore, I am")."

Another form of self-assertion can be participation—to say nothing of playing a leading role—in a mass movement. Eric Hoffer writes in *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, "There is in us a tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves. Success and failure are unavoidably related in our minds with the state of things around us. Hence it is that people with a sense of fulfilment think it a good

world and would like to conserve it as it is, while the frustrated favour radical change. The tendency to look for all causes outside ourselves persists even when it is clear that our state of being is the product of personal qualities such as ability, character, appearance, health and so on." What is the result? Hoffer quotes Thoreau as saying, "If anything ail a man, so that he does not perform his functions, if he has a pain in his bowels even ... he forthwith sets about reforming—the world." (Italics by Hoffer; Thoreau has used the plurals "ail" and "have" as it was done by many in his time in such contexts).

Attempts to reform the world invariably lead to struggles with status quoists. Besides, social tensions and conflicts will increase following rising ocean levels, caused by global warming, submerging coastal areas. Inward migration of people from these regions would trigger clashes over land and resources in the interior areas. The same factors will also be in operation in other areas to which people may escape from regions made uninhabitable by temperatures rising too high to support life.

One can, of course, argue that people would be kind to global warming refugees, realising that they may have to leave their homes someday for the same reason. But then, kindness is not what a person encounters frequently in life; it is the same with gratitude, the lack of which weighed heavily on the Bard of Avon. "Ingratitude," he lamented in *King Lear*, "thou marble-hearted fiend..." He bewailed in *As You Like It*, "Blow, blow, thou winter wind, / Thou art not so unkind/As man's ingratitude."

And he says in *Twelfth Night*, "I hate ingratitude more in a man/ Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness./ Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption/ Inhabits our frail blood." Character attributes like proneness towards gratitude are rooted deep inside one's DNA and are modified by the environment as one grows up. Seasonal changes can impact their intensity, as discomfort caused by extreme heat or cold can put one's temper on a short leash.

On the other hand, as Anton Chekhov put it, "People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they're happy." This brings us back to our starting point—northern India's butt-freezing, breath-choking winter. Can one be happy in its midst? The answer will be in the affirmative, as the news of a progeny scaling new heights at work or being gifted with a baby, will warm the cockles of one's heart. This, however, is most likely to be a passing phase, overwhelmed, sooner than later, by the many worries and sadnesses that quotidian existence brings and that, again, are ephemeral.

The more relevant question will be whether one can survive northern India's winter and for how long. The transition to the hereafter caused by pollution stalks one silently but lethally. The final truth in life is mortality.

All this has been said before, and will be said again, as one will hear the much-quoted proverb, "What can't be cured must be endured." It has joined the ranks of venerable cliches blessed with eternal life.

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

## Cultural heritage tourism: A path to sustainable growth and mutual understanding

Respecting the balance between tourism and heritage enables a mutually beneficial relationship that supports communities, preserves cultural identity and promotes global harmony

Cultural tourism, as defined in the 22nd session of the UN Tourism General Assembly in 2017, is an activity where a visitor's primary motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and engage with the tangible and intangible cultural attractions and products of a destination. These motivations shape the agendas of both the visitor and the tour guide at cultural heritage destinations, bridging the gap between the historical and the contemporary.

## The Evolution of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Cultural heritage has undergone a significant shift in perception, moving from an archaeological focus to the concept of "living heritage" and its reuse. Similarly, tourism has evolved from being largely

centered on pilgrimage to a multifaceted industry encompassing learning, entertainment, experiences, and relaxation. This transformation has elevated tourism as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and job creation across diverse sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment. The industry's ripple effect benefits individuals and communities alike, engaging local businesses, transport operators, craftspeople, tourist guides, and the hospitality industry in a symbiotic relationship.

For these benefits to be fully realised, collaboration among stakeholders is essential. They must work collectively to offer authentic and meaningful experiences that resonate with travelers while preserving the



SUKHDEV SINGH

integrity of cultural sites. **Cultural Heritage as a Driver of Tourism**

A rapidly growing segment within the tourism industry is cultural heritage, which encompasses natural and architectural sites, traditional crafts, cultural events, performances, and intangible knowledge. Recognised as both a commodity and an experience, cultural heritage attracts mar-

ket players, planners, and governments aiming to expand the scope of tourism. It promotes inclusive growth, intercultural exchange and mutual understanding.

The relationship between tourism and cultural heritage is built on mutuality. While cultural heritage serves as a key attraction for tourism, the latter provides the financial and structural support required for its preservation and promotion.

**Navigating Contradictions** Tourism operates on the principle of profit and economic growth, while cultural heritage centers on identity and inheritance. These differing foundations can create contradictions. For the tourism industry, cultural heritage is often commodified, whereas for her-



itage conservation, tourism acts as a feeder for sustainability. While these sectors can support one another to an extent, unchecked tourism practices can lead to significant challenges, including overcrowding, environmental and degradation.

To mitigate these issues, regulated practices in cultural heritage tourism must prioritise the symbiotic relationship

between factors influencing tourist experiences and those fostering cultural understanding. Tour operators and tourists must respect the sanctity and protocols of cultural heritage sites. Travelers should be encouraged to appreciate local customs without overstepping boundaries, ensuring a balance between immersion and respect. Sustainable cultural heritage tourism, thus, becomes a pathway to fostering "culture for peace."

