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FREEFALL OF FREEBIES

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday launched the first part of its 'Sankalp Patra' for the upcoming Delhi assembly elections, surpassing all 'freebies' expectations with the announcement of six poll promises, including Rs 21,000 for pregnant women, Rs 2,500 under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, LPG cylinders at Rs 500, and Rs 3,000 pension for senior citizens aged over 70 years.

However, shortly after the announcement, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal sharply reacted to the BJP's manifesto, calling it a 'Kejriwal Patra' instead of 'Sankalp Patra'. He accused the BJP of 'copying' his party for announcing several 'revis' (freebies) in its 'Sankalp Patra', stating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi won't approve of the 'freebies' promised by the BJP. "The BJP has repeatedly said that Kejriwal gives away free handouts, but today the BJP's national president announced that they too will provide free handouts to the people of Delhi," Kejriwal said.

"I want to tell them that they should acknowledge that Prime Minister Modi was wrong when he said the things he did about us. They should also accept that free handouts are not wrong—they are a gift from God and good for the country. He should come forward and assure that he consents to these (BJP) promises. He should tell us that I was right in providing free handouts," Kejriwal added.

Releasing the first part of the manifesto, BJP President Nadra said that women's empowerment has been a priority area for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He added that BJP-ruled states, including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Haryana, are already providing financial aid to women.

The second promise of the BJP is to provide LPG cylinders for Rs 500 to women from poor families and one free cylinder each on the occasions of



BJP National President JP Nadra along with Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and others leaders during the launch of 'BJP Sankalp Patra Part-I' for Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

AAP promises, BJP dismisses

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In another move to target youth voters, former Chief Minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, seeking re-election in the assembly polls, announced a major guarantee providing free bus travel to all school and college students in Delhi. Additionally, Kejriwal proposed a 50 percent concession on metro fares for students, urging the Central government to collaborate with the Delhi government in sharing the cost of this initiative.

Terming it an irresponsible move, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit slammed Kejriwal's proposal, saying that the AAP promises what it cannot deliver financially and would eventually accuse the national authorities of obstruction.

In his letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the AAP convenor



said, "Delhi's students rely on the Delhi Metro for commuting to schools and colleges to a large extent. To reduce the financial burden on them, I propose a 50 percent concession to students in Delhi Metro. Delhi Metro is a joint venture between the Central and Delhi governments. The expenditure on this scheme will have to be borne by both."

Kejriwal's request to Prime Minister Modi came on the day ahead of the

release of the BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' manifesto for the Delhi elections 2025. Notably, Delhi Metro is operated in collaboration between the Delhi and Central governments. The announcement, however, cannot be implemented immediately due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) currently in place in Delhi. Kejriwal assured that the scheme would be a priority for his government if re-elected.

"The metro fares are expensive for students. I have requested PM Modi to introduce this scheme, and we are ready to bear half the cost," Kejriwal said at the press conference, adding that the initiative could be rolled out after the elections.

Continued on page 2



Mystery deepens in Saif Ali assault

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

More than 40 hours after a gruesome attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan, the Mumbai police had not achieved any breakthrough in the sensational case as of late Friday evening. Meanwhile, the actor was making a rapid recovery from the grievous wounds he sustained in the knife attack by an intruder early Thursday.

On Friday, Saif, 54, was moved from the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to a special room at Lilavati Hospital. The police detained one suspect in connection with the attack, but released him after questioning, finding that he had no connection to the case. "The person who was brought to the Bandra police station is not related to the Saif Ali Khan case. We released him after questioning. No one has yet been arrested in connection with yesterday's incident," a senior police officer said.

Meanwhile, doctors attending to Saif at Lilavati Hospital expressed satisfaction with his progress. "Saif Ali Khan is doing excellently. We made him walk, and he can walk well. There is no problem and not much pain," said Dr. Nitin Dange of Lilavati Hospital. "The actor had sustained six stab wounds, including one to his spine, while grappling with an intruder who had broken into his 12th-floor apartment in the posh 'Satguru Sharan' building located at the junction of 29th and 24th Roads in Bandra (W), northwest Mumbai. The knife attack occurred between 2 a.m. and 2:30 a.m. Thursday, following a failed burglary attempt by the yet-to-be-identified intruder. After his admission to Lilavati Hospital, Saif underwent surgery to remove a knife lodged in his spine and to seal a spinal fluid leakage. "The actor was brought to our hospital with six injuries, two of which were deep. We carried out a surgery near his spine and removed a 2.5-inch piece of knife from the spine," said Dr. Niraj Uttamani, Chief Operating Officer of Lilavati Hospital, on Thursday.

Continued on page 2

Imran Khan convicted



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Friday sentenced jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 14 and seven years in prison respectively after finding them guilty of corruption in the 190 million pounds al-Qadir Trust case.

Judge Nasir Javed Rana of the anti-corruption court announced the verdict in a makeshift court set up in Adila jail where Khan is currently lodged. Khan is facing dozens of cases after he lost a trust vote in Parliament in 2022.

Khan has been convicted for "corrupt practices" and "misuse of authority", while his wife has been convicted for "involvement in illegal activities". Khan, who has been jailed since August 2023, was also fined Rs 1 million and Bibi half a million rupees. Failure to pay the fine will entail an additional six months of

imprisonment for Khan and three months for Bibi. The court also ordered the confiscation of the land of Al-Qadir University set up by them. Bibi was arrested from the court after the sentencing.

Supporters and leaders of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party staged a protest outside Parliament House, held placards, and chanted slogans, demanding his release.

"Today's verdict has tarnished the reputation of the judiciary. In this case, neither I benefited nor the government lost. I don't want any relief and will face all cases," Khan was quoted as saying by his party.

"A dictator is doing all this," he said. PTI leaders strongly denounced the verdict, terming it "unjust", "shameful", and a case of "political victimisation".

PTI chairman Gohar Khan said, "The behaviour of the court has been unjust. Khan sahib has not benefitted from a single rupee from this matter." PTI lawyer Faisal Chaudhry termed the decision "political use of the National Accountability Bureau".

Another party leader, Shibli Faraz, argued that Khan and Bibi were not beneficiaries of the alleged transactions. He contended that they were being punished for founding the Al-Qadir University, which aimed to promote the teachings of the Prophet. "Those who looted the country walk free, while sincere leaders face jail," said Faraz, while reaffirming to challenge the verdict.

Khan can appeal against the judgment in the High Court and if needed in the Supreme Court.

