



1000 KMS

Indian Metro Network achieves a historic milestone of 1000 kilometres under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

PM MODI GIVES GIFT OF NEW METRO PROJECTS AND NAMO BHARAT TO PEOPLE OF DELHI

A journey that began in 2002 with initiation of modern metro in Delhi by Vajpayee ji, has reached the nationwide 1000-kilometre milestone under Modi ji

WE NOW HAVE THE WORLD'S 3rd LARGEST METRO NETWORK

KILOMETRES ADDED



3X
INCREASE

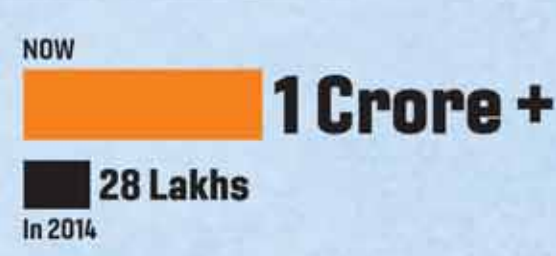


STATES COVERED



DAILY PASSENGERS TRAVELLING

OVER 2.5X
INCREASE



TOTAL DISTANCE BY METRO TRAINS DAILY

3X



Police claim breakthrough in journalist's murder, 3 arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■
BIJAPUR

Amid massive protests and widespread condemnation in Chhattisgarh and outside, Bijapur police on Saturday arrested three persons in a brutal murder of a young journalist Mukesh Chandrakar.

Ritesh Chandrakar and his brother Dinesh Chandrakar along with a supervisor Mahendra Ramteke have been taken into custody, Bastar (Range) Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said.

Ritesh was nabbed from Raipur airport while two others were held in Bijapur.

The body of Mukesh Chandrakar, who had gone missing since January 1, was



The three accused- Ritesh Chandrakar, Dinesh Chandrakar and Mahendra Ramteke have been arrested on Saturday for brutal murder of journalist Mukesh Chandrakar in Bijapur.

recovered on Friday from a septic tank of a contractor Suresh Chandrakar's complex at Chattanpara locality in Bijapur city.

On January 1 night,

Ritesh invited the deceased Mukesh Chandrakar for a dinner in a planned manner under a conspiracy at Suresh Chandrakar's property.

Police said based on

investigations that during dinner, Ritesh had an argument with Mukesh for creating hindrance in their work despite having family relations.

On January 1 night, Ritesh invited the deceased Mukesh Chandrakar for a dinner in a planned manner under a conspiracy at Suresh Chandrakar's property

Police informed that Ritesh and Ramteke attacked Mukesh with iron rod and the journalist succumbed to injuries on the spot.

As per police, Ritesh informed Dinesh Chandrakar and others about the killing. Later, the three buried Mukesh's body in a septic

tank. Under intense pressure from civil societies and journalists, state government has constituted an 11-member special investigation team (SIT) headed by Bijapur Additional Superintendent of Police Mayank Gurjar to probe into the murder. Police say they will soon apprehend the main accused Suresh Chandrakar.

Meanwhile, the issue has taken a political turn as Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, who also holds the home department, alleged that the civil contractor Suresh Chandrakar, the main accused in the case, is a Congress leader while the Congress hit back at the Minister and said that the accused has left Congress and already joined the BJP.

Chhattisgarh procures 97.60L tonnes paddy



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh government has procured 97.60 lakh tonnes of paddy as of Saturday for the Kharif year 2024-25.

Food Department officials said 19.34 lakh farmers have sold their paddy. In return, over Rs 21,000 crore has been paid to them through the bank linking system.

Millers have so far lifted 65.80 lakh tonnes of paddy. Chhattisgarh aims to procure 160 lakh tonnes of paddy this

season. The procurement began on November 14 and will conclude on January 31, 2025.

Chhattisgarh is paying the highest support price of Rs 3,100 per quintal.

The total registered paddy growers this year are 27.68 lakhs, including 1.45 lakh new registered farmers.

Procurement is underway at 2,739 procurement centres across the state.

Micro ATMs have been made available in all the 2058 cooperative societies.

Centre approves Rs 200 cr for Unity Mall project in Chhattisgarh



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said on Saturday that the central government has approved Rs 200 crore for the Unity Mall project in the

state. It is an initiative of the government to set up a Unity Mall in each state's capital to promote local products and products from other states.

Sai said on his X handle that his government was promoting the 'One District

One Product' model.

The aim is to promote district-wise specialities.

This will inspire local artisans, weavers, and self-help groups and boost employment opportunities, he said.

Bilaspur railway station undergoes major facelift

STAFF REPORTER ■
BILASPUR

A facelift of Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur railway station is underway with a renovation project of Rs 392 crore.

Under the mega facelift project, the Bilaspur railway station will be developed a green station with world class amenities in which the station premises will have natural light and ventilation.

A senior official from Indian Railways said the renovation and modernization project will ensure Bilaspur which is the headquarters of South East Central Railway (SECR) will have all modern facilities.

An aesthetic view is being given to the station with modern architectural design and expansion of platforms.

Passenger facilities like hi-speed Wi-Fi, comfortable



A view of Bilaspur railway station after the renovation project is completed

sitting arrangements, air conditioned waiting halls, modern toilets and special facilities to differently-abled have to be developed under the plan. On the other hand CCTV cameras are being

installed, automatic ticketing facility and modern passenger information system are initiated to ensure safety and offer a digital solution to the passengers.

Apart from them,

shopping facilities, food courts are being established at the station premises and stalls are established to showcase the regional cultural heritage.

Keeping in view the long term plan, a waiting room

The Bilaspur railway station will be developed a green station with world class amenities in which the station premises will be have natural light and ventilation

having seating arrangements for around 800 persons, parking area for around 1150 vehicles in 28,000 square feet area, 3 new foot-over-bridge (FOB) are being constructed.

New AI system to help doctors identify patients at risk for suicide

AGENCIES ■

A team of US researchers has developed a novel artificial intelligence (AI) system that can help doctors identify patients at risk for suicide. Researchers from the Vanderbilt University Medical (TASE:PMCN) Center said that AI-driven clinical alerts can potentially improve prevention efforts in routine medical settings.

The team tested the AI system, called the Vanderbilt Suicide Attempt and Ideation Likelihood model (VSAIL), in

three neurology clinics at VUMC. They analysed 7,732 patient visits over six months for suicide risk during regular clinic visits.

The findings, reported in JAMA Network Open, showed that the AI model could effectively prompt doctors -- 596 total screening alerts -- by analysing routine information from electronic health records and calculating a patient's 30-day risk of a suicide attempt.

Further, the team compared two approaches -- automatic pop-up alerts that

interrupted the doctor's workflow versus a more passive system that simply displayed risk information in the patient's electronic chart.

The interruptive alerts were found to be far more effective, leading doctors to conduct suicide risk assessments in connection with 42 per cent of screening alerts, compared to just 4 per cent with the passive system.

While "universal screening isn't practical in every setting" the new VSAIL can "help identify high-risk

patients and prompt focused screening conversations," the researchers said, suggesting that similar systems could be tested in other medical settings.

The team found that although interruptive alerts were more effective at prompting screenings, they could potentially contribute to "alert fatigue" among doctors.

The team said that doctors can become overwhelmed by frequent automated notifications. They urged future studies to examine this concern.

Collective efforts emphasised to promote road safety measures



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

A review meeting of the road safety scenario of Chhattisgarh, held in Raipur on Saturday which emphasised the need for collective efforts for

widespread promotion of the mandatory use of seat belts and helmets.

Chief Secretary Amitabh Jain and Chairman of the Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety (Retd.) Justice Abhay Manohar Sapre presided over the meeting.

Sapre gave instructions to survey and identify black spots for road accidents and take preventative measures.

He asked officials to educate students about road safety and take action against those who break the rules.

He asked officials to educate students about road safety and take action against those who break the rules

He said that fatalities in road accidents can be reduced by taking special initiatives for emergency treatment and trauma care.

Better results can be achieved through planning with inter-departmental coordination, he said.

Small milk fat globules promote good bacteria growth: study

AGENCIES ■

An Israeli study has revealed that small milk fat globules promote the growth of beneficial bacteria, according to a press release issued by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HU) on Thursday.

The study, published in Food Chemistry, explored how the structure and size of milk fat globules influence their interactions with both beneficial and harmful bacteria.

The researchers tested milk fat globules from mammary gland cells and raw milk, focusing on their impact on bacterial growth and biofilm formation.

The study found that the structure of the globules,



rather than their chemical composition, was key in shaping these interactions, Xinhua news agency reported.

Consequently, small milk fat globules promoted the growth of Bacillus subtilis, a beneficial bacterium, while

larger globules triggered biofilm formation, which is linked to bacterial resilience.

Furthermore, a synthetic lipid mixture mimicking the chemical composition of small milk fat globules failed to stimulate bacterial growth, underscoring the critical role

of structural properties over mere chemical makeup.

Metabolomic profiling further supported these results, showing that bacteria responded differently to various globule sizes.

The findings underscore milk's natural protective mechanisms and its potential to support gut health.

Interestingly, the size of the milk fat globules did not affect Escherichia coli, a harmful bacterium, highlighting the specificity of the interactions.

The researchers concluded that these insights could help enhance dairy and food safety, suggesting that milk's structural design plays an important role in shaping the microbial ecosystem and supporting health.