**Economic and Cultural Benefits of Heritage Tourism** Cultural heritage tourism creates opportunities for income generation and employment. This is achieved by maintaining and showcasing heritage structures, sites, and products. Preservation and management efforts, such as cata-

logging and storytelling, directly benefit from tourism revenue. Simultaneously, the broader economic ecosystem, including hospitality, transportation, and entertainment, flourishes through increased visitor engagement.

However, cultural heritage is far more than a revenue-generating commodity. It serves as a repository of customs, values, and artifacts, connecting communities to their past and reinforcing their identities. Tourism, when responsibly managed, can amplify the significance of heritage sites by fostering research, introducing new narratives, and raising awareness. Reinvestment of economic returns into preservation ensures the longevity and authenticity of cultural heritage.

## Challenges of Cultural Heritage Tourism

While tourism can elevate the value of cultural heritage, it also introduces challenges. Overcrowding, environmental degradation, and disruptions to the local population's way of life are common issues.

## Sustainable and Responsible Tourism

To maintain a harmonious balance between tourism and cultural heritage, sustainable practices are essential. These include regulating visitor numbers, promoting eco-friendly initiatives, and ensuring that tourism revenue is reinvested into preservation efforts.

(The writer is retired professor of Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar and Vice-Chairman, INTACH; views are personal)





'Putin should negotiate with Ukraine, Zelenskyy ready for talks'

PTI/AP WASHINGTON/MOSCOW

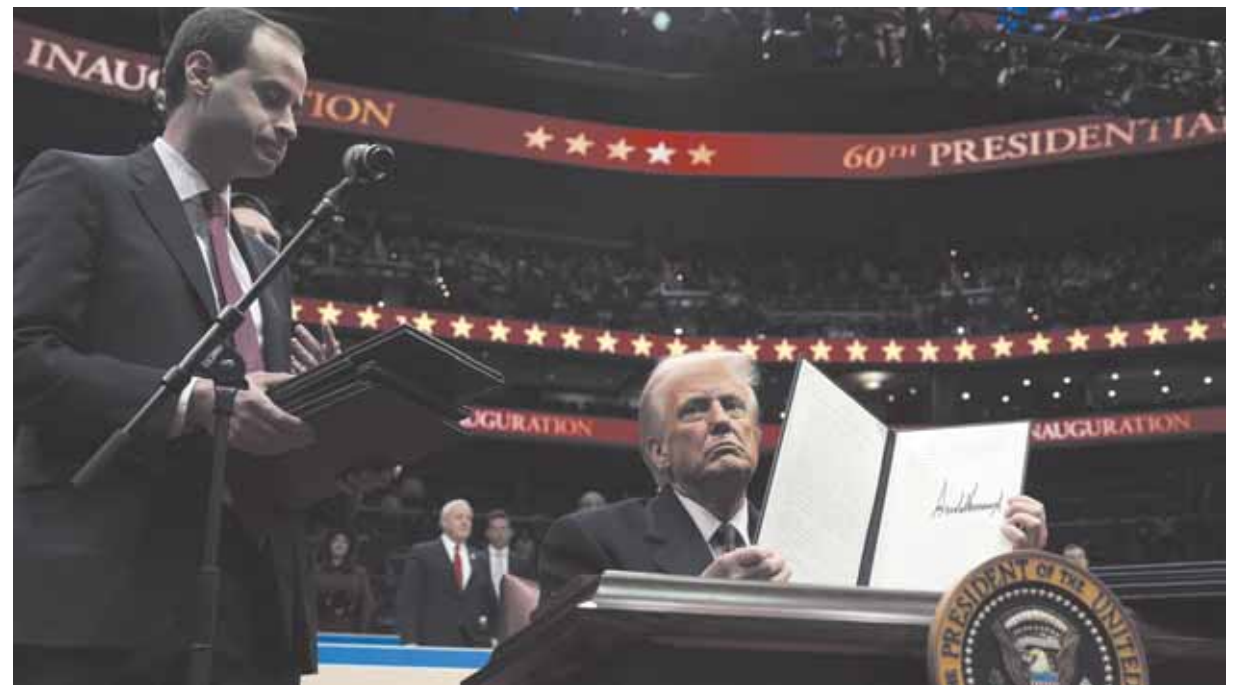
Russian President Vladimir Putin 'should make a deal' with Ukraine, US President Donald Trump has said...

Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Trump said on Thursday that the OPEC+ alliance of oil exporting countries shares responsibility for the nearly three-year conflict in Ukraine...

UK to convince US Prez Trump not to impose trade tariffs

PTI LONDON

The British government on Friday said it has an argument in favour of convincing US President Donald Trump not to impose tariffs on its trade with the UK...



President Donald Trump signs an executive order as he attends an indoor Presidential Inauguration parade event at Capital One Arena...

Donald Trump signs executive order to declassify JFK assassination files

Washington (PTI): US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order seeking to declassify files on the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy...