Continued on page 2



Israel-Hamas limp towards normalcy

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's security Cabinet on Friday recommended approval of a ceasefire deal after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed an agreement had been reached that would pause the 15-month war with Hamas in Gaza and release dozens of hostages held by militants there.

Mediators Qatar and the US announced the ceasefire on Wednesday, but the deal hung in limbo for more than a day as Netanyahu insisted there were last-minute snags he blamed on Hamas.

The militants maintained they were "committed" to the deal, while residents of Gaza and families of the hostages anxiously waited to see if it would materialise.

The deal now goes to the full Cabinet of ministers for final sign-off. It is expected to 'OK' the ceasefire, which could start as soon as Sunday, even though it has drawn fierce resistance from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners. Their objections could destabilise his government, however.

Hamas triggered the war with its October 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and left some 250 others captive.

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Bharat on Auto Mobility

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has emerged as a major automobile hub in the world and number of cars sold in the country annually surpasses the population of many countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Friday.

Underlining this, he also said future of mobility belongs to India that saw an unprecedented sale of 2.5 crore vehicles a year, and attracted USD 36 billion foreign direct investment in just four years.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, the prime minister also emphasised that India stands as an outstanding destination for every investor looking to shape one's future in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi. PTI

chain of the mobility ecosystem — from automobile manufacturers to components, electronics parts, tyre and energy storage makers, and automotive software firms and material recyclers — under a single umbrella.

Modi said the automotive industry was driven by innovation and technology and stressed that the future belongs to the East, Asia, and India.

"India is an excellent destination for every investor looking to see their future in mobility," he said while reassuring everyone that the government is fully supportive and encouraged everyone to continue advancing with the mantra of 'Make in India, Make for the World'.

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Govt taking decisive steps to wipe out Naxalism: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Friday claimed that his government was taking concrete and decisive steps to eliminate the red menace from the state.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have promised to end Maoism from the state by March 31, 2026 and the state government is taking all possible steps to keep their words", Sai said in a statement.

Sai was reacting to the success of security forces in eliminating 12 hardcore ultras on Thursday's encounter.

"The bravery of the Jawans is commendable and I congratulate the Jawans and officials involved in the operation", he further said.

Security forces on



Thursday eliminated 12 ultras in an operation at forested patch in Bijapur district.

After the gunfight ended, bodies of 12 Maoists including five women and weapons were

Two BSF men injured in IED blast in Narayanpur



STAFF REPORTER ■ NARAYANPUR

Two troopers of Border Security Force (BSF) were injured on Friday morning in an IED explosion allegedly triggered by the Maoists in Narayanpur district in Chhattisgarh.

The blast took place around 9 am in the forest near Garpa village in Sonpur area during an area domination exercise, Narayanpur

Additional Superintendent of Police Robinson Guriya said.

The 133rd battalion of BSF was out on an operation.

Two jawans identified as Ravi and Rajendra, were injured in the blast.

They were taken to the security camp in Garpa and provided preliminary treatment.

They were stated to be out of danger.

BJP retains Kiran Singh Deo as C'garh BJP chief



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

After the BJP registered a landslide victory in the last Chhattisgarh assembly elections, Deo, a first-time MLA, was earlier appointed the party's state unit president on December 21, 2023.

Deo started his political journey as the president of the students' union of the Government PG College in Jagdalpur in 1985-86. In 1998, he became the Bastar district unit vice-president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, BJP's youth wing, and became the president of the same unit in 2002.

That year, he was elevated to the position of BJP's Bastar district unit president. Deo then served in various capacities in the BJP's state unit.

Besides, Deo served as BJYM Bastar District President in 1998, from 2002 to 2005, as BJP State Secretary from 2005 to 2009, as a party working committee member from 2009 to 2014, and as Secretary from 2015 to 2018.

In 2009, he was elected as the Mayor of the Jagdalpur Municipal Corporation. From 2018 to 2022, he served as the General Secretary of the BJP's state unit.

Legislator from Jagdalpur constituency in Chhattisgarh's Bastar, Kiran Singh Deo, was on Friday re-elected unopposed as the Chhattisgarh BJP President for a second consecutive term.

BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde, the observer to pick the party's state unit chief, announced 63-year old Deo's election during a programme here at party's state headquarters Keshabhau Thakre Parisar.

The newly elected BJP chief expressed gratitude to the party's national and state leadership, as well as its members, for entrusting him, a worker from the Bastar region, with this responsibility once again. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, his cabinet colleagues and senior party leaders were present at the event.

Deo won the lone unreserved Jagdalpur seat in the Bastar region in the 2023 assembly polls.

He belongs to the erstwhile Sukma "Jamindar" family under Bastar Maharaja and belongs to the Kshatriya community – a general category caste.

Maoist with Rs 8L bounty arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ KANKER

A Maoist carrying a reward of 8 lakh was arrested and explosives were recovered from him on Friday after a gunfight in Kanker district in Chhattisgarh.

Rakesh alias Motiram Usendi (39) was apprehended from the forested hills of



Rakesh alias Motiram Usendi (39) was apprehended from the forested hills of Sitram village in Chhotebethiya area

Sitram village in Chhotebethiya area, Kanker (Range) Deputy Inspector General of Police Amit Kamble said. Rakesh was active as the Platoon Number 2 Commander under the Military Company Number 5 of the outlawed Maoist outfit, he added.

He carried a bounty of Rs 8 lakh on his head, he said.



Bhojpuri actress and singer Akshara Singh kept the audience spellbound on the concluding day of the Tatapani festival in Chhattisgarh's Balrampur-Ramanujan district

MoU inked to produce biofuel from urban waste



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Biofuel Development Authority, GAIL India Ltd, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and six municipal corporations signed an MoU on Friday to produce compressed biogas from urban solid waste.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao in Raipur.

Through this MoU, compressed biogas plants will be set up in Ambikapur, Raigarh, Korba, Bilaspur, Rajnandgaon, and Dhamtari.

Each of the six plants will produce about 70 metric tonnes of compressed biogas every day. GAIL and BPCL will invest about Rs 600 crore in these projects.

On this occasion, Sai said that this will not only fulfil the big objective of environmental protection and cleanliness but will also generate employment.

This is a huge step towards achieving the goal of a clean environment and net zero emission, he said. An official of GAIL said that Organic farming will be promoted from the co-product generated from the plants. Effective disposal of waste will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

CCCI seeks apex fare facility for Chhattisgarh

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Chamber of Commerce and Industries on Friday urged the Union Minister of Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu to provide the apex fare facility for the air passengers of the state.