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda		Regional Office, Jeevan Prakash, L.I.C. Building, Pandri, Raipur (C.G.), PH: 0771 - 4222611, 4222612 E-mail: recovery.raipur@bankofbaroda.com	POSSESSION NOTICE	
(As per Appendix IV read with rule 8(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002) Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of Baroda under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(2) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice to the following borrowers / guarantors calling upon the Borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the respective notices within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The under mentioned Borrower / Guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers/Guarantors and the Public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of the Act read with Rule 8 and under section 14 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002.				
S. N.	Branch Name/Ph.No.	Name of Borrower / Guarantor	Description of Property	Demand Notice Date, Amount & Symbolic / Physical Possession Date
01	Santoshi Nagar Branch, Raipur 7024108166	M/s Danteshwari Baster Arts Furniture Prop.: Mr. Raghunath Singh Bundela, Prajapati Complex, Boriyakhurd, Kandul Road, Pin - 492001, Raipur.	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Equitable mortgage of residential Plot No. - 63, Kh No. - 255/1-2-3 Part, online Bhuniya Kh. No. - 15003/1 Part, PH No. - 83. R. N. M. Raipur - 18 (Kandul), Plot area - 1500.00 sq ft. Property situated at - Wallfort Paradise Phase-II, Mouza - Kandul, Tehsil & Distt. - Raipur (C.G.) Owner of the property is Mr. Raghunath Singh Bundela. Boundaries of the Property: North - Plot No. 62 South: Plot No. 64, East: Plot No. 52 West: Road.	02.08.2024 Rs. 28,70,818.25 + interest + other charges 03.01.2025 Physical Possession
The Borrowers / Guarantors / Mortgagees in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the above mentioned property and any dealings with the property/ies will be subject to the charge of Bank of Baroda for above mentioned amount interest and other charges thereon. The Borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets. Date: 05.01.2025, Place: Raipur, Chhattisgarh Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda				

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

Established 1865 sunday pioneer

RAIPUR, SUNDAY JANUARY 5, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹3

magazine

www.dailypioneer.com

PUBLISHED FROM DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA



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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

Former West Delhi MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma will contest against AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi assembly constituency. The New Delhi seat, held by Kejriwal since 2013, will witness the former chief minister taking on the sons of two other former chief ministers. Verma is the son of Sahib Singh Verma, who had a two-year tenure as chief minister in the 1990s. Former West Delhi MP Verma started his preparations for contesting from the seat even before he was announced as the official candidate, saying he had been given the go-ahead by national leaders. The Congress candidate from the seat is former three-term chief minister Sheila Dikshit's son Sandeep Dikshit. "I thank my party's top leadership... I hope that the trust that the party has shown in me, I'll live up to it... When Delhi was facing COVID-19, when they needed Oxygen, Arvind Kejriwal Ji was distributing a 'free bottle on every bottle'... There are many works in Delhi - like cleaning



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

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

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

Kejriwal promises water bill waivers post elections

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) debt accumulated to over Rs 73,000 crore, former Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party convener Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday made another promise to the people of Delhi that his party would waive inflated water bills if his party was voted to power in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls likely to be held next month. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal urged the people not to pay inflated water bills and said that 12 lakh families got bills of zero amount. "But when I went to jail, I don't know what these people (BJP) did behind my back." He assured that these erroneous bills would be waived off after the elections, offering relief to affected residents. The AAP government is providing 20,000 litres of free water to Delhi households. Interestingly, Kejriwal's AAP is in the power in Delhi. This comes after announcing six freebies to the people of Delhi including Mahila Samman Scheme under which Rs 2100 per month to be given to every woman, Pujaris and Granthi's monthly salary and free treatment to senior citizens. Insiders say the DJB's financial losses have jumped from Rs 344.05 crore in the 2019-20 fiscal to Rs 1,196.22 crore in 2021-22, while the board has a debt of more than Rs 73,196.55 crore, which includes Rs 37,366.59 crore in principal amount and Rs 35,829.96 crore in interest.

Fresh violence erupts in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

After the apologies by Manipur chief Minister N Biren Singh, fresh violence were reported from the north eastern State as security was beefed up in Kangpokpi district where the Superintendent of Police was injured in a mob attack for failing to "remove" the central armed forces as per the demands of Kuki groups. A mob on Friday evening attacked the office of M Prabhakar, throwing stones and other "projectiles" to vent their anger over the continued deployment of central forces, particularly the BSF and the CRPF, in the Saibol village. Vehicles of district police kept within the compound of the SP's office were vandalised. Prabhakar



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

was injured after being hit on the forehead by some projectile, officials said. Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla who took over the charge chaired a meeting with senior police, CRPF, BSF, Assam Rifles officials on Saturday and reviewed the comprehensive security situation in the state. The Governor of Manipur chaired a security meeting at Raj Bhavan in Imphal. Taking stock of the prevailing law and order situation, the Governor reviewed the security apparatus and its

arrangements throughout the state, with a particular focus on border areas," the release issued by Raj Bhavan said. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023. A senior officer in Imphal said a huge contingent of security forces have been deployed in the area. "Situation is now under control and being closely monitored," he added. In a statement, the police said that besides stones, the protestors attacked the SP office with petrol bombs. "Security forces retaliated against the mob and resorted to the use of adequate force to disperse the mob and the situation was brought under control," it said.

Nagaland CM calls for end to factionalism in Naga talks

PNS ■ KOHIMA

Nagaland deputy chief minister Yanthung Patton, while emphasising that the Centre is willing to offer only one solution to the longstanding Naga political issue, on Saturday urged Naga underground factions and people to come together for a permanent resolution. Addressing the 175th anniversary celebration of Lhisemia Thino, the amalgamation of different clans of Lhisemia Khel (sector) of Kohima village, Patton said, "The Centre,



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

agreement in 1997 and also inked the Framework Agreement in 2015. It also entered into parallel negotiations with the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (WC NNPGs), composed of at least seven Naga factions, in 2017. They signed the Agreed Position in November 2017. Negotiations between the Centre and Naga groups were declared to have concluded on October 30, 2019, by the then interlocutor and Governor of Nagaland, R N Ravi.



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

Two Army accidents in two weeks: 8 soldiers dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Three Indian army jawans were killed and two others received injuries when their vehicle skidded off the road and fell into a deep gorge in the North Kashmir district of Bandipora on Saturday. According to preliminary reports, the accident occurred due to inclement weather and poor visibility conditions in the SK Payeen area of Bandipora. The locals in the area responded swiftly and launched rescue operations. This is the second incident in the last two weeks in which Indian army jawans lost their lives in a road accident. Five soldiers were killed in the Balnoi sector of Poonch when an army vehicle rolled down into a gorge on December 24, 2024. Srinagar-based Chinar Corps posted on X (earlier Twitter), "On 04 Jan 24, while performing duty in the Bandipora district, an Indian Army vehicle skidded and fell into the gorge due to inclement weather and poor visibility." Injured soldiers were promptly evacuated for medical care with assistance from Kashmiri locals, for which we express gratitude to the citizens for providing immediate succor. Tragically three bravehearts lost their lives in the unfortunate accident. Indian Army extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families."

Fog causes rail, air traffic disruption



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

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

hours of zero visibility, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). India's largest airline, IndiGo, temporarily halted both arrivals and departures. Airlines, including IndiGo and Air India, issued travel advisories urging customers to check their flight status before heading to the airport and allow extra time for travel. An official said 19 flights were diverted at the airport between 12.15 am and 1.30 am due to reduced visibility. Of them, 13 were domestic, four international and two non-scheduled flights. More than

WEATHER	
AQI	378
MAX	20°C
MIN	7.8°C

45 flights were cancelled due to bad weather conditions at Delhi as well as at the destination airports, the official said. As per information available on flight tracking website Flightradar24.Com, over 450 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport. "While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not

CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information. "Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," the Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a post on X at 6.56 am. CAT III facility allows aircraft to operate in low-visibility conditions. Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital is operated by DIAL, handles around 1,300 flight movements daily. "# 6 E T r a v e l A d v i s o r y : Departures and arrivals at #DelhiAirport are currently on hold due to reduced visibility," IndiGo said in a post on X at 1.05 am on Saturday. Air India said in an update on X at 1.16 am that poor visibility due to dense fog was impacting flight operations in Delhi and parts of northern India. A thick blanket of fog had enveloped Delhi on Friday as well, delaying more than 400 flights. In an update on X at 10.58 am, IndiGo said dense fog continued to affect visibility in Delhi, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Srinagar, Guwahati, and Patna, even during daytime. "We assure you that our teams are working diligently to assist all impacted customers, ensuring your journey resumes as soon as the weather improves," it said in another post at 11 am.

Delhi man scams 700 women using fake dating profiles

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested a 23-year-old man who allegedly scammed over 700 women after befriending them on dating applications by posing as a US-based model. The cyber police station of West district arrested Tushar Bisht on charges of exploiting online platforms such as Bumble and Snapchat to lure his victims, blackmail them using private photos and videos, and extort money. According to police, during the day, he works as a recruiter at a private company in Uttar Pradesh's Noida. At night he turns into a US-based model on a soul-searching trip to India. His day job offered him security, and his nocturnal activities brought in the money through manipulation and blackmail. Tushar Singh Bisht, 23, was arrested from the Shakarpur area of East Delhi on Friday for defrauding over 700 women by posing as a model on dating platforms. A resident of Delhi, Tushar has a bachelor's degree in business administration (BBA). For the past three years, he had been employed as a technical recruiter at a private company in Noida. His father works as a driver, his mother is a homemaker, and his sister is employed in Gurugram. "Posing as a US-based freelance model, the accused created fake identities using a virtual international mobile number and photographs of a Brazilian model," Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), Vichitra Veer, said in the statement. Bisht used the fake profiles to connect with women aged between 18 and 30 years on various online dating platforms. "His primary targets were users of Bumble, Snapchat and WhatsApp," the statement said. The DCP said Bisht gained his victims' trust by engaging in conversations, and convinced them to share private and intimate images and



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

videos."Once he obtained the content, he resorted to blackmail, threatening to leak the sensitive material online, or sell them to dark web unless the victims paid him," the DCP said. Preliminary investigation revealed that the accused interacted with over 500 women on Bumble and 200 others on Snapchat and WhatsApp, police said. The accused's mobile phone contained incriminating evidence, including objectionable data of victims, a virtual mobile number, and details of financial transactions involving extortion. The police also seized 13 credit cards linked to various banks, the statement said. The matter came to light on December 13, last year, when a Delhi University student filed a complaint with the cyber police station claiming that she had connected with the accused on Bumble earlier in the year. Posing as a US-based model visiting India for work, he gained her trust through consistent chats. As their interactions deepened, the accused persuaded her to share private photos and videos on Snapchat and WhatsApp. Despite repeated requests to meet in person, he always evaded with excuses, the DCP said.