Japan's leader says he's preparing for tough negotiations with US President

Tokyo (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, struggling to stabilise his minority government, said Friday he will seek to maintain regional security...

Luther King, Jr. I have determined that the release of all records in the Federal Government's possession pertaining to each of those assassinations is also in the public interest...

Israelis await next four hostages' names in ceasefire deal

AP TEL AVIV

Relatives of hostages still being held by militants in Gaza called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday to ensure all remaining captives are freed...

first of all we want to say thank you for the happy moments we felt this week. But we want to tell you we still have 94 hostages, we need them all at home...

will also release a list of which Palestinian prisoners will be freed. The hostages were among about 250 men, women and children captured by militants who burst across the border into Israel on Oct 7, 2023...

children, sick people and those over 50 — almost all civilians, though the deal also commits Hamas to freeing all living female soldiers in Phase 1...

US Prez targets California water policy as he prepares to tour LA fire damage

Washington (AP): As President Donald Trump prepares to tour wildfire damage in California, he's zeroing in on one of his frequent targets for criticism: State water policy...

water is in the north, while most of its people are in the drier south. Los Angeles, the nation's second largest city, depends on drawing water from elsewhere...

according to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, a regional water wholesaler. Metropolitan provides the rest of the water from state supplies and the federally managed Colorado River system...

keeping a certain amount of water flowing through helps support fish populations and the waterway itself. But Trump and others say the state lets too much water go to the ocean rather than cities and farms...



Caretakers release panda cubs at a playground to make public debut ahead of Chinese Lunar New Year at Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu in southwestern China's Sichuan Province on Thursday.

UK MP flays 'Emergency' film screening disruption by 'Khalistani terrorists'

London (PTI): An Opposition Conservative Party Member of Parliament has urged the UK Home Secretary to intervene after his constituents in north-west London were threatened by 'masked Khalistani terrorists' who burst into a screening of Kangana Ranaut's film 'Emergency'...

and not be "threatened by thugs who want to disrupt democratic opportunities to see public films." "May we have a statement from the Home Secretary (Yvette Cooper) next week on what will be done to ensure that people who want to see such films, which have been passed by censors, can do so in peace and harmony?"

Washington (PTI): The US has arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals, including a suspected terrorist, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors, the White House has said.

US arrests 538 illegal immigrant criminals

Washington (PTI): The US has arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals, including a suspected terrorist, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors, the White House has said.

Underlining that deportation flights have begun, she asserted that President Donald Trump is "sending a strong and clear message to the entire world: if you illegally enter the United States of America, you will face severe consequences."

# Government approves ₹500 Crore capital infusion in IFCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic financial institution IFCI on Friday said the government has approved ₹500 crore capital infusion in the company through the preferential issue of shares. The Department of Financial Services has conveyed sanction of the President of India to release funds of ₹500 crore to IFCI Ltd towards subscription to the share capital during FY 2024-25, the state-owned entity said in a regulatory filing. Following this, the meeting of the board of directors of the company is called on January 29, 2025, to consider the Preferential Issue of equity shares to the central government, subject to the approval of shareholders, stock exchanges and such other regulatory authorities



as may be required. With the infusion, the government's holding in the company is expected to further increase from the existing 71.72 per cent as of September 2024. The capital infusion plan for IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in the

Lok Sabha in December. The Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up by the government on July 1, 1948, as the first development financial institution in the country. The Finance Ministry, in November 2024, in principle approved the 'Consolidation of IFCI Group', which entails the merger/amalgamation of

IFCI Limited and Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited and other group companies. As per the proposal, Stock Holding Corporation of India Ltd, IFCI Factors Ltd, IFCI Infrastructure Development Ltd and IIDL Realtors Ltd will merge with IFCI Ltd. Further, Stock Holding Services Ltd, IFCI Financial Services Ltd, IFIN Commodities Ltd and IFIN Credit Ltd will be merged into a single entity, which will be a direct subsidiary of the consolidated listed entity. Additionally, Stock Holding Document Management Services Ltd, Stock Holding Securities IFSC Ltd, IFIN Securities Finance Ltd, IFCI Venture Capital Funds Ltd and MPCON Ltd shall be direct subsidiaries of the consolidated listed entity that is IFCI.

# FM Sitharaman takes part in customary halwa ceremony

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday participated in a traditional 'halwa' ceremony, marking the final stage for the preparation of Union Budget 2025-26 to be unveiled on February 1 in the Lok Sabha. The ceremony is a customary ritual in which traditional dessert 'halwa' is prepared and served to officials and staff members of the finance ministry who are involved in the preparation of the budget. It is organised in the basement of North Block, which houses the ministry in the national capital and is attended by the finance minister and other high-ranking officials. According to sources, the Finance Minister participated in the ceremony and also took a round of the Budget Press and reviewed the preparations besides extending her best wishes to



the officials concerned. Sitharaman is going to present Budget 2025-26, the eighth straight budget in a row, on the backdrop of GDP growth moderating to 6.4 per cent in the financial year as against 8.2 per cent recorded in the previous fiscal. Like the previous four full Union Budgets and one Interim, the full Union Budget 2025-26 will also be delivered in paperless form. All the Union Budget documents, including the Annual Financial Statement

(commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill etc. As prescribed by the Constitution, will be available on the 'Union Budget Mobile App' for hassle-free access to Budget. Besides Sitharaman, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and other senior officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth and other senior officials were present at the ceremony.