They urged him to direct the aviation companies to provide the benefit.

Apex fare is a discounted airfare that's available to travellers who book their flights in advance.

In a letter to the minister, they said that even if a traveller of Chhattisgarh buys air tickets 90 days in advance or even earlier, the aviation companies do not provide the benefit of apex fare.

They said that aviation companies were charging up to 40 percent or more than standard rates for the tickets bought for April, May, and June, which was unjustified.

Air travel is a major means of transportation in the present day. But common people are facing financial difficulties in air travel due to high fares, they said.



Maoists kill civilian



STAFF REPORTER ■ BIJAPUR

Maoists killed a 48-year-old man on suspicion of being a police informer in Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh, police said on Friday.

The victim Sukku Hapka and two other villagers of Hallur village in Mirtur area were abducted by the left-wing radicals on Thursday evening, Bijapur Additional Superintendent of Police Chandrakant Governa said.

Maoists strangled Hapka to death and badly assaulted two other villagers, he added.

After Hapka's body was found abandoned in the area, a police team was rushed to the spot on Friday morning.

The ASP said that a pamphlet released by the Bhairamgarh area committee of Maoists at the scene in which they claimed the Hapka was a police informer.

A search operation has been launched in the area to identify the assailants, he said.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT, CIRCLE NO-1 RAIPUR (C.G.)

Tender Notice (I Call)

Contractors, Registered appropriate class in Unified Registration System [e-Registration] invited Online tenders for the following works:-

NIT No. System Tender No.	Name of Work	Probable amount of contract
1	2	3
219/159167	Renovation Of Research. Girl'S Hostel Building (GF+FF) Floor At Pt. Ravishanker Shukla University Raipur	Rs. 43.85 Lakh
218/163817	Proposed Boundary Wall Drain With Cover, NP-3 Pipe For Community Building Raipur (C.G.)	Rs. 48.08 Lakh
217/163818	Renovation Of Community Building Ground Floor At Pt. Ravishanker Shukla University Raipur	Rs. 46.89 Lakh

Last date of tender Download Date up to **04.02.2025 Time 17:30 PM**

Note: All eligible/interested contractors are mandated to get enrolled on the e Procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) in order to download the tender documents and participate in the subsequent bidding process.

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P.W.D. Raipur Circle No-1
Raipur (CG)**

G-242505410/3

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OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
MINIMATA BANGO CANAL DIVISION NO. 5, KHARSIA, DISTT-RAIGARH (C.G.)**

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System Tender No. 160026 NIT NO. 03/SAC/2024-25 Date 18-10-2024 (Gr No. 01) is here by cancellation due to unforeseen circumstances.
G-242503320

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Publication of Notice regarding possession of property u/s 13(4) of SARFAESI Act 2002 RAC PANDRI Branch.

Notice is hereby given under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with rule 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, a demand notice was issued on the dates mentioned against each account and stated hereinafter calling upon them to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of said notice.

The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of power conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 9 of the said Act on the dates mentioned against each account.

The Borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the AXIS BANK LTD. for an amount and interest thereon.

The borrowers attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section(8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.

Name of Borrower/Guarantor Address	Description of Immovable Property	Date of Demand Notice	NPA DATE	DATE OF Possession	Amount Outstanding
1. Mr. Shiv Murat Singh 2. Mrs. Anita Kamala Singh	All That Piece And Parcel of The Property Situated At Kharsia No. 412/ 14-20-21-22-27(part) Equitable Mortgage Property Situated At Apartment No. H-303, Build-up Area 702 Sq. ft. Super Built Up Area 802 Sq. ft. 3rd Floor of Multistoried Building Popularly Known As Block H In 'Bimil Enclave' Condominium, Rawabhatia, P.H. No. 100 Ward No.01, Maulana Abdul Rauf Ward Birgaon Nagar, Palika Parishad Raipur C.G. Bounded North: open & Boundary Wall South: Flat H-304 East: open & Block G West: Flat H-302	31.08-2024	09-07-2024	14-01-2025	Rs. 3,61,191/-
1. Mr. Santosh Kumar Shah 2. Mrs. Anita Devi	All That Piece And Parcel of The Property Situated At Plot No. A/51, Kh. No. 63-94, 5772 5009 & 881, Ashok Vihar, Situated At Gondwara, P.c No-108 Raipur Tahsil & District Raipur (C.G.) Bounded North: Plot No. A-50, South: Plot No. A-52, East: Raod West: Plot No. A-54.	18.07-2024	10-04-2024	15-01-2025	Rs. 2,06,531/-

Date: 18-01-2025 Place: Raipur

Authorised Officer (Axis Bank Ltd)

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT, CIRCLE NO-1 RAIPUR (C.G.)

Tender Notice

Contractors, Registered appropriate class in Unified Registration System [e-Registration] invited Online tenders for the following works:-

NIT No System Tender No.	Name of Work	Probable amount of contract
1	2	3
216/163166	S.R., M.O.W. AND OTHER DEPOSIT WORKS FOR NURSING HOSTEL (NEWLY ALLOTTED TO TAHsil OFFICE) D.K.S. CAMPUS AND OTHER NON RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN OLD MANTRALAY SECTION UNDER SUB DIVISION-1, RAIPUR (C.G.) (1st Call)	Rs. 25.00 Lakh
181/164271	S.R., M.O.W. AND OTHER DEPOSIT WORKS FOR NURSING HOSTEL (NEWLY ALLOTTED TO TAHsil OFFICE) D.K.S. CAMPUS AND OTHER NON RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN OLD MANTRALAY SECTION UNDER SUB DIVISION - 1, RAIPUR (C.G.) (2nd Call)	Rs. 25.00 Lakh

NIT No.181 System Tender No.164271 Last date of tender Download Date up to 29.01.2025 Time 17:30 PM & NIT No.216 System Tender No.163166 Last date of tender Download Date up to 03.02.2025 Time 17:30 PM

Note: All eligible/interested contractors are mandated to get enrolled on the e Procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) in order to download the tender documents and participate in the subsequent bidding process.

**Superintending Engineer
P.W.D. Raipur Circle No-1
Raipur (C.G.)**

G- 242505378/3

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Rajnath underlines need to strengthen India's offensive and defensive responses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday here underlined the need to strengthen India's offensive and defensive responses in view of the turmoil being witnessed in the rules-based international order. Addressing an event, organised to commemorate 2024 as the Year of Naval Civilians, he highlighted the increasing complexities for the Armed Forces due to the tense geopolitical security scenario and pitched to increase the critical capability of the country at the earliest.