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

In a momentous occasion for Indian Americans, six of their leaders on Friday were sworn-in as the members of the US House of Representatives, the largest so far for this minority ethnic community in the United States. "When I was first sworn in twelve years ago, I was the sole Indian American Member of Congress and only the third in US history. Now, our coalition is six strong! I am excited to welcome even more Indian Americans to the halls of Congress in the years to come!" Congressman Dr Ami Bera said in a post on X. Bera, the senior most of them, who has been sworn-in for the seventh consecutive term as a representative of the seventh Congressional District of

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said some people are trying to disturb peace in the name of caste politics and called for thwarting such designs to preserve the social harmony in rural parts of the country. Inaugurating the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, the Prime Minister exuded confidence that villages will play a key role in pushing forward the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047. Without mentioning any names, Modi said certain people are trying to disturb peace by spreading the venom of caste politics. "We have to work to strengthen the heritage of peace and harmony of villages," he said. Recalling the steps taken by the NDA government since 2014, for rural development, Modi, quoting an SBI research report, said poverty in rural India came down to below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. He said the previous government had neglected the people living in rural India, and even after decades of independence, villages



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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Entire country needs MSP, says fasting farmer leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Fasting Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal on Saturday appealed to farmer outfits in other states to fight the agitation seeking legal guarantee to MSP strongly in their states to send a message to the Centre that it is not Punjab's fight alone. During his over 11-minute address at the "Kisan Mahapanchayat" at Khanauri, Dallewal tried to send across a message that his life was not more important than farmers. Seven lakh farmers have committed suicides in the country and he knows what their families have to go through, Dallewal said at the mahapanchayat called by the two forums which is spearheading the ongoing agitation. The 70-year-old farmer leader was brought out in a stretcher and addressed the gathering of farmers while lying on a bed from a stage at the protest site. He referred to farmers' demands, including the MSP guarantee, indicating that he understands the enormity of the task at hand but that does



not mean one will sit and do nothing. Dallewal, who is convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political), has so far refused to take any medical aid despite his prolonged fasting which completed 40 days on Saturday, which has caused his health to deteriorate. During the past few days, Dallewal had made an address to the farmers via short video messages, but this was his first public appearance after several days when he began his fast on November 26. Dallewal, whose outfit was earlier part of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) during

its agitation against now repealed farm laws, said, "When we returned from Delhi (borders after the 2020-21 stir), farmer leaders from other states had said Punjab is going back after the repeal of three laws.... We had told them Punjab cannot betray anyone." "Now, Punjab is at the forefront again. I request organisations of other states with folded hands to fight agitation strongly in their states and send a message to the central government that this agitation is not of Punjab alone but of the entire country," he said. "The entire country needs MSP," said Dallewal, who in between took sips of water

and told doctors standing nearby to allow him to complete his speech and not worry about his blood pressure. He told the gathering, "The way you have come today in numbers. Now, from every village one trolley should reach Khanauri to strengthen this Morcha." "The battle which I am fighting, it is not me who is fighting. It is being said Dallewal is fighting... It is God's will. The way God wants one to do, we have to do accordingly," he said. During his brief address, Dallewal said, "The night we got information that police can evict us, the same night scores of youths reached Khanauri from Punjab and Haryana and took charge of the morcha..." The Punjab government recently made it clear that it had no intention to forcibly evict Dallewal from the present agitation site. "I have faith that we will win the Morcha. The government may try to use as much force, but they cannot defeat the morcha," he said. Then going into the enormity of the task at hand in fighting the farmers' battle for MSP guarantee and other

demands, Dallewal said, "It is not that I don't understand this... I have studied, and I know it is difficult. But seeing the difficulty or enormity of the task if we sit doing nothing, then how will things work". See how much loss we suffered, he said, referring to farmer suicides. "Seven lakh farmers have committed suicide in the country. If we sit and think it is a difficult task, it will not be achieved, should we let them die. We are farmer leaders, many of our colleagues are farmer leaders," he said. Dallewal said he does not even care about his life, but the battle has to be fought so that no farmer suicides happen again. "The Supreme Court recently said that Dallewal's life is important. I had said that day hon'ble Supreme Court I am also human, alright, but what about families of those 7 lakh farmers who have committed suicide. We have to stop suicides in future," he said. Dallewal thanked the farmers who came for the "Kisan Mahapanchayat" from far off places and said despite doctors not permitting, it was his desire to meet them all.

Eminent nuclear scientist R Chidambaram passes away

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Renowned nuclear scientist and crystallographer Dr Rajagopala Chidambaram - who played an integral role in the Pokhran-I and Pokhran-II nuclear tests - passed away on Saturday, following a brief indisposition. Dr Chidambaram, who had not been keeping well for some days, had been admitted to the Jaslok Hospital where he breathed his last in the early hours of Saturday. He was 89. A high-pressure physicist and internationally-renowned crystallographer, Dr Chidambaram will long be remembered for his contributions to establish India as a nuclear weapons power on the global stage besides and give a boost to India's nuclear power generation plan. He was a trailblazer, an inspirational leader, and a dedicated mentor to countless scientists and engineers in the country. His life's work has propelled India to the forefront of global science and technology, and his legacy will continue to inspire generations. Born

November 11, 1936, he was an alumnus of Presidency College, Chennai, and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, from where he also later got his D.Sc Degree. Dr Chidambaram joined the Indian nuclear establishment in 1962, when Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha, the father of the country's nuclear programme, helmed the affairs. During his illustrious career as a scientist, Dr Chidambaram worked as the Director of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) from 1990-93, Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and Secretary of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) from 1993-2000. He was also the chairman of the board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) during 1994-95. A Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India from 2001-2018, Dr Chidambaram also served as a member of the IAEA's Commission of Eminent Persons, contributing to the organisation's vision for 2020 and beyond. Apart from playing a pivotal

part in shaping India's nuclear capabilities, Dr Chidambaram played an integral role in the nation's first nuclear test in 1974, and led the DAE team during the Pokhran-II nuclear tests in 1998. He had worked with legends like Dr Vikram Sarabhai, Dr Homi Sethna, Dr Raja Ramanna, Dr M R Srinivasan, Dr P K Iyengar and groomed distinguished scientists like Dr Anil Kakodkar, who succeeded him. During the Pokhran-I test carried out on May 18, 1974 (Smiling Buddha), Dr Chidambaram worked closely with Dr Ramanna, Dr Sethna and Basanti Dulal Nag Chaudhuri, then then Director General of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). During Pokhran-II on May 11 and 13, 1998 (Operation Shakti), Dr Chidambaram worked with then DRDO chief Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, who later became the President and Dr Kakodkar. A visionary leader, Dr Chidambaram believed in the power of science and technology to drive national development.

Congress announces the launch of 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign to press for resignation of Amit Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress has announced the launch of a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign to press for the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "insulting" BR Ambedkar, the principal architect of India's Constitution. Congress head of media and publicity Pawan Khera said under the campaign, party leaders will organise 'Chaupals' in every district and tell people how the BJP-RSS has been insulting Ambedkar and demeaning the Constitution for decades. Launched on January 3, the campaign will culminate on January 26 with a grand rally at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh,

the birthplace of Ambedkar, commemorating 75 years of the Constitution and the Republic, Khera said. "To safeguard his legacy and values, a 'Samvidhan Bachao Rashtriya Padayatra' will be held from January 26, 2025, to January 26, 2026 -- connecting villages and towns across India with a powerful message of unity and social justice. We reiterate our demand to sack Home Minister Amit Shah for his derogatory remarks against Dr Ambedkar," Khera told reporters. The Congress leader also accused the BJP leadership of trying to "normalise the demonisation" of national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Jawaharlal

Nehru, who left an indelible mark in the country's history. "Make-up artists' cannot replace national icons whose contributions to the nation are immense. Such people have certainly created a name for themselves in the country's history. Icons like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar cannot be replaced," Khera said. He also said the campaign aims to awaken and tell the people of the country about BJP's actions and the "insult" to Ambedkar. Replying to a debate on the Constitution in the Rajya Sabha on December 17, Shah had criticised the Congress for repeatedly taking Ambedkar's name. "It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar... Had



they taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven," Shah had said. "We hoped that the home minister would apologise and the prime minister would intervene in this matter. But Prime

Minister Modi supported the home minister and became a partner in insulting Ambedkar ji," Khera claimed. The Congress leader said this issue was also raised at the Belagavi meeting where it was decided that the party will

launch a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign across the country. "Under this campaign, we will organise 'Chaupals' in every district and tell people how the BJP-RSS has been insulting Ambedkar ji and demeaning the Constitution for decades," Khera said. The Congress leader also recalled how on November 30, 1949, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) described the Constitution as "un-Indian" in its mouthpiece 'Organiser'. "When Ambedkar ji talked about equal rights for women, RSS burnt his effigy at the Ramliha Maidan. Not just Ambedkar ji, but Gandhi ji's legacy is also being attacked today," he alleged. He also claimed that BJP was confident of

changing Ambedkar's Constitution by winning more than 400 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which didn't happen. "But, had this happened, not only would the Constitution have changed, even Mahatma Gandhi's picture would have been removed from currency notes. "Mahatma Gandhi, whom the whole world considers an ideal, is slowly being removed by the ruling party of his own country. That is why the Congress is moving ahead and preserving the legacy of Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi," he said. Khera also said the BJP cannot roam around speaking about the Constitution while keeping 'Manusmriti' in its armpit. "BJP not just openly

commits injustice against Dalits and Adivasis in the country, it also weakens their laws. The BJP is against constitutional and democratic institutions. It has always insulted Ambedkar ji, but we will not tolerate this anymore," he said. Khera also released a pamphlet for the 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign, claiming the Congress seeks to reveal with historical background how the BJP has been conspiring against 90 per cent of India's population. "Insulting Babasaheb Ambedkar or conspiring against him is a violation of the rights of 90 per cent of the people of this country... It is an attack on them," Khera alleged.