# RBI penalises J and K Bank, Bank of India, Canara Bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday said it has penalised Jammu and Kashmir Bank, Bank of India, and Canara Bank for deficiencies in regulatory compliance. Jammu and Kashmir Bank has been penalised Rs 3.31 crore for contravention of certain norms related to financial inclusion - access to banking Services - Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA); 'Know Your Customer' and 'Loans and Advances - Statutory and Other Restrictions'. In another release, the RBI said Rs 1 crore penalty has been imposed on the Bank of India for non-compliance with certain provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949. A penalty of Rs 1.63 crore has been imposed on public sector Canara Bank for non-compliance with certain directions on priority sector lending, the interest rate on deposits and financial inclusion - access to banking services - BSBDA, the RBI said. Also, a penalty of Rs 1 lakh has been imposed on Datsun Exports, West Bengal for non-compliance with certain directions issued by the RBI on 'Managing Risks and Code of Conduct in Outsourcing of Financial Services by NBFCs'. In each case, the RBI said penalties were based on deficiencies in statutory and regulatory compliance and were not intended to pronounce upon the validity of any transaction or agreement entered into by the entities with their customers.

# Insurers expect tax benefits, concessions for healthcare sector in Union Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurers are hopeful of a host of tax benefits, including concessions for the insurance and healthcare sectors, from the Union Budget 2025-26 to be unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1. SBI General Insurance MD and CEO Naveen Chandra Jha said that as India advances toward financial inclusivity and universal healthcare, the upcoming Budget is expected to further strengthen the health insurance sector. Initiatives like Bima Sugam, designed to achieve the goal of 'Insurance for All' by 2047, are expected to receive regulatory and fiscal support to address the protection gap, he noted. "Additionally, the budget is likely to focus on expanding access in underserved regions through government-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and advancements in digital infrastructure," Jha added. Bajaj Allianz Life MD and CEO Tarun Chugh said India's economic growth presents immense opportunities for the insurance sector to enhance financial resilience. "Aligning tax deduction of life insurance annuity products with the National Pension Scheme (NPS) and addressing the issue of tax on principal component on annuity products can evolve retirement needs effectively," he added. Chugh also made a case for the introduction of a separate tax deduction for term insurance and extending the tax deduction on life insurance premiums under the new tax regime. According to the Annual Report of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai), the country's insurance penetration in 2023-24 was 3.7 per cent compared to 4 per cent in 2022-23. The penetration for life insurance industry marginally declined from 3 per cent in 2022-23 to 2.8 per cent during 2023-24. The penetration with respect



to the non-life insurance industry remained the same at 1 per cent during 2023-24. Subrata Mondal, MD and CEO of IFICO Tokio General Insurance said the Union Budget provides an essential opportunity for the government to implement reforms that can address industry challenges and encourage the broader adoption of insurance products. One key expectation is the enhancement of tax incentives for policyholders to promote wider uptake of insurance, he added. Another priority is increasing budgetary support for government-backed insurance schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Ayushman Bharat, he added. "They would significantly improve access to insurance for underserved populations, particularly in rural and economically weaker regions," Mondal said. Sameer Bansal, MD & CEO, PNB MetLife, said that while India is a fast-growing economy fuelled by its rising middle-class population of 25-45-year-olds, the proportion of people above the age of 60 is equally increasing at a rapid pace. Financial stability is a cornerstone of a secure future. One of our hopes for the upcoming budget is to see support for pension and annuity plans, which are key financial instruments for the retirement planning needed to create that stability, he added. "Tax support for pension plans offered by life insurers on par with the National

Pension Scheme will provide both greater choice and allow diversification of assets into multiple pension plans," he said. Bansal also urged the government to consider removing GST on premiums for annuity plans to support pensioners and make annuities more affordable and accessible. Universal Sampo General Insurance Managing Director and CEO Sharad Mathur opined that strengthening the insurance sector is essential for driving financial resilience, economic stability, and inclusive growth. With targeted reforms and incentives like the reduction of GST on Health insurance, we can unlock the true potential of insurance, ensuring wider coverage, encouraging innovation, and building a secure future for every individual and business, Mathur said. Srikanth Kandikonda, Chief Financial Officer, ManiPalCigna Health Insurance, said that given the rising healthcare costs and the need for higher sum insured cover, the government should reduce the tax burden by increasing the limits under Section 80D of income tax for premiums paid for health insurance to Rs 50,000 for all and Rs 1 lakh for senior citizens. "This is crucial for achieving the government's vision 'Insurance for all by 2047' and would substantially reduce the financial burden on families investing in their health and financial wellbeing," Kandikonda added. During 2023-24, the non-life