"If we assess the entire decade from a defence and security perspective, we can say that it has been a volatile decade. We are witnessing conflicts and wars in different regions across

the world. Keeping these things in mind, we need planning, resourcing and budgeting for our security. There is a need to adopt a consultative approach. We need to take inputs from all the stakeholders on how to face future challenges. Our forces should be equipped and ready according to the changing times," Rajnath Singh said emphasising that the civilian workforce, an integral part of the Armed Forces, will play a crucial role in the planning process. He stressed that the military is surging forward with a big mandate and complex structure and the civilian workforce "soldiers without uniforms" play a pivotal role as they work behind-the-scenes to provide significant strength to the troops.

In view of India's strategic



location and its geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), defence minister reiterated the resolve of the Government to strengthen the Navy, terming it as a necessity in today's times. He termed the ships as a symbol of India's empowerment.

"India's economic prosperity is linked to maritime security. It is, therefore, necessary to protect our territorial waters, ensure freedom of navigation, and keep sea routes, which are our maritime highways, safe. In recent years, major naval powers have reduced their presence in IOR, while the Indian Navy has increased it. There is a possibility of increase in threats in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and the sea areas adjacent to East African countries. In view of this, the Indian Navy is working towards increasing its pres-

ence further," he said. Rajnath Singh described cyber security as an important aspect of maritime security in today's times, stating that ignoring cyber attacks can prove to be detrimental/fatal. He laid stress on the need to run a special awareness campaign on cyber security in the Armed Forces. In his welcome address, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi acknowledged the critical role that the Naval Civilians play in supporting various facets of the Indian Navy's operations including technical assistance, administrative management and logistics support. Their support is essential to the Navy's combat readiness and operational success, he said. The event commenced with a special photo and painting exhibition that displayed the artistic talents and achieve-

ments of Naval Civilians. The artworks depicted scenes of life at workplace and various contributions of civilians in the operational support of the Navy. A special moment of the ceremony was the introduction of the recipients of Prime Minister's Shram Awards to the defence minister. The Shram Awards are presented annually to the individuals who have shown extraordinary devotion and outstanding contributions in their respective roles. In recognition of exemplary service and contributions, Rajnath Singh presented nine meritorious awards and 16 cash awards to Naval Civilians who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and professionalism in their line of duty.

Private bodies providing essential public services have to be under RTI Act, says CIC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Advising the Delhi government to stop ex post facto renewal of licences of private hospitals, the CIC has said private entities providing essential public services have to be brought under RTI Act in a state-specific amendment of the transparency law. Information Commissioner Vinod Kumar Tiwari made these observations while hearing the case of an RTI applicant who was allegedly given "exorbitant bills" by a private hospital for the treatment of his wife in 2023.



RTI applicant Sanjeev Kumar had approached Delhi government's Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) seeking details of licence issued to Artemis Hospital, where his wife underwent treatment, among other information in a 12-point application. Not getting satisfactory response, he approached the Central Information Commission with his case. "...Core contention of the appellant in the instant appeal was non-receipt of correct and accurate information from the PIO and also arbitrary practice adopted by the Artemis Hospital in raising unjustified demands/ bills during hospitalisation which gets facilitated by respondent's (DGHS) clandestine practice of renewing the licence with retrospective effect as a matter of routine," Tiwari noted. Artemis being a private hospital is not covered under the provisions of the RTI Act. "Entities providing Public Services being essential for the citizens have to be included in the definition of the 'Public Authority' by bringing in a state-specific amendment of the RTI Act which is a concurrent list subject," Tiwari said. During the hearing, Kumar had alleged that the recognition certificate dated August 01, 2023 of Artemis Hospital provided to him by DGHS, in response to his RTI application shows that the hospital had no valid license on dates of hospitalization of his wife on April 07-08, 2023. "...It is noted from the oral submission of the respondent (DGHS) that registration of hospitals is being renewed retrospectively, which essen-

tially means that private hospitals have an option to withdraw renewal requests should they get caught in malpractices," Tiwari pointed out. He said despite repeated directions from the Commission during pendency of this case, DGHS has not uploaded the relevant legal/executive order authorizing such a back dated/ex post facto issuance. "...The fact remains that allegation of appellant regarding exorbitant prices/bills raised by the Artemis Hospital cannot be ruled out in entirety as the respondent as well as the third party i.e. Artemis Lite Hospital have failed to file any counter submission to buttress the arguments of the appellant, therefore, the balance of convenience favours the appellant," Tiwari said. The DGHS claimed that the plea that Artemis Hospital did not possess valid registration certificate at the relevant time is not acceptable since as per their normal practice the registration certificate under process is "deemed to be considered as a fact that registration of Hospital is still valid". "The Commission considering the submission of the parties concluded that the reply furnished by the PIO in the first instance and the submission given during the course of hearing are contradictory. This casual conduct of the PIO causes unwarranted obstructions to the appellant's right to information and is a grave violation to the provisions of the RTI Act," the CIC noted while issuing a show cause notice to the CPIO. The CIC imposed a penalty of

Rs 15000 on the CPIO Sandeep Kumar Agarwal and awarded a compensation of Rs 45000 to Kumar for the hardships to be paid by DGHS. Tiwari said Kumar was made to suffer mental and financial harassment by making him to run from pillar to post at this very old age for the treatment of his wife by imposing exorbitant medical bills merely for the purpose of generation of profits. "In view of the above, an advisory under Section 25(5) of the RTI Act is issued to the Respondent Public Authority (DGHS) to amend the applicable regulations governing renewal of licenses of private hospitals so as to afford an opportunity of hearing to the citizens affected by the deeds of the hospitals besides stopping the practice of issuing ex post facto renewal of license," Tiwari said in the order, a copy of which was also marked to Delhi Health Secretary. He said many state governments are bringing the Right to (Public) Services Act to ensure delivery of public services to ensure entities providing services are held accountable for deficiencies. "Such legislations are complementarity to the Right to Information Act because they rely on flow of information to determine deficiencies," Tiwari said. He said, in contrast to it, DGHS by declaring hospital running under them as private entities and hence, being outside the purview of the RTI Act has defeated the very purpose of such social welfare arrangement and the Act.