MP Govt to appraise Court on Bhopal toxic waste shifting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BHOPAL

Amid protests over the planned disposal of 337 tonnes of toxic waste linked to the Bhopal gas tragedy in the Pithampur industrial town of Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has decided to appraise the courts of the latest position on the issue and not proceed until further court orders. The decision was taken on Friday night during a high-level meeting to review the situation. "The state government stands firmly with the people. We will not allow any harm to the public. We will bring the matter before the court and proceed with any action only in compliance with the court's order," Yadav told reporters after the meeting. The chief minister has appealed to the citizens not to



Workers deployed for the collection of toxic waste for disposal from the Bhopal's Union Carbide factory at the Pithampur Industrial Waste Management Facility. PTI

believe in rumours. Yadav held discussions with senior public representatives, top officials from the administration and police, and legal experts in the meeting regarding the transportation of the Union Carbide waste and its dumping and disposal near Pithampur. He said that they have discussed various aspects of the work related to dumping of Union Carbide waste in the presence of deputy chief

ministers Jagdish Devda and Rajendra Shukla, senior MP and state president of the Bharatiya Janata Party Vishnu Dutt Sharma, Urban Development and Housing Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, Chief Secretary Anurag Jain,

Additional Chief Secretary Dr Rajesh Rajora, Director General of Police Kailash Makwana, Principal Secretary Law and other senior officials in the Chief Minister's Office. Yadav said, "The Madhya Pradesh government is a government that gives top priority to the interests of the public. Therefore, we have always moved forward with the public interest in mind. In compliance with the Supreme Court's instructions and the High Court's order, the Union Carbide waste has been transported to Pithampur." He said they only transported it while complying with the safety parameters in line with the petitions and orders of the court. The court had given a deadline for the waste to be sent to the designated place before January 4. The court expected its report by January 6.

Bihar PSC exam retest held peacefully for 12,000 candidates amid paper leak allegations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
PATNA

The retest for a select group of candidates who had appeared in the recent Bihar PSC exam, which has been embroiled over allegations of question paper leak, was held on Saturday afternoon at 22 centres here, officials said. Altogether, 12,000 candidates were scheduled to sit for the re-examination that started at 12 pm and continued till 2 pm, they said. The 70th Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) held on December 13 has been in the eye of a storm over allegations of leak of question papers, which has been denied by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC), though a fresh test was ordered for 12,000 candidates, who had appeared for the exam at the Bapu Pariksha Parisar centre here. "The re-exam took place at 22 centres in Patna. Out of a total 12,000 candidates, around 8,200 aspirants had downloaded their admit cards. The authorities concerned will later provide the exact number



of students who appeared for the retest," District Magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh told reporters. "The retest was peacefully held at all the centres, where adequate arrangements were put in place. The district administration had issued strict guidelines. Unauthorised entry, gatherings and protests within a 200-metre radius of the centres were prohibited," he said after the exam. The clamour for cancellation of the Combined Competitive Examination held on December 13 by the BPSC has gained strength, as agitating aspirants found support from

various political parties, Independent MP Pappu Yadav and Jan Suraj founder Prashant Kishor. Yadav had on Friday led his supporters in blocking rail and road traffic in several areas of Patna as well as other parts of the state. Several MLAs and leaders of the Congress, CPI-ML (Liberation), CPI(M) and CPI also lent support to the protesting candidates, who have been demanding that fresh exams be held for all the five lakh candidates, who had appeared at more than 900 centres across the state, to ensure a "level-playing field".

Cold wave intensifies in Uttar Pradesh, dense fog disrupts normal life

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

The cold wave gripping Uttar Pradesh intensified on Saturday, with icy winds and dense fog plunging temperatures and disrupting daily life across the state. For the second consecutive day this season, a cold-day alert was issued in 10 districts, leaving residents shivering as they braved the harsh weather conditions. Kanpur recorded the lowest temperature in the state, with the mercury dipping to 4.6 degrees Celsius in the last 24 hours.



The cold snap was felt statewide, with temperatures in 20 cities falling below 10 degrees Celsius. The Meteorological Department issued a yellow alert for dense fog in 26 districts. In Lucknow, visibility dropped to less than 50 meters until 9 a.m., causing significant disruptions to air travel. Two flights to Lucknow from Bengaluru and Delhi were cancelled, while several outbound flights faced delays of up to eight hours. Visibility reached zero in

multiple cities, including Meerut, Auraiya, and Mainpuri, where vehicles struggled to navigate. Slow-moving traffic was reported in Sambhal, Ghaziabad, Hapur, and Ayodhya. In Agra, dense fog caused a tragic accident late Friday night in the Kiravali area, where three vehicles collided. One person died, and 30 passengers were injured in the mishap. In another accident, a passenger bus collided with a truck on the Agra-Jaipur

highway at 1 a.m. The bus, traveling from Gujarat, also struck a Max vehicle following the initial collision. Police arrived at the scene to rescue passengers trapped inside the bus. Four passengers and two individuals from the Max vehicle were critically injured. According to reports, the accident occurred after the driver of a trailer truck abruptly applied brakes, causing the bus to rear-end the truck amid low visibility. The police later used cranes to

remove the damaged vehicles. Dr. S.N. Sunil Pandey, a meteorologist at CSA University in Kanpur, explained that the strong northwestern winds from the mountains have significantly intensified the cold. "The wind speed on Saturday is expected to range between 15 and 25 km/h, contributing to severe cold conditions," he said. Pandey predicted that Saturday would remain extremely cold, with minimal chances of sunshine. Some respite from the cold is expected on Sunday, with a slight rise in temperature and reduced fog. However, the cold wave is likely to return after Monday as a new western disturbance becomes active. This weather system could bring drizzle to parts of western Uttar Pradesh and the NCR, further intensifying cold winds. Authorities have urged residents to exercise caution while traveling and to stay indoors during peak fog hours to minimize risks associated with the severe weather.

Three arrested in connection with Chhattisgarh journalist Mukesh Chandrakar's murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
RAIPUR

Three persons have been detained in connection with the murder of a 33-year-old journalist whose body was found in a septic tank on a local contractor's property in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Saturday. Mukesh Chandrakar, a freelance journalist, went missing on January 1, and his body was found on Friday in the septic tank on a property owned by contractor Suresh Chandrakar at Chattanpara Basti in Bijapur town. "Three persons have been detained in connection with the murder and are being interrogated," an official here said. The police, however, did not disclose their names and said the details would be revealed later in the day. Mukesh worked as a freelance journalist for news channels, including NDTV, and ran a YouTube channel, 'Bastar Junction', which has some 1.59 lakh



subscribers. He had played a crucial role in the release of a CoBRA commando, Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, from Maoists' captivity in April 2021 following the Takalguda Naxal ambush in Bijapur, wherein 22 security personnel were martyred. He went missing on Wednesday evening, and his elder brother Yukesh Chandrakar lodged a complaint with the police the next day, a senior police official said. Tracking Mukesh's mobile number, police reached the property owned by Suresh Chandrakar and found the body in a septic tank, which was freshly cast with

concrete slab, he said. Police suspect the murder is linked to a recent report of irregularities in road construction work in the district the victim had covered. Suresh Chandrakar is said to be involved in the work. Journalists held a symbolic road blockade at Hospital Chowk on National Highway 36 in the city in the morning, demanding that the contractor's properties in Bastar division, including Bijapur, be attached and a case be registered against him. They also demanded a death sentence for the contractor and others involved in the murder, removal of security detail for him, and sealing of his bank accounts, among other demands. The protesting journalists also sought the suspension or transfer of the Bijapur superintendent of police. Protestors have warned of an indefinite road blockade from Sunday if their demands are not met.

UP Govt launches initiative to curb stubble burning, promotes sustainable farming

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Government has launched a unique initiative, "Parali Ke Badle Govansh Khaad" (cow manure in exchange for stubble) aimed at curbing stubble burning and promoting sustainable farming practices, officials said on Saturday. The initiative, launched on October 28, 2024, seeks to address environmental pollution caused by stubble burning while benefiting farmers through the distribution of cow manure for organic farming, a statement said. Under the campaign 2,90,208.16 quintals of straw were collected across the state and 1,55,280.25 quintals of cow manure were distributed to farmers. The manure is being used to enhance soil fertility and encourage sustainable agricultural practices, it said. Several districts including Varanasi, Banda, Budaun, Jalaun, Bareilly, Amethi, Siddharthnagar, and Bahraich performed notably well during the campaign with large-scale collection of straw and distribution of manure, the statement added. The campaign not only reduces environmental hazards but also lowers production costs for farmers contributing to long-term agricultural welfare and conservation efforts, the statement said. It also emphasizes the protection of destitute cows by facilitating the distribution of manure collected from cow shelters to farmers. This effort showcases the proactive and efficient functioning of the Animal Husbandry Department, the statement added. The 'Parali Ke Badle Govansh Khaad' campaign stands as a crucial step for the welfare of farmers, environmental sustainability, and society at large, the government said. It effectively curbs stubble burning and motivates farmers towards organic farming, this initiative marks a significant stride towards a greener revolution in the state, the statement added.