# Rupee rises 22 paise to close at 86.22 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rupee appreciated 22 paise to close at 86.22 against the US dollar on Friday, as a decline in the US dollar index supported investor sentiments. Forex traders said weak crude oil prices also boosted the local unit, while sustained foreign fund outflows weighed on the local unit. Traders further noted that the upcoming Union Budget will play a crucial role in shaping market sentiment and the rupee's trajectory. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a strong note at 86.31 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.16 and a low of 86.36. It finally closed at 86.22, rising 22 paise against the US dollar from previous close. On Thursday, the rupee declined 9 paise to settle at 86.44 against the US dollar. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said the rupee strengthened this week as the dollar index saw a



significant decline. He said the drop in the dollar came after US President Donald Trump's oath taking on January 20, while concerns over heavy tariffs on China were alleviated after no such drastic measures were announced. This brought relief to global markets and supported emerging market currencies like the rupee. "Adding to the rupee's strength was a softer trend in crude prices, which reduced import pressure and supported the domestic currency. The rupee is likely to remain in a range of 85.80-86.50, with further movement depending on global cues, crude price trends,

and any fresh policy signals from the Indian government," Trivedi said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading down 0.56 per cent to 107.44. The Dollar Index has recently surged, reaching a high of 110, fuelled by escalating uncertainty surrounding the "Trump factor". However, this rally in the Dollar Index is unlikely to be sustained as global uncertainties subside and Trump-related risks diminish, CR Forex Advisors - MD Amit Pabari said. Moreover, at the World Economic Forum in Davos,

Switzerland, US President Donald Trump called for an immediate interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve, a move that will generate a negative sentiment for the DXY, Pabari added. Meanwhile, Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.47 per cent to USD 78.66 per barrel in futures trade. Brent oil was trading at USD 78.03 per barrel as Trump asked Saudi to lower prices so that he could make Russia stop the war. He has also threatened sanctions against Russia if they do not get out of the war, Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 329.92 points, or 0.43 per cent, to settle at 76,190.46 points, while the Nifty declined 113.15 points, or 0.49 per cent, to 23,092.20 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,758.49 crore, according to exchange data.

# CBIC notifies rules for entities to get TIN

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Entities that are not required to get a GST registration but are required to make a tax payment under the GST Act provision can now obtain a Temporary Identification Number (TIN). The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has notified an amendment to GST rules to issue TIN to entities that are not required to register under the GST Act but need to make payments under some specific provision. Under Goods and Services Tax (GST) rules, registration is mandatory for businesses with an annual turnover of ₹40 lakh and ₹20 lakh in the manufacturing and services sectors, respectively. "Where a person is not liable to registration under the Act



but is required to make any payment under the provision of the Act, the proper officer may grant the said person a temporary identification number," CBIC said while introducing Rule 16A in Central GST Rules. The decision to issue TIN to entities that are otherwise not required a GST registration was taken by the GST council in its meeting last month. This would ensure smooth tax payments while reducing the compliance burden on those who do not regularly engage in taxable activities.

# AIMTC urges government to address challenges faced by transport sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) national president Harish Sabharwal on Friday asked the government to address issues like exorbitant increase in toll tax rates and misuse of the e-challan system. The charge handover and oath taking ceremony of the newly elected office bearers of AIMTC was held on Friday, where Amritlal Madan, the outgoing President of AIMTC, officially passed on his responsibilities to the newly elected president Sabharwal and his team. AIMTC in a statement said some of the key issues that will be high on Sabharwal's agenda include abolition of border checkpoints in the states especially in



Maharashtra, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh. The truckers body said exorbitant increase in toll tax rates, checking misuse of E-challan system and impractical ban on 10-year old diesel vehicles in Delhi-NCR are also on

agenda of the newly-elected president of AIMTC. AIMTC also demanded that the government should constitute 'Drivers Samajik Suraksha Welfare Board' with representatives from AIMTC. It also demanded that drivers

should be covered in the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Ayushman Bharat Yojana. According to the statement, the transportation sector is a key contributor to India's economy, accounting for approximately 7.7 per cent of India's GDP (PPP adjusted). AIMTC also announced that every year the 24th Day of January will be celebrated as 'National Drivers Day'. In 1936, AIMTC was established as a non-political, not-for-profit apex body representing India's road transport sector in both cargo and passenger segments. It encompasses over 95 lakh truckers, 50 lakh passenger vehicle operators, and 3,500 associations nationwide, impacting over 20 crore people directly or indirectly.

# Used-car sales in India to cross one crore annual mark by 2030: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian used-car market is expected to cross 1 crore sales mark annually by 2030 with oftakes increasing across both urban and smaller towns, according to a report by CARS24. As per the 'Gear of Growth: The 2024 Indian Used-Car Market Report', Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi are driving the country's used-car boom. "The market is projected to grow from 4.6 million sales in CY23 to a whopping 10.8 million by CY30, cruising ahead with an impressive CAGR of 13 per cent," CARS24 Co-Founder Gajendra Jangid said. As the customer preferences change for more affordable and dependable options, the



used-car market is witnessing an uptick vis-a-vis the new car market, he added. As per the report, SUVs continue to dominate the used car market with a share of 16.7 per cent in 2024. Their spacious design, versatility, and premium appeal make them a favourite across both urban and rural markets, it noted. The report highlighted that the post-COVID era has seen a significant shift in consumer preferences, with 12 per cent

of car buyers prioritising personal mobility for convenience and safety over shared transportation. Maruti Suzuki Swift has become the most sought-after model across both metro and non-metro cities, the report said. Additionally, models like the Hyundai Santro, Tata Tiago NRG, and Maruti Wagon R have consistently delivered exceptional resale value, solidifying their popularity among budget-conscious and value-driven buyers, the report said. As per the report, financing for new cars has seen significant growth, climbing from 60 per cent in 2010 to 84 per cent in 2024, highlighting the increasing consumer reliance on loans for vehicle ownership.