PM Modi to distribute more than 65 lakh SVAMITVA property cards today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Saturday distribute more than 65 lakh property cards under the SVAMITVA Scheme, the Panchayati Raj Ministry said. According to senior officials of the ministry, beneficiaries from more than 50,000 villages in 10 states -- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh -- and two Union Territories -- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh -- will receive the cards. SVAMITVA, a scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, provides a 'Record of Rights' to village household owners with the issuance of legal ownership cards to the property owners by mapping land parcels using drone technology, it said. The prime minister will preside over the event through video-conferencing, where he will interact with selected beneficiaries and also deliver a nationwide address, the ministry said in a statement. This event will mark a major milestone of crossing more than 2.24 crore property cards preparation and distribution under the Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas (SVAMITVA) scheme and distribution of about 65 lakh property cards in a day. Union Minister of Panchayati Raj Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan,' Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj S P Singh Baghel, and Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj Vivek



Bharadwaj will be present at the event. It will be attended virtually by several chief ministers, Union ministers, ministers in the concerned states, and Panchayat representatives, the ministry said. Events are also being organised in more than 230 districts for the physical distribution of property cards. It is expected that around 13 Union ministers will physically join from designated locations to oversee the distribution ceremonies. Training-cum-orientation programmes and distribution pro-

grammes will also be conducted in more than 25,000 Gram Panchayats across these 12 states and Union Territories, highlighting the scheme's impact and reinforcing its role in empowering rural communities. Ministry officials said under the scheme, over 90 per cent of the drone mapping has been done, covering around 3.17 lakh of the over 3.44 lakh villages that were the target. This includes full saturation in the Union Territories of Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Delhi, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, as well as the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. In addition, property cards have been generated for all inhabited villages in Haryana, Uttarakhand, Puducherry, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, and Tripura, highlighting significant advancements in implementation. The scheme's targets are likely to be achieved by 2026. A survey of rural land in India

for Settlement and record of rights had last been completed many decades back. Moreover, 'abadi' (inhabited) areas of villages were not surveyed in many states. Hence, no 'Record of Rights' could be created for the village 'abadi' areas. The scheme aims to provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India. The demarcation of inhabited land in rural areas would be done by the use of drone technology with the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Revenue Department, State Panchayati Raj Department, and Survey of India. The outcome would include creating and updating the 'Record of Rights' in the revenue registers and issuance of property cards to the owners. So far, 31 states and Union Territories have joined the scheme. Of these, Sikkim, Telangana and Tamil Nadu had participated only in the pilot phase. West Bengal, Bihar, Nagaland, and Meghalaya have not joined the scheme.

Wildlife Department to serve notices to illegal constructions surrounding Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Wildlife Department will soon serve notices to over 100 illegal construction owners who built illegal structures in the restricted area of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary in Gurugram. For this, the department has written a letter to the Tehsildar and sought information about all the people doing illegal construction. After getting the information, notices will be issued to everyone to remove the illegal construction within 15 days. After this, a demolition drive will be conducted. Notable, any kind of construction work is banned within a 5 km radius of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary located on Jhajjar-Farrukhnagar Road. Despite this, builders and dealers have illegally built over 100 illegal constructions farmhouses and societies. Last year, a survey was conducted by the Department. It was revealed that over 100 constructions have been done without the permission of the Ministry of Environment within the 5 km restricted area of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary. These include nine societies



mos, most of the farmhouses and a school. The central government has declared Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary as an Eco-Sensitive Zone-1 (environmentally sensitive area). In such a situation, construction within a radius of 5 km has been completely banned. The Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department has issued licenses to nine builders to build group housing societies. The license has a condition that they have to obtain a no objection certificate (NOC) from the Ministry of Environment. But without taking prior permission few builders made construction in the restricted zone. The survey has also revealed

Law officer censures ED for 'half-baked' reply, says miscommunication later in SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an unusual turn of events in the Supreme Court, a law officer criticised the ED for filing a "half-baked" reply in a bail matter and later termed it a miscommunication while urging the court to proceed with the hearing. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan was hearing an appeal of Arun Pati Tripathi, an Indian Telecom Services officer, challenging the October 25, 2024 order of the Chhattisgarh High Court denying him bail in connection with the high-profile Chhattisgarh liquor scam. Additional solicitor general SV Raju, appearing for the Enforcement Directorate (ED), said, "There is something hanky-panky as far as my department is concerned. Without consultation, a half-baked affidavit has been filed even before we made an appearance." Taking note of the shocking submission, the bench expressed dissatisfaction on the situation, calling it a "serious matter" questioning the accountability of ED and the agency's advocate-on-record (AoR).



"The counter must have been filed by your AoR," Justice Oka said to which Raju said the AoR could not be blamed for the oversight. Subsequently when the matter was taken up for hearing, the bench asked Raju, "You (ED) have filed a counter affidavit. Can you disown it now? What is going on?" He responded, "I am not disowning. I am only saying it was filed without proper vetting so I will have to verify." The bench termed it a "sad thing" and said it was like casting an aspersion on the AoR. "I am not casting any aspersion. Some miscommunication has happened," said the law officer, insisting the AoR was not to be blamed. Raju then requested the bench to proceed with the matter, but the court posted the hearing on February 5.

Political parties give multitude of reasons for selecting candidates with criminal records: ADR data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Political parties have given reasons, such as "strong administrative capacity", "commitment to public service" and claims of cases being "politically motivated", for selecting candidates with criminal records in the 2024 Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly elections, poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said on Friday. In many cases, the parties dismissed alternative candidates as lacking experience or the ability to connect with voters, using these explanations to side-step questions about their choices, ADR said. It has analysed the Form C7 of 1,286 candidates, who contested the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly polls.

Form C7 requires candidates to declare their criminal antecedents, if any. An ADR report revealed that such reasoning often failed to meet the Supreme Court's directive requiring detailed, merit-based justifications for selecting candidates with criminal backgrounds. Instead, statements like "the candidate is young and energetic" or "cases were filed due to public agitation" were repeatedly used. Despite these assertions, 29 per cent candidates in Maharashtra and 20 per cent in Jharkhand had no justification published for their selection, a direct violation of the Supreme Court's orders. For instance, in Maharashtra, Digamber Rohidas Aagwaha of the Rashtriya Samaj Paksha, facing 35 criminal cases, was described as an "influential



leader" dedicated to the poor, with no viable explanation for bypassing candidates without criminal records. Similarly, the selection of Congress's Sanjay Chandukaka Jagtap and Bunty Baba Shelke, facing 27 and 26 cases respectively, as candidates was justified on grounds of administrative experience and alleged political victimisation. The report also highlighted non-compliance with mandatory disclosures. In Maharashtra, the NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar faction and the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) failed to provide justifications for any of their candidates with criminal cases. Similar lapses were noted in Jharkhand, where the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) did not disclose reasons

for selecting any of its candidates with criminal records. The ADR has called for urgent reforms, including deregistration of the non-compliant parties, disqualification of candidates with serious criminal charges and stricter monitoring by the Election Commission (EC). In Maharashtra, 48 per cent of the analysed candidates (503 out of 1,052) declared criminal cases, with 32 per cent facing serious charges. In Jharkhand, 45 per cent candidates (105 out of 234) declared criminal cases, with 35 per cent facing serious charges. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Babul Marandi, facing 15 cases, was praised for his social service credentials and allegations against him were dismissed as politically driven.