Devotees visiting Ayodhya during Mahakumbh should not face any inconvenience: CM Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
AYODHYA

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Saturday, said that over 40-45 crore devotees are expected to attend Prayagraj Mahakumbh-2025, with many likely to visit Ayodhya as well. In Ayodhya, devotees will visit prominent temples and sites, including Ramlala, Hanumangarhi, and Suryakund. He instructed the local administration to ensure all preparations are complete, focusing on visitor safety, crowd management, worship arrangements, and shelter facilities. The CM held a review meeting with administrative officials after meeting with BJP workers. He said, "No devotee should face any inconvenience during the cold season. In addition to maintaining



cleanliness, proper arrangements for bonfires and other necessities must be ensured." In the auditorium of Acharya Narendra Dev Agricultural University Kumarganj, the Chief Minister along with district senior officials gathered information about the security of devotees coming to Ayodhya during Mahakumbh-2025, cloud management, shelter and

more. Divisional Commissioner Gaurav Dayal gave a presentation on the preparations in Ayodhya for Mahakumbh-2025. The Chief Minister issued necessary instructions to the officials. The review meeting was attended by local administration officials, police personnel, and senior district authorities.

Six MLAs from Lakhimpur Kheri meet CM Yogi demand removal of SP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

The demand for the removal of Lakhimpur Kheri's Superintendent of Police (SP), Ganesh Prasad Saha, has reached Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. On Saturday, six Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs from the district met with the Chief Minister in Lucknow, alleging negligence and misconduct on the part of the SP. According to sources, the MLAs expressed their grievances, claiming that SP Saha does not address their concerns, frequently engages in phone conversations with mafia members, and has failed to maintain law and order in the district. "The SP does not listen to us. He prioritizes talking to the mafia and has deteriorated the city's security. We request



his immediate removal," one MLA reportedly said. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, after hearing the concerns of the MLAs, assured them that an investigation would be conducted, and appropriate action would follow. Lakhimpur Kheri district, which comprises eight assembly constituencies, saw six MLAs participating in the meeting, including Yogesh

Verma (Sadar), Vinod Shankar Awasthi (Dhaurahra), Saurabh Singh 'Sonu' (Kasta), Aman Giri (Gola), Manju Tyagi (Srinagar), and Shashank Verma (Nighasan). District BJP President Sunil Singh also accompanied them. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, MLA Saurabh Singh and District President Sunil Singh stated that their discussions with the CM also covered development initiatives in the district. "The Chief Minister assured us he would visit Lakhimpur on January 15 to review the progress of ongoing projects," said Singh. The MLAs had earlier raised their concerns with Principal Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad on Friday. During the meeting, they accused SP Saha of ignoring their calls and favoring mafia elements.

Sanjay Prasad, a trusted officer of CM Yogi, assured the MLAs that their complaints would be forwarded to the Chief Minister for review. SP Ganesh Prasad Saha, an IPS officer, took charge of Lakhimpur Kheri on January 12, 2023. Known for his sharp administrative skills, Saha has previously served as a Deputy Commissioner of Police in Gorakhpur, Banda, Prayagraj, and Deoria. He has also been awarded the prestigious Parakram Award for his service. Despite his accolades, Saha's tenure in Lakhimpur Kheri has been marked by allegations of favoritism and negligence. The MLAs have claimed that their inability to collaborate with the SP has hampered governance and development in the district.

Technological innovations likely to elevate 2025 Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
PRAYAGRAJ

The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj is set to embrace the digital era with groundbreaking initiatives aimed at enhancing the experience of millions of devotees. From advanced navigation systems powered by Google to a state-of-the-art AI Generative Chatbot, the event is making significant strides toward becoming a high-tech spiritual gathering. Google Navigation for Seamless Pilgrimage For the first time, Google has integrated the temporary city of Mahakumbh into its navigation system, marking a historic policy shift. An MoU has been signed between Google and the Mahakumbh Mela Authority to develop a



specialized navigation system tailored to the fair. This system will enable visitors to locate various sites, Akharas,

and prominent saints with ease. This innovative feature is expected to go live by late

November or early December. Additional Mela Adhikari Vivek Chaturvedi highlighted that while

Google has provided navigation for established cities worldwide, this is the first time it has developed navigation for a temporary event of this scale. Over 450 million domestic and international devotees are expected to benefit from this technology, allowing them to effortlessly reach their destinations, whether it be Sangam Ghat, specific Akharas, or temples. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasized the importance of leveraging digital technology to enhance the pilgrimage experience, aligning with his vision of a Digital Mahakumbh. With Google Maps, devotees will no longer need to ask for directions, making their spiritual journey smoother and more fulfilling.

AI Generative Chatbot: A Technological Marvel The Maha Kumbh will also feature the first-ever AI Generative Chatbot, an initiative championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. This high-tech chatbot provides real-time assistance and information on facilities such as food, lockers, washrooms, and changing rooms. Accessible in 11 languages, including Hindi, English, Tamil, and Bengali, the chatbot ensures seamless communication by responding to both spoken and written queries in the user's preferred language. Visitors can also receive a personalized Mahakumbh certificate with their photo by scanning a QR code or

visiting the link (https://chatbot.kumbh.up.gov.in). This unique feature allows attendees to create a lasting memento of their visit, either digitally or as a printed keepsake. Regional Tourism Officer Aparajita Singh noted that under CM Yogi's guidance, preparations are in full swing to make the Mahakumbh a spiritually enriching and technologically advanced event. The AI chatbot initiative is being extensively promoted on social media platforms such as X, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, creating a buzz among tech-savvy devotees worldwide. Enhancing the Visitor Experience The AI Generative Chatbot is not just a tool for

convenience; it aims to foster a personal connection with the event. By providing detailed information about every major program and event, it ensures that visitors stay informed and engaged throughout their pilgrimage. This initiative underscores the Mahakumbh's commitment to blending tradition with innovation, offering devotees a unique and memorable spiritual experience. With these digital advancements, the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is poised to set a new benchmark for religious gatherings, demonstrating how technology can enrich age-old traditions while catering to the needs of modern devotees.

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

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Staying true to his aggressive style of play, generational talent Rishabh Pant conjured up a spectacular 33-ball-61 to somehow keep India afloat even as Australia remained in driver's seat in the fifth Test, which is poised for an intriguing finish.

It was largely due to Pant's breathtaking knock that India finished the second day at 141 for 6 for an overall lead of 145. Pant entrained the packed SCG with four monstrous sixes and six boundaries.

His back-to-back sixes off Mitchell Starc into the heritage Ladies Members Stands were for posterity.

Pant's knock prevented Indian second innings from falling apart with the visitors top and lower order struggling to negotiate Aussie attack on a track that was aided seam and bounce.

This was after unheralded bowling duo of Prasidh Krishna (3/42) and Nitish Reddy (2/32) complemented Mohammed Siraj



at the MCG, Pant perhaps cleared his mind about what he needed to do. He came in at a time when not just Boland but even debutant Beau Webster was getting the ball to move a proverbial mile off the deck. There was steep bounce available at the Randwick End (far end) where Kohli got out. Boland pitched it on hard length and got

both seam and bounce. The result was a now familiar dab towards slips as Kohli's future beyond 123 Tests looks doubtful.

This was after both KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal got a couple of rippers.

However once Pant came out, he was a man-on-a-mission as the first ball disappeared into the long-on stand. The fallen pull shot also came out of the closet. It was exhilarating stuff.

Pant rode on bounce and hit Webster over point but the two sixes off Starc do take the cake. It was understood that Pant was mentally not in frame due to unsolicited sermons from a coaching staff member, who despite knowing the dashing southpaw's game told him to play otherwise.

At one point, a clueless Pat Cummins was forced to put six fielders near the boundary ropes. The skipper himself who saw the back of Pant, inducing edge from a ball that rose. Indian and Australian fans gave a standing ovation to the diminutive southpaw.

Third pacer steps up

In the post lunch session, Prasidh and Reddy more than made up for skipper Bumrah's absence as India took 51 overs to bowl out the hosts.

Steve Smith's (33) dismissal off Prasidh just before lunch disturbed Australia's rhythm.

Post lunch, Prasidh came from round the wicket from the Paddington End and removed Alex Carey (21) with an angled-in delivery. Carey was looking good but once Karnataka speedster found his length, he was literally unplayable.

Debutant Webster (57) justified his selection with a half-century but it was Reddy, coming for his second spell, sparked a collapse with wickets of Cummins and Mitchell Starc, both done in by subtle movement off the surface.

The final blow was dealt by Prasidh. He used the uneven bounce and cracks off the surface to get one bounce awkwardly at Webster and Jaiswal snaffled the catch.



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

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India's overall lead is not even close to the 200-run mark but pacer Prasidh Krishna says the unpredictable nature of the SCG track will keep them in the hunt since batting won't be easy for Australia in the fourth innings because of the variable bounce.

India ended the second day at 141 for six for an overall lead of 145. A win in the Sydney Test will ensure that India retain the Border Gavaskar Trophy.

"It is getting difficult in some areas. The ball is keeping low sometimes but there is enough bounce for us to be in the game and look for those edges. Try and beat them on either side of the bat," Prasidh said during the media interaction. He didn't put a number on what would be a defendable total for the visitors.

"There is no particular number in mind but then as many runs as we score would be great. We are ready to bowl them out for whatever," the Karnataka speedster, who got the prized scalp of Steve Smith in the first innings, said.

Prasidh got Smith at the stroke of lunch but during his spell in the first session, he was guilty of missing his length. He either went too full or too short.