## INBRIEF

### AMPHENOL LAUNCHES TWO MADE-IN-INDIA TECH SOLUTIONS

Amphenol, a world leader in interconnect solutions for Communications, Mobile Consumer Products, RF, Optical, Broadband and Commercial electronics markets, today ushered into the next era of sustainable technology solutions with the launch of DuraSwap Concentric Connectors and Type 6 Charging Gun solution designed and manufactured in India at the country's premier battery technology showcase, the Bharat Battery Show 2025 organised under the aegis of Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.



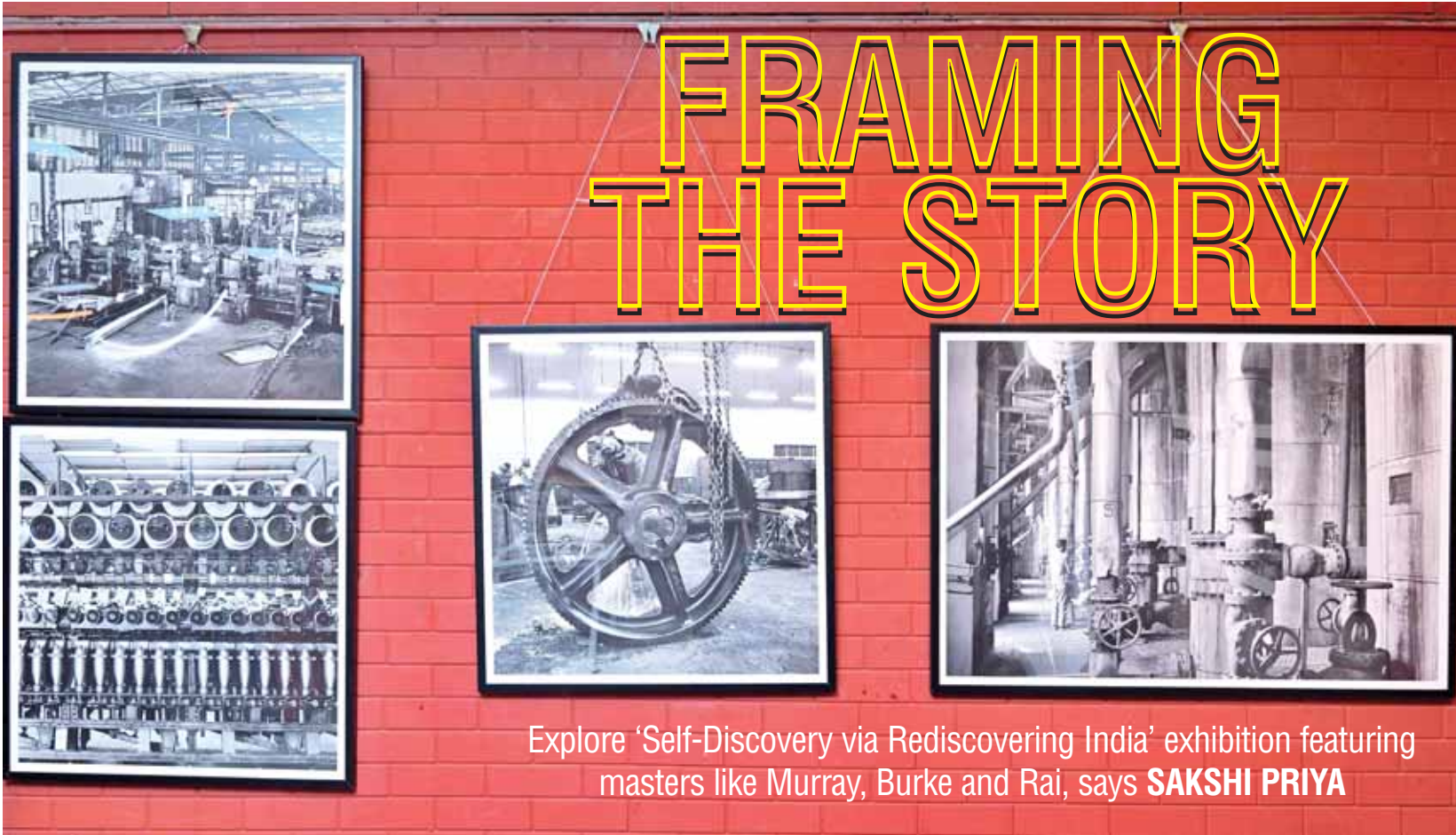
### WORKSHOP ON BEAUTY FOR BETTER LIFE

AMRITSAR: Directorate of Placement and Career Enhancement of Guru Nanak Dev University in coordination with Life Long Learning Department organised a workshop on the topic of "Beauty for Better Life" under the CSR of Loreal implemented by Naandi Foundation - Mahindra Pride classroom. Workshop offered 40 hours of free training for Cosmetology and Beauty culture to the students of Life Long Learning Department. The students were trained on the said domain and life skills. More than 50 students have undergone the skill training from an Industry expert.