The report criticised political parties for prioritising "winnability" over integrity and accused the EC of failing to enforce compliance effectively. The ADR report also revealed significant non-compliance with disclosure requirements. It pointed out that in Maharashtra, 83 per cent of such candidates were crorepatris, including the BJP's Prashant Ramshekhar Thakur, who declared assets worth Rs 475 crore. In Jharkhand, Congress candidates dominated the list of the wealthiest, led by Krishnan Nand Tripathi, who declared assets of Rs 70 crore. The ADR emphasised that systemic reforms are essential to address the deep-rooted nexus between money, muscle power and politics.

Hounded by media, IIT Baba leaves Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Hounded by the media, Abhay Singh, famously known as IIT Baba, has abruptly left the Maha Kumbh and the Shri Panchdasham Juna Akhara in Prayagraj. His departure on Thursday night has left both the ashram sadhus and his family in a state of concern, as his current whereabouts remain unknown.

Abhay's parents, including his father Karan Singh—an advocate and former head of the Jhajar Bar Association—arrived at the Ashram the same night searching for him, only to discover he had already departed.

According to ashram sadhus, Abhay was struggling with increasing mental stress caused by continuous media interactions and controversies over some of his statements. Unable to cope, he decided to leave the ashram, switching off his phone and cutting contact with devotees and media personnel.

Abhay Singh, a resident of Jhajar, Haryana, is an aerospace engineering graduate from IIT



Bombay. After a stint working at an airplane manufacturing company in Canada, he returned to India and subsequently disappeared from his family's sight. His family first learned of his spiritual journey through viral videos from the Maha Kumbh, where he was seen explaining spiritual concepts with the help of pictures and diagrams. Despite gaining popularity as Engineer Baba, the media spotlight and associated pressures ultimately led to his departure.

Abhay Singh, nicknamed Engineer Baba, gained attention at the Maha Kumbh for his unique approach to spirituality. An alumnus of IIT Bombay, he earned a degree in aerospace engineering and later became a sanyasin associated with the Juna Akhara.

The making of Naga Sadhus begins at Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The process of initiating new Naga Sadhus has commenced at the Akharas along the banks of the Sangam as part of the preparations for Mauni Amavasya during the Maha Kumbh. Both Udasi Akharas and the seven Shaivite Akharas, including Juna, Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Atal, Agni, and Awahan, are set to welcome more than 1,800 new Naga Sanyasis into their fold. The intricate rituals began today at Juna Akhara and will culminate in the Tang Tod (breaking of ties) ceremony within 48 hours. For the Akharas, the Kumbh Mela is not only an occasion for the holy Amrit Snan but also a crucial opportunity for expansion and spiritual renewal. The initiation of new Naga Sanyasis is a significant event, especially during the Maha Kumbh, which holds immense importance for trainee ascetics. Mahant Ramesh Giri of Juna Akhara shared that the rituals began on January 17 with a 24-hour period of dhawaja (religious flag), during which the aspirants abstain from food and water. Following this, the candidates are led to the Ganga banks by the Akhara Kotwal to commence the initiation



process. The initiation begins with the aspirants taking 108 dips in the sacred Ganga, symbolizing purification. This is followed by a head-shaving ceremony and the Vijay Havan (victory offering). The Acharya Mahamandleshwar of the Akhara leads the Sanyas Diksha (renunciation initiation), wherein five senior gurus bestow essential items upon the aspirants. The final rituals will take place on the morning of January 19, when the aspirants will shed their loin cloths and fully embrace their new identities as Naga Sanyasis. While some may choose to remain Digambar (clothed only by the sky), others are given the option to retain clothing but participate in the Amrit Snan as Nagas.

Two key rituals define the transformation into a Naga Sadhu. First is the cutting of the braid, which symbolizes the severing of all social ties. Once this ritual is performed, the individual cannot return to worldly life. The second is Tang Tod, the final ritual signifying the breaking of all earthly attachments. Unlike other ceremonies, this is performed by a fellow Naga Sadhu under the Guru's guidance, cementing the initiate's commitment to asceticism.

Akhara Hierarchy and Responsibilities

Becoming a Naga Sadhu is essential for assuming leader-

ship roles within the Akharas. Positions such as General Secretary, Secretary, Shrimahant, Mahant, Thanapati, Kotwal, and Pujari are reserved exclusively for Nagas. The Akhara's internal committee thoroughly evaluates each candidate before bestowing this responsibility. Mahant Yamuna Puri of Mahanirvani Akhara revealed that while their exact dates for initiation are undecided, the rituals will be completed before Mauni Amavasya. Similarly, Udasi Akharas are preparing for their initiation ceremonies. The initiation of over 1,800 new Naga Sadhus during Maha Kumbh 2025 highlights the enduring significance of this ancient spiritual tradition. The newly initiated Nagas will participate in their first Amrit Snan alongside their respective Akharas on Mauni Amavasya, marking the culmination of their transformative journey.

For the Akharas, these rituals reinforce their spiritual legacy and expand their cadre of ascetics who bear critical administrative and financial responsibilities. As the Sangam witnesses this sacred event, the Maha Kumbh continues to uphold its reputation as a confluence of faith, tradition, and renewal.

BJP felicitates sanitation workers at Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders in Uttar Pradesh distributed copies of the Constitution to sanitation workers at the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, calling the religious congregation a 'great celebration of unity' that reflects the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

The initiative is part of the BJP's nationwide 'Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan' campaign to celebrate 75 years of the Indian Constitution. As part of this outreach, the party is felicitating Dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) across the state. After garlanding sanitation workers and handing them copies of the Constitution, Uttar Pradesh BJP secretary Abhijit Mishra remarked, "We came here to honor those who were reduced to a mere vote bank by non-BJP parties and

governments. Now, with a strong and sensitive leader at the nation's helm, we are witnessing transformative change." Talking to reporters, Mishra further claimed, "Other political parties have always treated Dalits and OBCs as vote banks. In contrast, our party reveres and empowers them. The Maha Kumbh is a grand celebration of unity, a principle the Constitution guarantees. By distributing copies of the Constitution, we aim to reinforce the vision of unity that our founding fathers had, which our opponents often seek to undermine."