"The difference was when I got back from lunch, I actually looked at where I was bowling. I sat with the analyst and we had a better idea of what my reference point is. When I came in to bowl next, that really helped."

Prasidh came to Australia at least three weeks earlier

McDonald surprised by Pant's subdued play in first innings

PTI ■ SYDNEY

It was not at all surprising that Rishabh Pant bulldozed the Australian attack with his stroke-play in the second innings but his ultra-defensive approach on the opening day indeed was, Australia head coach Andrew McDonald said on Saturday.

Pant had laboured to 40 off 98 balls, taking multiple blows on his body during his 149-minute stay on the wicket. Pant had said that he was not in a frame of mind to attack.

Pant, though, changed the gears effortlessly in the second innings, hitting Mitchell Starc for two massive sixes. Scott Boland and Beau Webster were not spared either as they too were lofted for a six each.

"First of all, it's not surprising, the way he plays. We were in fact a little bit surprised in the first innings, the way he went about his work. He's got an incredible ability to put pressure back on to bowlers," McDonald said, doffing his hat to India's biggest match-winner in Test cricket in recent years.

However, Australia didn't allow Pant to completely walk away as Pat Cummins dismissed him just when things looked like getting out of hand.

"We're planning for that though, we'll plan leading into the summer. We bounced in and out of a few plans there and clearly kept taking on the boundary riders and was getting away with it and no, it was an innings that you would say was right for that time."

Boland has been difficult match-up for Kohli

Virat Kohli has been out eight times in his nine innings while fishing at deliveries on or outside the off-stump and

Australia head coach praised his bowlers, especially Scott Boland, who sent back the India stalwart four times in five Tests.

Does it seem easy to get Kohli out?

"No, it's never easy to get Virat out," McDonald, trying to contain his smile of satisfaction.

"I give full credit to the bowlers and the execution of the plan. It's one thing to have a plan, but then to be able to execute is another thing. It's put him (Kohli) under immense pressure. And, look, he's tried some things."



"He's tried walking out of his crease. He's tried different tactics as well. But clearly that relentless nature of our bowlers, in particular, Scottie (Boland), the 'match-up' has been incredibly difficult for him to combat. But he's never an easy wicket, no."

This is a pitch for even contests

The traditional SCG wicket is usually a batting paradise and also helps the spinners towards the end but the ongoing Test has unfolded on a green top with variable bounce on offer.

McDonald did not hide his appreciation for the ground staff for preparing a fair track.

"The ground staff have done an incredible job in terms of, creating a wicket with something in it. Traditionally here it's quite benign and we've had a lot of draws, so a lot of people have been talking about the draws, so you're damned if you do it and damned if you don't. So this game's sped up."

"I think he's trying to produce an even contest between bat and ball. There's no doubt about that. It's made for interesting cricket."



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

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Senior India batter Rohit Sharma on Saturday firmly dismissed his retirement rumours, saying he is "not going anywhere" and offered poor form as the reason for him "standing down" from the ongoing Sydney Test against Australia.

Grappling with modest form, Rohit "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test, handing over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah, sparking widespread speculations about his future.

"I have not retired. I stood down, that is what I would say. Basically the chat that I had with the coach and the selector was very simple. I am not able to score runs, there is no form, it is an important match and we need a player with form," Rohit told Star Sports.

"As it is, in our batting, the form of the boys is not that good. So you cannot carry a lot of out of form players in the team. This simple thing was going on in my mind. I am not going anywhere," he added.

The 37-year-old said the team management and selectors backed his decision.

"I wanted to tell the coach and the selector that this is what is going on in my mind. They backed my decision. They said that you have been playing for so many years. You know what you are doing."

"So for me, it was difficult to take this decision. But if everything is kept in front, then this decision was sensible. I will not think much further," he added.

In Rohit's absence, Shubman Gill was included in the India eleven for the crucial fifth match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as India is trailing 1-2. The Mumbaier endured a tough time in Test cricket in

2024, accumulating just 619 runs in 26 innings across 14 matches averaging 24.76.

Before standing down, he had scored just 31 runs across five innings in three Tests in this series after joining the team following the Perth Test.

Rohit's bold call triggered speculations that he might pull the plug on his Test career after this series.

"This is not a retirement decision. I am not going to leave the game. There is no such decision. But I am out of this game because the bat is not working."

"But there is no guarantee that the bat will not work after 5 months. There is no guarantee that the bat will not work after two months or six months down the line," Rohit said.

He hoped for a turnaround in his fortunes sooner than later.

"We have seen a lot in cricket. Every minute, every second, every day life changes. So, I have a belief that things will change."

"But, at the same time, I have to be realistic as well. So, if a person has a mic inside, or a laptop, or a pen, what he writes, what he says, it does not change our life. We have played this game for so many years."

"So, these people cannot decide when we should go or when we should not play. I am a sensible man. I am a mature man. I am the father of two children. So, I have a little brain to decide what I want in life," he noted.

Asked if he took this decision after the Melbourne Test defeat, Rohit said: "No, I took this decision after coming to Sydney. Because after the match, we had only two days in between. And one day was New Year's eve. So on New Year's, I did not want to tell this to the coach and the selector."

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

AP ■ BRISBANE

Novak Djokovic was beaten 7-6 (6), 6-3 by big-serving Reilly Opelka in the Brisbane International quarterfinals.

The 37-year-old Djokovic was playing his first tournament of the year. The 24-time Grand Slam champion is preparing for the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 12 and which he has won 10 times.

"Amazing tennis, Reilly. Absolutely deserved," Djokovic wrote on Instagram.

Opelka served 16 aces — including one to finish off each set — to earn one of the biggest wins of the American's career.

"I was just focused on my way that's how it works out."

New coach Andy Murray will join Djokovic in Melbourne. Opelka achieved a career-high ranking of No. 17 in Feb. 2022 before undergoing hip surgery later that year to remove a benign tumor. He's now No. 293.

"It was tough. A lot of uncertainty, a lot of doubt," Opelka said.

In the semifinals, Opelka will face Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, who beat Jakob Mensik 7-5, 7-6 (5). The other semifinal will feature Jiri Lehecka against Grigor Dimitrov.

Lehecka beat Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 6-4 and Dimitrov advanced when Jordan Thompson retired while Dimitrov was ahead 6-1, 2-1.

Opelka said. "If I hit them, it's hard to get them back. If there's anyone that can, it's him."

"We have nothing to lose coming in against him. He's the greatest player ever," Opelka added. "So you end up playing more free and you take a lot more risk. If you play your normal level or even above a normal level, he's going to win every time. So it's tough in his position because he gets guys that are good players that they roll the dice. And on a on a day like this when a lot of things go



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paralympic bronze medalist and Arjuna Award winner Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan still remembers those tearful days at school when relentless bullying left her devastated and depressed.

Now a successful shuttler, the 19-year-old believes the prestigious award has come as a just reward for those days of turmoil.

"When I was in 6th or 7th standard, there was not much growth in me. In schools, there was bullying. I used to be very sad. I used to cry for every small thing. So, yeah, it's kind of an answer to them that I can also do something and achieve big," Nithya told PTI.

Reflecting on her achievements, she added, "I have seen so many of my co-athletes who are winning awards and are achievers. So, getting one of the national awards is something very prestigious."

"It is a proud moment for me. All the medals and awards are like a gift for me — a recognition of my hard work, dedication to the game, practicing every day, following everything, and being disciplined."

Born and raised in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, Nithya had lost her mother when she was just one year old. Her father and grandmother became her unwavering support system, with her brother standing by her side as a constant companion.

"I used to stay inside the house a lot, So just to get me



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

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

soon became her chosen sport, turning into an all-consuming passion.

"My brother took up badminton for fitness, and I joined him. Watching Sindhu in 2016 inspired me, and my friends and I started playing badminton in the streets. This sparked my interest in training, and I started practicing twice a week, gradually increasing to daily sessions."

"When COVID hit, I couldn't train, but once it was over, I resumed and discovered Para badminton. That's when I moved to Lucknow (under Gaurav Khanna, Head Coach of Team India) for training," added Nithya, who has recently started training at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy

(PPBA) due to its proximity to her hometown.

A fan of Chinese legend Lin Dan, Nithya discovered the world of Para-Badminton in 2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19 and started competing in international events from 2021.

"Looking ahead to 2025, the Asian Championship will be one of the key Paralympic events this year. Next year, we have the World Championship. My target is to peak by 2028 Los Angeles Games, so there are no shorter goals now—only focusing on the World Championship each year leading up to 2028," said Nithya.

Recently, there was a controversy when two-time Paris bronze medallist shooter Manu Bhaker's name

didn't figure in the initial list of nomination for the national award due to lapses in applying on time.

Asked about her opinion, Nithya said the government should recognise them without athletes having to apply.

"When I got a call from my team telling me I had to apply for a national award, I was surprised. I didn't know that athletes had to apply themselves. I always thought the government would recognise and honour athletes directly."

"Government supports us a lot, and they must be aware of our achievements. They back us in tournaments and training, so I believe they should recognise athletes without us having to apply," she signed off.



Phool Khilein Hai Gulshan Gulshan

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

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

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



season, a season of beauty, growth, and renewal. Not far from here, *Lodi Garden* offers its own magic. The soft winter sunlight filters through the trees, casting long shadows on the ground while highlighting bursts of colour from the flowers below.

you to pause and appreciate the little things, like the texture of a flower's petals or the way the wind makes them dance. The quiet hum of the park, combined with the gentle presence of flowers, creates an atmosphere of calm, offering a break from the city's constant rush.