Photography has a way of preserving moments, not just in images but in emotions, in stories and in history. Stepping into the *Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India* exhibition, curated by Neville Tuli, feels like embarking on a personal journey through time. Hosted by the Tuli Research Centre for India Studies (T.R.I.S.), the collection showcases photographs that capture the essence of India, spanning over a century. This third installment of the series presents a stunning collection of photographs that bring together India's rich cultural heritage, its landscapes, and the people who have shaped its story. The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to experience not only the visual beauty of India but the depth of its historical and emotional connections. The collection highlights some of the earliest photographs from the mid-1800s, including Dr. John Murray's *Bishessur Nath Temple, Benares (1858)*. The albumen print, preserved in its pristine form, speaks to the timeless spirituality of Varanasi. Similarly, Colin Roderick Murray's *Jagmandar Water-Palace at Udaypur (1873)* captures the reflective beauty of Rajasthan, where the delicate interplay of water and architecture tells its own story. As one moves through the exhibition, it



Explore 'Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India' exhibition featuring masters like Murray, Burke and Rai, says SAKSHI PRIYA

becomes evident how photography has documented India's evolution. Early works by pioneers like Linnaeus Tripe and Samuel Bourne provide a visual history of India's landscape and architecture. Their photographs are windows into a bygone era, evoking a sense of nostalgia for a time that is both familiar and distant. The collection doesn't just stop at capturing landscapes or monuments, it explores the lives of people, the complex relationships between humans, animals and nature and the political shifts that have shaped the country. Works by contemporary masters like Raghuraj Rai and Jyoti Bhatt add a modern perspective, demonstrating how photography has continued to evolve as an art form while remaining true to its roots as a medium for storytelling. The exhibition's focus on India's cinematic and political history further enhances its significance. Photographs from the sets of iconic films, as well as snapshots from key political



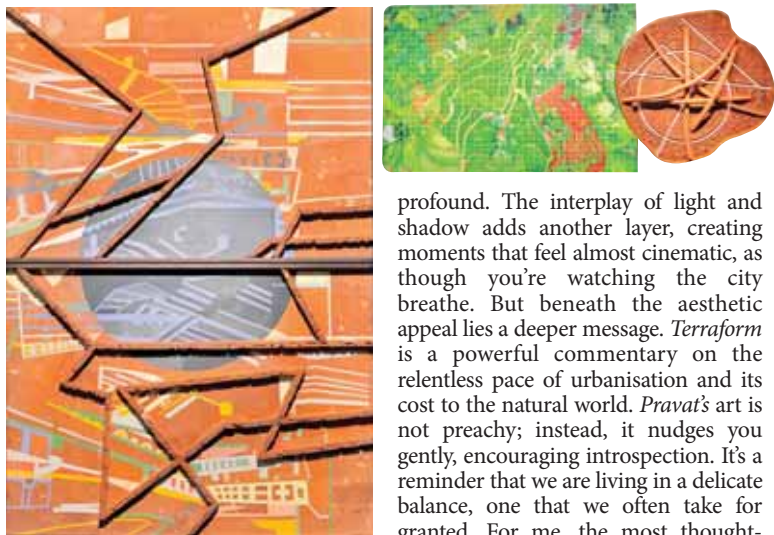
moments, provide an intimate look into the country's cultural and social landscape. These images not only reflect history but also shape the way we remember it. With access to an extensive digital archive containing over 22,000 photographs, the exhibition offers a deeper dive into India's history, allowing visitors to explore beyond the gallery walls. This combination of physical and digital resources provides a comprehensive view of India's rich visual heritage. The *Self-Discovery via Rediscovering India Part III* exhibition is a reflection of India itself. It is an invitation to reconnect with the nation's history, to see it through the eyes of those who have captured its most defining moments. For anyone interested in understanding the soul of India, this exhibition is a rare and valuable opportunity to experience the country's past, present and future through the lens of some of the greatest photographers.

PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

## ART BEYOND THE CITY



By SAKSHI PRIYA  
In *Terraform*, M. Pravat invites us to walk through a world that feels both familiar and unsettlingly fragmented. This solo exhibition, hosted at STIR Gallery, Delhi, is an ambitious exploration of how our built environments intersect, clash and coexist with nature. By using materials like bricks, pigment, dust and LED lights, Pravat creates pieces that feel like echoes of urban landscapes, half-built, half-ruined and wholly captivating. Walking into the gallery feels like stepping into a suspended reality. The sculptures and installations seem to hold secrets, each fragment whispering stories of cities in transition. Pravat's work doesn't just replicate the urban environment; it deconstructs it, laying bare the tensions between construction and destruction, between human ambition and nature's quiet defiance. As I moved through the space, I found myself reflecting on my own relationship with the city, its noise, its chaos and its beauty. What struck me most was how each