The BJP's initiative comes in the backdrop of political sparring with the opposition. During the last Lok Sabha elections, the opposition accused the BJP of pursuing a massive mandate to alter the Constitution—an allegation the ruling party has vehemently denied. Despite falling short of its "400 paar" tar-



get, the BJP managed to form the government with support from regional allies. Meanwhile, the opposition INDIA bloc made surprising gains, bolstering its presence in the Lok Sabha.

Adding to the political dynamics, the Samajwadi Party (SP) recently announced plans to install a bust of its founder and prominent OBC leader, late Mulayam Singh Yadav, at the Maha Kumbh. The Congress, on the other hand, is set to launch its 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally on January 27, aiming to corner the BJP over its alleged stance on the Constitution.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati, who has been striving to regain her political foothold, is also engaging in outreach efforts, criticizing the BJP over alleged denigration of Constitution framer and Dalit icon BR Ambedkar.

In 2019, during the previous

Kumbh Mela, Prime Minister Narendra Modi famously washed the feet of sanitation workers as a gesture of respect. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also initiated educational programs for the workers that year.

This year, Modi described the Maha Kumbh as "Ekta ka Mahakumbh" (a Maha Kumbh of unity) during a recent visit to Prayagraj. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath echoed this sentiment, referring to the congregation as "Samajik Samta Ka Mahaparv" (a mega festival of social equality).

The government has also unveiled a giant statue of Lord Ram embracing Nishad Raj, a king revered by the politically significant Nishad community, at Shringverpur's Nishad Raj Park. The gesture is seen as an attempt to woo the OBC riverine community, which has been pushing for Scheduled Caste (SC) status. A senior RSS leader

downplayed the political undertones, stating, "You can draw your own political narratives, but we stand for unity. The Maha Kumbh is a classic example of caste harmony, where all differences are bridged. That is the unity the prime minister must have been referring to."

Political analyst Sudhir Panwar, who once contested elections on an SP ticket, noted, "The BJP faces a dilemma over the issue of caste census, which has united opposition parties and many of its OBC allies. While it has performed well in recent by-polls, the shock loss of the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat lingers. Measures like the community outreach at Maha Kumbh are part of its strategy to regain lost ground."

As the Maha Kumbh unfolds, the event not only remains a spiritual hub but also a platform for political narratives, reflecting the interplay of faith and electoral strategies.

VHP to push for 'liberation of temple' at Maha Kumbh congregation



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela has become a focal point for diverse discussions ranging from spirituality to socio-political issues. Adding to its significance, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has announced a high-profile meeting of its Margdarshak Mandal, where saints and spiritual leaders will deliberate on key issues including the "liberation of temples" from government control and Hindu claims over historical sites. This four-day congregation, scheduled from January 24 to 27, is expected to see robust participation from saints across the nation. According to VHP spokesperson Vinod Bansal, "Freeing temples from government control will be the primary agenda, as it directly impacts the sanctity and autonomy of our religious institutions."

The VHP is currently running a nationwide campaign advocating for temple autonomy. Bansal elaborated, "The Margdarshak Mandal baithak will not only address temple-related concerns but also deliberate on contemporary

issues affecting the Hindu community, such as 'love jihad,' 'ghar wapsi,' and religious conversions. These discussions aim to foster unity among Hindus, transcending caste and regional barriers." In addition, the VHP's Pranyas Mandal, its Board of Trustees, will meet after the Margdarshak Mandal session to further refine and implement decisions made during the gathering.

"The Maha Kumbh is a perfect backdrop for fostering unity and social harmony," Bansal noted. Highlighting the symbolism of the Kumbh, he added, "It is here that people from all walks of life gather, setting aside social and economic differences. This unity is what our community and nation need to overcome the challenges posed by our colonial past, including the entrenched caste system."

A key focus of the discussions will be countering what the VHP calls the "divisive politics" of caste-based narratives. "Our goal is to build a united Hindu society that stands strong against such political agendas," Bansal said. The meeting coincides with

growing tensions over Hindu claims to certain historical sites. In recent months, petitions have been filed regarding the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, and the Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan. These claims have sparked legal and social debates, with some incidents escalating into violence. A senior RSS leader, speaking on the condition of anonymity, remarked, "The Maha Kumbh represents the essence of unity, bridging divides of all kinds. While narratives can be drawn politically, the event's true purpose lies in fostering harmony and reinforcing our cultural ethos."

The VHP's initiatives also come against the backdrop of heightened political activity. The opposition has been vocal about caste-based census demands, which have garnered support from several of the BJP's allies. Political analyst Sudhir Panwar observed, "The BJP faces challenges in maintaining its support base among OBCs, especially after recent setbacks like the Faizabad Lok Sabha loss. Initiatives like this are part of its strategy to consolidate its standing."

Fake bank accounts: Gurugram police arrest two criminals

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram police have arrested two criminals for allegedly opening fake bank accounts in the name of 'Jan Dhan Yojana' and making them available to cyber thugs, police said.

The suspects have been identified as Shaun, a resident of village Kiranki, Gurugram and Azharuddin alias Azru, a resident of Punhana, Nuh. The police have also recovered five bank pass book, fake rent agreement and electricity bills from them.

The complainant told the police on Monday that he had met two persons who told him that they opened bank accounts



under 'Jan Dhan Yojana', of which Rs 7,000 is given by the government every month. After this, the accused opened a bank account for the victim. After opening the bank account, he took the victim's

ATM cards and mobile numbers registered in the bank account and said that after going to the government office and registering under 'Jan Dhan Yojana', they would get their ATM cards and mobile

numbers back. "When the bank did not return the victim's ATM card and mobile number for several days, he went to the bank and enquired, and then he came to know that a lot of money had been transacted from his bank account," Priyanshu Diwan, ACP, cyber crime said.

Based on the victim's complaint, a case was registered under the relevant sections of the IT Act at the cyber police station (west), Gurugram.

During the investigation, the police team led by Inspector Sandeep, SHO of the said police station nabbed the accused from Sector-10 on Wednesday. During police interrogation, it was found that both the accused used to open bank

accounts under 'Jan Dhan Yojana' by telling people that the government would deposit money in these accounts. "To open a bank account, the accused used to get fake agreements and electricity bills prepared. After opening the bank account, they used to take the bank ATM card and registered mobile number from the bank account holder in the name of registering the bank account in the government office. After that, they used to sell those bank accounts to another accused for Rs 10,000," he said. Accused Sahun has been taken on one day of police custody and remanded from the Court for further interrogation and recovery, police said.