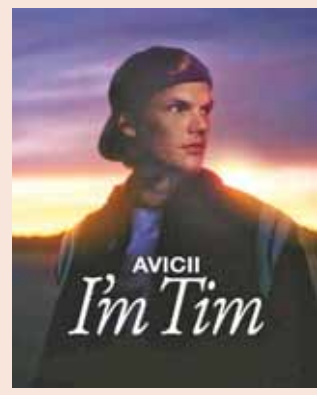
flowers, each more stunning than the last. *Hyacinths*, with their soft pastel shades and soothing fragrance, line the walkways, offering a moment of tranquillity in the midst of the garden's grandeur.

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

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



SUGGESTED BINGES



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



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



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



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



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

In 1989, the movie *Khoj* brought together *Naseeruddin Shah* and *Rishi Kapoor* in a suspenseful tale of deceit and mystery. The story revolved around a man whose wife mysteriously vanished, only to have another woman claim to be his wife. While the film's climax fell flat, its premise remained exciting. Fast forward to the present, and *Khoj - Parchaiyo Ke Uss Paar* attempts to reimagine the suspense in a web series format. Directed by *Prabal Baruah* and produced by *Juggernaut*, this *Zee5* thriller stars *Sharib Hashmi*, *Anupriya Goenka*, and *Aamir Dalvi* in pivotal roles. Unfortunately, it struggles to deliver the nail-biting tension audiences expect from such a genre. The story follows *Ved* played by *Sharib Hashmi*, a man desperately searching for his missing wife, *Meera*, played by *Anupriya Goenka*. As he goes deeper into her disappearance, *Ved* encounters bizarre events and clues that challenge his grip on reality. A sceptical police officer complicates matters, questioning *Ved's* narrative and leaving him to prove that the woman posing as *Meera* is not, in fact, his wife. While the first three episodes, particularly *Aar Ya Paar*, maintain a semblance of intrigue, the series begins to lose steam soon after. The narrative feels unnecessarily stretched, adding little value to the plot. Despite a strong performance by *Sharib Hashmi* in a rare lead role, and *Anupriya Goenka's* stellar portrayal, the storyline fails to capitalise on its potential. The biggest letdown is the

IN KHOJ OF THRILL

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

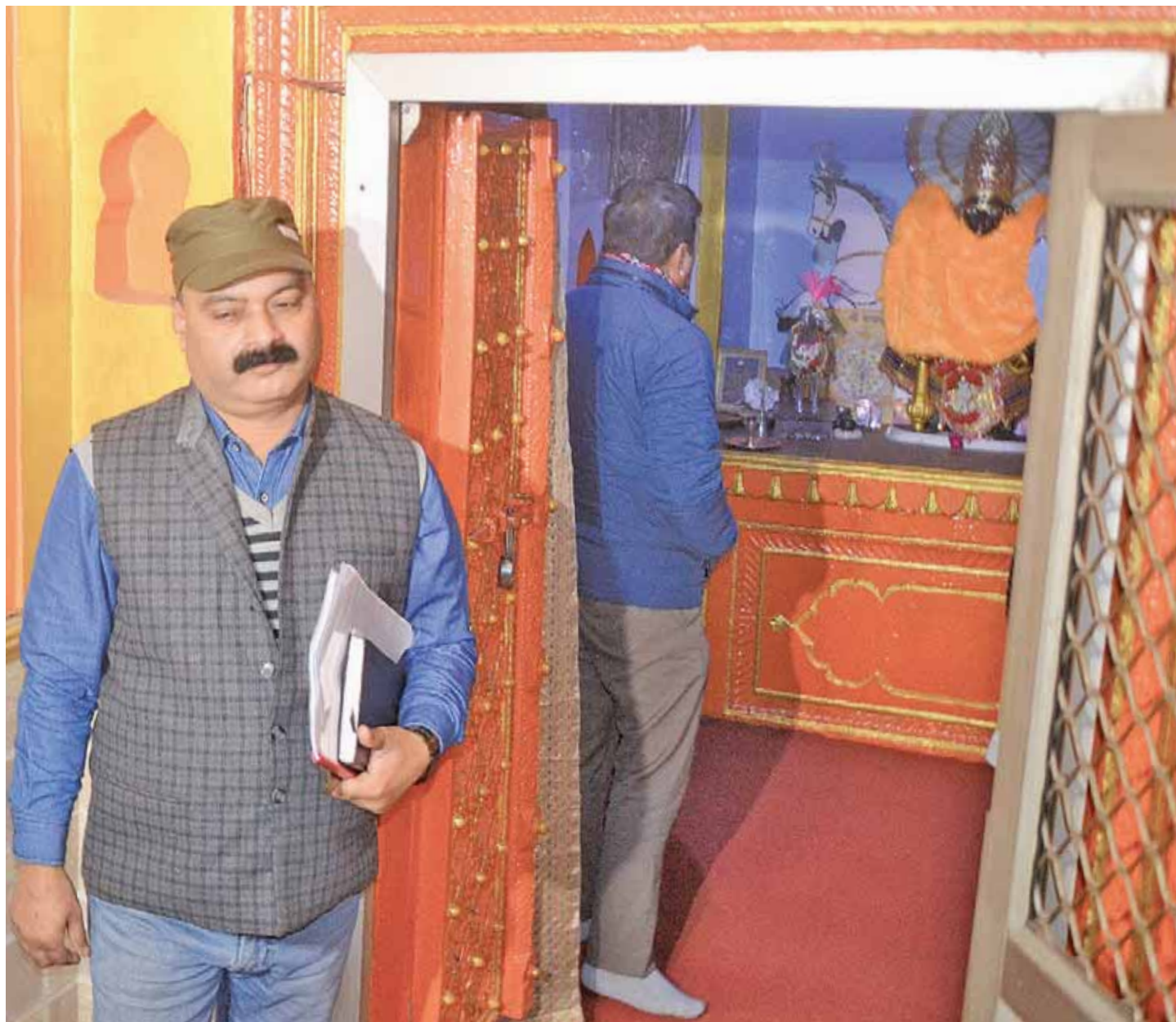


predictability of the plot. The absence of genuine twists and an underwhelming climax detract from what could have been an interesting watch. The final episode abruptly resolves the mystery, leaving viewers dissatisfied. Moreover, the police inspector's role is underdeveloped, adding little to the progression of the narrative. Another notable drawback is the lack of an impactful background score, which

could have significantly enhanced the suspense. The awkward cliffhanger endings to each episode feel forced, especially for a series with a mere 140-minute runtime, which would have been better suited as a film. Despite its flaws, the performances by *Sharib Hashmi* and *Anupriya Goenka* are the saving grace of the series, making it a tolerable one-time watch. However, the lack of originality and engaging drama keeps it from standing out. **Rating: 2/5**

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

— Pearl S Buck



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

Locked Temple, Unlocked History

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

The ASI Steps In

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



DISCOVERY IN SAMBHAL: UNEARTHING ANCIENT TEMPLES AND WELLS

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



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

The Stepwell of Laxman Ganj

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

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



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

A Shared History Unearthed

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



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

"IF YOU REALLY WANT TO MAKE A FRIEND, GO TO SOMEONE'S HOUSE AND EAT WITH HIM... THE PEOPLE WHO GIVE YOU THEIR FOOD GIVE YOU THEIR HEART"
—CESAR CHAVEZ

EXQUISITE DINING WITH A VIEW

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

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

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

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

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

reflected in every aspect of *Resaca*, from the décor to the curated dining experience. *Resaca* is a destination where food lovers can indulge in both culinary delights and a beautiful atmosphere.

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

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

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

Of course, no visit to *Resaca* is complete without sampling their signature cocktails, such as the *Katana*, made with vodka, coconut and matcha or the refreshing *Green Park*, which features Hendricks Gin, celery infusion, and elderflower syrup. *Resaca* offers an experience that goes beyond a meal. From its stunning interiors to its carefully crafted cocktails and mouthwatering dishes, this restaurant has quickly become a go-to destination for those looking to indulge in style.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



FROM THE ITALIAN FEASTS

At *Toscano*, traditional flavours and premium ingredients transport you to Tuscany, writes **TEAM AGENDA**



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FACT SHEET

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

FACT SHEET

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



SMALL PLATES LEAD THE WAY

Small eateries deliver bigger and tastier joys than mega restaurants



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



FOODFREAK



Pawan Soni
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

MEDIEVAL MARVEL IN BARCELONA



don't let that deter you—this serene sanctuary is worth the extra steps. Inside, the décor has evolved from vibrant, bold palettes and plush velvets to a soothing symphony of creams and greys adorned with elegant black and white photos. My lucky pick was an Apartment with a breath-taking medieval ambience and charming views of the cobbled street buzzing with tapas bars. Talk about living the fairy tale! The room's ambience, a mix of sophisticated neutrals and delicate fabrics, made the stay luxuriously cosy. The sleep preferences menu—offering sheets in cotton, satin, or linen, and a variety of pillows—felt like a dreamy personal touch. And the bathroom! A peaceful oasis with both a bathtub and rain shower, mood lighting, and Molton Brown products.

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

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

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

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

Barcelona might be a few years away, Hotel Neri will be my go-to choice. I wholeheartedly recommend this gem—and any Relais & Chateaux property—to fellow travellers seeking a truly memorable experience.
— She is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category

By AKANKSHA DEAN

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

like a time-travelling adventure. This enchanting 12th-century palace-turned-hotel, located beside the quaint Placa de Sant Felipe Neri, retains its historical charm with stone walls and archways that whisk you back in time. Though it lacks a gym, its distinct style and unbeatable location make up for it tenfold. The terrace overlooking a quaint, atmospheric square and the lush rooftop bar are just a couple of quirky touches you'll love. Given its quiet pedestrian street setting, you might have a slight hassle with heavy luggage, but

WINTER WONDERS OF DARJEELING



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

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

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



to see the famous Sumendu Lake. However, I missed the main route and ended up taking a secondary road, which stretched the distance to 50 km and took me around 4 hours to reach. The ride was not wasted, though, as I passed through beautiful tea gardens and stopped at a viewpoint called Lepchajagat. Finally, I reached Mirik Lake, spent some peaceful time there, and then started my journey back to Darjeeling. On the way, I also visited the Nepal border at Pashupati Nagar and enjoyed a quiet dinner before returning to my homestay.