piece felt alive, as if caught mid-metamorphosis. There's a raw, unpolished energy to the work that mirrors the constant flux of modern life. Pravat has a remarkable ability to take the ordinary, bricks, stone, dust and land and elevate it into something

profound. The interplay of light and shadow adds another layer, creating moments that feel almost cinematic, as though you're watching the city breathe. But beneath the aesthetic appeal lies a deeper message. *Terraform* is a powerful commentary on the relentless pace of urbanisation and its cost to the natural world. Pravat's art is not preachy; instead, it nudges you gently, encouraging introspection. It's a reminder that we are living in a delicate balance, one that we often take for granted. For me, the most thought-provoking aspect of the exhibition was its sense of incompleteness. These aren't polished, finished works, they're intentionally raw, mirroring the way cities are always in a state of becoming. It's both unsettling and oddly hopeful, an expression to human resilience and the

possibility of change. Pravat's ability to turn complex themes into visceral experiences is what makes this exhibition so memorable. Pravat's *Terraform* goes beyond being a traditional art exhibition. It's an immersive experience that urges us to pause and reflect on the way we shape and inhabit the world around us. It encourages a deeper look at the delicate balance between creation and destruction, challenging us to rethink our relationship with the spaces we build and the nature we often overlook. As the artist explained, "This landscape is actually magical lands, a digital landscape. I'm inspired by the digital format and I started rendering a digital feeling. When you see it from a distance, it looks consciously faded, like it's mathematically exercised in certain ways, cutting your land and developing your shape. The challenge is how I mixed everything together, where contrast exists between the elements, and people should think about why this context has changed."



## Steps of Serenity

By TEAM VIVA  
In moments where words cannot express the depth of emotion, dance becomes a powerful form of communication. Samaya Chauhan's *Rangapravesham* performance in New Delhi was a beautiful example of this truth. At just sixteen, Samaya's talent shone brightly, captivating the audience and bringing to life the rich tradition of Kuchipudi. The evening marked her transition from a student to a full-fledged performer, celebrating her growth as an artist. The recital opened with the graceful *Ganpati Vandana*, a prayer to Lord Ganesha, followed by *Dashavtar*, in which Samaya depicted the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. Through her precise footwork and expressive movements, she brought each avatar's story to life. A particularly emotional part of the performance was *Samson Ki Maala pe Simrun Main Pii Ka Naam*, choreographed by Padma Bhushan Shri Raja Reddy, where Samaya beautifully expressed the spiritual connection between two souls.

The performance concluded with *Tarangam*, in which Samaya danced on the rim of a brass plate, telling stories of Lord Krishna's childhood. The complexity of the rhythmic patterns and Samaya's graceful footwork demonstrated her technical skill and deep understanding of the dance form. Dr. Aseem Chauhan, Chancellor of Amity University, presented a Vote of Thanks, saying, "The essence of today's incredible performance by my daughter Samaya is the notion of Guru Shishya Parampara, the sacred bond between the Guru and his disciple." This connection was evident in the performance, with Samaya drawing on the teachings and guidance of her esteemed gurus, Padma Bhushan Shri Raja Reddy, Smt. Radha Reddy and Smt. Kaushalya Reddy. The evening was a celebration of culture, tradition and the bond between mentor and disciple. Samaya's performance highlighted the beauty of Kuchipudi, reminding the audience of the timeless connection between dance, history and emotion.



## BRM 2025: UNITING CULTURES THROUGH THEATRE



By TEAM VIVA  
The National School of Drama (NSD) is set to host the 25th edition of *Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM)* from 28 January to 16 February 2025, marking a significant milestone in its history as the world's largest theatre festival. For the first time, the festival will expand beyond India, with performances in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Kathmandu, Nepal, alongside 11 Indian cities including Bengaluru, Jaipur and Ranchi. Themed *One Expression, Supreme Creation*, BRM 2025 will feature over 200 productions from nine countries, including Russia, Germany and Taiwan, creating a global platform for collaboration and cultural

exchange. Renowned actor and NSD alumnus Rajpal Yadav has been named the *Rang Doot* (Festival Ambassador) of this year's event. The festival will also emphasise inclusivity by featuring productions involving marginalised communities such as *Santhal tribes, sex workers, transgender persons and children*. Virtual performances under the initiative *Vishwa Jan Rang* will include NRIs and youth from all seven continents. NSD Director Shri Chittaranjan Tripathy said, "Bharat Rang Mahotsav has evolved into a global celebration of theatre, providing a platform to share and celebrate diverse creative expressions. With its expanded reach,

this year's festival sets a new benchmark." BRM 2025 will also include director-audience dialogues, masterclasses, seminar and cultural experiences like folk and traditional performances, Rang Haat exhibitions and a vibrant food bazaar. The Opening Ceremony at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi, will feature Rang Sangeet, a musical performance by the NSD Repertory Company, as part of celebrations marking NSD's 65th anniversary and the Repertory's 60th year. With its unique blend of global outreach, inclusivity, and cultural immersion, BRM 2025 promises to be a landmark event in the world of theatre.