DARJEELING'S ICONIC LANDMARKS

Day 3 was all about sightseeing in Darjeeling. I started my day at Tiger Hill to witness the stunning view of Kanchenjunga. Next, I visited the serene Ghoom Monastery and felt the peaceful vibes of Buddhism. After that, I stopped by the Peace Pagoda, built to promote harmony, and had my lunch. My next destination was the Rock Garden, located 3000 ft below the main road, which had some dangerous turns but was worth the experience. Finally, I ended my sightseeing with a visit to Batasia Loop to watch the toy train and the Zoological Park, which had some unique animals. In the evening, I did some shopping at Mall Road, treated myself to ice cream at Keventer's, and enjoyed delicious momos. I returned the scooter to the shop and headed back to my homestay to pack my bags because it was time to leave for home. On the last day, I took a shared taxi for ₹400 to NJP. From there, I boarded the New Delhi Poorvottar Sampark Kranti Express to Kanpur. The 17-hour journey brought me back home, and I ended my vacation with empty pockets but a heart full of beautiful and tremendous memories.

MIRIK'S SERENE SHORES

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

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19
This week presents numerous opportunities for joy, with financial gains expected from various endeavors. You may find yourself busy, perhaps with work-related travel, which could lead to some stress. Midweek brings sudden shifts that might challenge your current plans or expectations. It's a crucial time to release any unproductive bonds, clearing the path for a more meaningful existence. As the week progresses, you may feel a strong pull towards acquiring material possessions, which could lead to unrealistic expectations. Caution is advised against starting new projects or making impulsive decisions, as these could lead to setbacks. Maintaining a positive outlook will be challenging, yet essential to navigate this period effectively.
Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Tuesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22
This period promises to be exceptionally favorable, marked by a profound sense of blessing and personal achievement. You'll find yourself at the center of your universe, reveling in a phase rich with joy, amazement, and rejuvenation. A harmonious alignment of mind, spirit, and body will emerge, enhancing your social standing. This time will usher in newfound bravery and inspiration, leaving you relieved as certain challenges conclude. Expect transformative shifts in your perspectives and plans, paving the way for a brighter future. Changes may include adopting a new routine, dietary adjustments, or exciting career opportunities. Fresh beginnings are indicated, perhaps in personal commitments or professional partnerships, bringing a refreshing change to your life's narrative. As the week closes, familial happiness will increase, and a feeling of complete fulfillment will envelop you emotionally and spiritually.
Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Sky Blue
Lucky day Thursday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21
This week centers on inner resilience rather than physical prowess. Your strength will stem from a disciplined approach to your emotions and desires, grounded in a firm moral backbone. This foundational inner strength will navigate you through deceptive circumstances to clarity. You may find inspiration and guidance from a notable woman known for her deep understanding and intuition. Considering her advice or emulating her approach could be pivotal in shaping your life's direction. An urgent call to action encourages you to embrace spirituality—engage in meditation, practice yoga, and connect with your spiritual beliefs. It's a time to move away from idle fantasies and ground yourself in reality, letting go of unproductive daydreams to focus on what truly matters.
Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Monday



TAURUS April 20-May 20
This week, those who are naturally resourceful will find themselves thriving financially through their inventive abilities. You possess the strength to transform your visions into reality. Choices made during this time are likely to lead to beneficial outcomes. Gifted with a flair for articulation, your words will captivate and persuade those around you, marking an exceptionally successful week. However, midweek may present some challenges with potential delays. Despite these obstacles, your perseverance and resolve will guide you through, ensuring you meet your objectives. Expect communication from afar that could influence your financial and emotional stability positively. This period promises both security and satisfaction as you navigate through the highs and lows with grace.
Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Saturday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22
This week begins with decisive actions on both personal and work-related fronts, reflecting your resilient nature as you navigate life's challenges with courage. Expect some confrontations and issues arising from stubborn attitudes, necessitating a thoughtful and tactful approach. Embracing new perspectives and letting go of outdated beliefs will be crucial. Changes could unfold in various areas, such as your job, living situation, and close relationships, and you might encounter health challenges that could lead to feeling overwhelmed. Despite these struggles, the latter part of the week heralds a shift toward positivity, bringing a sense of relaxation, improved well-being, and financial satisfaction. You will find yourself in a position to indulge in life's comforts and will likely extend your support to those in need due to your compassionate nature.
Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Orange
Lucky day Wednesday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19
This week promises to be a whirlwind, touching every facet of your life—from personal finance and home life to social and professional engagements. It begins with a focus on household matters, and for those not currently in a partnership, significant life changes such as marriage may be on the horizon. Midweek, travel could play a role, adding variety to your routine. Professionally, expect to dive deep, as a drive for excellence pushes you to refine your abilities and commit fully to your projects, often extending your work into the night. Joyful family news, such as the arrival of a new member, may also grace the week. As the days progress, the fruits of your labor will become apparent, notably through substantial financial gains. Opportunities for career advancement are likely to emerge, featuring appealing terms.
Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Rose
Lucky day Tuesday



GEMINI May 21-June 20
This week, individuals born under Gemini will find numerous reasons to smile. An aura of optimism surrounds you, illuminating your path and attracting positive vibes in all your endeavors. Your ability to highlight the positive aspects of life makes you a beacon of warmth, drawing others towards you. However, midweek might bring a few challenges that could disrupt your peace temporarily. Despite this, rest assured that this phase will pass swiftly, paving the way for abundant blessings and a sense of fulfillment. Your efforts toward your goals are bearing fruit, marking significant strides towards completing your success cycle. You'll likely notice substantial improvements in ongoing projects and may find opportunities for recognition, public acclaim, or international connections.
Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour White
Lucky day Sunday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22
This week brims with opportunities and inventive energy, marking a period of great enthusiasm and readiness to embrace new challenges. An inspiring new concept may captivate your imagination, reinforcing that you're following the right path. You'll find yourself adeptly handling both personal and professional responsibilities. Midweek brings family gatherings and celebrations, possibly related to home-related milestones, children's achievements, or exciting career developments. These events will add to the joyous atmosphere around you. As the week concludes, your resolve and tenacity serve as an inspiring testament to others, showcasing the foundation of your accomplishments. Enjoy this vibrant period, as it promises both fulfillment and success and remain open to the unexpected joys it may bring.
Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Teal
Lucky day Friday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18
This week, individuals born under the Aquarius sign can expect a vibrant period filled with personal satisfaction and grandeur. There will be significant progress in business ventures, accompanied by generous expenditures that not only meet family expectations but also bring joy. This generosity extends to caring for others, demonstrating a warm and compassionate nature. Relationship dynamics, especially with a partner, may involve some heightened demands, yet responses will be heartfelt and giving. Children are likely to bring joy into the household, with possible achievements in academics or career advancements for a son. However, there's a note of caution for Aquarian women to attend to their health, as they might face some challenges related to emotional well-being or other physiological concerns, which could affect their mood during this period.
Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22
During this pivotal period, the actions you take will lay the foundation for future developments. Although progress may seem gradual, your perseverance will ensure that significant strides are made. Energize yourself to tackle necessary tasks effectively, as your hard work is likely to gain recognition and yield rewards. Utilize your diverse skills optimally this week, as your resolve and tenacity will leave a lasting impression on those around you. Your role as an inspirational figure will uplift others. Effective communication will enhance your relationships with both superiors and colleagues. As the week closes, a fresh burst of innovative thinking will illuminate your projects. Your productivity will soar in your chosen field, accompanied by vibrant energy and a zest for life. This is a time to relish and optimize the joyful moments.
Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Monday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21
Despite your significant efforts across various sectors to secure employment, the outcomes you've anticipated have not yet materialized. Your dedication and zeal are commendable; however, financial gains may be challenging to come by this week. Fortunately, as the week unfolds, promising opportunities are likely to emerge, potentially leading to substantial achievements. Supportive figures in your life, such as father figures or mentors, are keen to see you succeed and will play a crucial role in your progress. Remember, patience will be your greatest ally during this period. Building on a solid foundation will inevitably lead to favorable results. Remain steadfast, as you are on the verge of a breakthrough, where success promises to be significant and enduring.
Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Golden
Lucky day Saturday

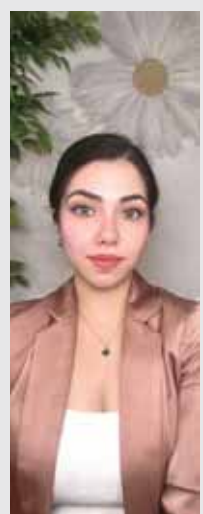


PISCES Feb 19-March 20
This week heralds a period of financial growth and satisfaction. You'll find yourself drawn towards seeking inner peace through practices like yoga, meditation, and chanting. Expect to feel compelled to arrange spiritually uplifting events at home, enhancing the serene atmosphere. However, midweek might present challenges in your personal relationships, possibly leading to misunderstandings or disagreements with a partner. Such conflicts may lead you to reflect on your deeper desires and life goals. Remember, your perspective may lean towards seeing the negative rather than appreciating what you have. This inclination could lead to a sense of being overwhelmed by negativity. It's crucial during these times to stay resilient and confront these challenges with courage rather than succumbing to despair.
Lucky number 16 | Lucky colour Mint
Lucky day Friday

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

Discovering the Purpose of Life

THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

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

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



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

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

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

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

Now you can write to us at agendapioneer@gmail.com