12 Naxalites neutralised in fierce encounter with security forces in Bijapur

PTI ■ BIJAPUR

The 12 Naxalites neutralised in a fierce encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday were from the Maoist organisation's strongest unit in the Bastar region, police said on Friday.

The identity of the killed Naxalites is yet to be ascertained but preliminary information suggests they belonged to Maoists' People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) battalion no. 1 and Central Regional Committee company, a police official said.

PLGA is the armed wing of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist).

According to police, the PLGA battalion no. 1 is considered the strongest formation of the Maoists in the tribal-dominated Bastar region and is headed by Deva. It has orchestrated several deadly attacks on security personnel in south Bastar in the past.

Previously the formation was headed by Hidma, believed to



be the man behind many big strikes against security forces in the Bastar region, which comprises seven districts. Twelve Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in the dense forest of the Pamed-Basaguda-Usoor axis of Bijapur district on Thursday. Besides the bodies, weapons were also recovered from the site, he said.

A search operation is still underway in the area and the security forces are likely to return to their bases on Friday evening, the official said. Personnel belonging to the

18-year-old NEET aspirant hangs himself in hostel room

PTI ■ KOTA

An 18-year-old NEET aspirant hanged himself in his hostel room here, police said on Friday.

Officials said that no suicide note was recovered from the room. The incident occurred in Ambedkar Colony, Vigyan Nagar area on Thursday night. According to police, Abhijeet Giri, hailing from Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, had been preparing for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) at a coaching institute since April, 2024.

The incident came to light when around 8 pm when a mess worker went to deliver food to Abhijeet's room, a police officer said.

Upon receiving no response, the mess worker along with a few hostellers forcibly opened the door and found him hanging from the ceiling fan, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI)

Lal Singh Tanwar said. A police team reached the spot and sent the body for post-mortem, which will be conducted after his family arrives. They have been informed about the incident, the ASI added.

He said that no suicide note was recovered from the room and the reason behind the suicide is yet to be ascertained.

The ceiling fan in the hostel room was not equipped with suicide prevention device, mandated by the district administration to prevent suicides in student accommodations, the officer said.

Preliminary investigations suggest that Abhijeet was good in studies and attended his coaching classes regularly, he said.

This is the third suicide by a coaching student in Kota this year. The city, a prominent hub for coaching institutes, saw 17 such cases in 2024.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bonanza before budget

The Cabinet has greenlit the 8th Pay Commission, setting the stage for a revision of salaries of central govt employees

The Union Cabinet's approval of the 8th Pay Commission ahead of the budget marks a significant step toward revising the salary and pension structure for over 49 lakh central government employees and nearly 65 lakh pensioners. Chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the decision emphasises improving quality of life and stimulating economic activity through enhanced consumption. The 8th Pay Commission will be tasked with revising salaries, allowances and pensions for central government employees and pensioners. Consultations will be held with central and state governments and other stakeholders before finalising its recommendations. The Commission's chairman and two members are to be appointed shortly, and its findings will replace the existing 7th Pay Commission framework, whose term ends in 2026. Historically, pay commissions are constituted every decade to address inflation, economic growth and employees' changing financial needs.



Prime Minister Modi underscored that the revised pay structure will boost consumption by increasing disposable incomes. Higher salaries and pensions are expected to lead to increased spending on goods and services, driving demand in sectors such as retail, real estate, and automobiles.

This consumption surge could further stimulate production and employment, creating a positive feedback loop in the economy. The Commission's recommendations are expected to address the rising cost of living and improve the financial wellbeing of central government employees and pensioners. While the revisions will inject liquidity into the economy, they will also impose a significant financial burden on the exchequer. Increased salary outlays may necessitate budgetary adjustments, potentially impacting allocations for other sectors like infrastructure and welfare.

Although PSU and state government employees are outside the direct purview of central pay commissions, the 8th Pay Commission's recommendations often set a benchmark. Many state governments and PSUs align their pay scales with central government standards, amplifying the financial impact across the broader public sector. This could also have adverse effect on the economy. Higher disposable incomes could lead to demand-pull inflation, particularly in essential goods and services. Managing inflation will require a balanced monetary policy. Besides, the exclusion of PSU employees and 'gramin dak sevaks' from central pay commission benefits may intensify demands for similar revisions, potentially leading to unrest and political pressure. Increased spending on salaries and pensions may constrain the government's ability to invest in capital-intensive projects, potentially slowing long-term economic growth. Despite challenges, it can serve as a catalyst for the economy by generating demand and boosting production.

PICTALK



Tourists at Mall Road amid snowfall, in Manali

A spectacle of faith, unity and cosmic significance



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The Kumbh Mela highlights the blend of tradition and modernity. It links cosmic phenomena with earthly rituals while fostering community feeling

The grand Maha Kumbh Mela, one of the most magnificent spiritual gatherings in the world, is here. The Uttar Pradesh government has meticulously prepared to host this sacred festival – happening once every 12 years – with Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally monitoring the developments. Began on January 13, 2025, the Maha Kumbh is anticipated to draw an awe-inspiring congregation of over 45 crores – a footfall of around 450 million pilgrims, saints, ascetics and tourists – devotees.

At the heart of this divine celebration, is the (coming together) 'Sangam' – the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mystical Saraswati rivers. Millions of devotees will come together to take a holy dip, seeking spiritual cleansing and blessings. The Maha Kumbh is a timeless testament to faith, unity, and the eternal connection between humanity and the divine, that owes its origins to mythology and history. Devotees believe that a dip during the auspicious planetary alignments cleanses sins and paves the way for Moksha (liberation). Swami Sivanaanda, the Yoga Guru, and a proponent of Vedanta, rightly pointed out that "The holy dip at the Kumbh Mela is not just a ritual; it is a profound surrender to the divine." Mythologically connected, the legend of 'Samudra Manthan', or the Churning of the Ocean, is the cornerstone of its mythological significance. According to ancient scriptures, gods and demons churned the ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality (Amrit). As the Gods carried away the nectar, a few drops fell at four locations – Haridwar, Prayagraj, Nashik and Ujjain – and these places became sacred. Thus began the tradition of the Kumbh Mela. Scholar Diana Eck, professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University notes that "The Kumbh Mela reflects the Indian ethos of integrating mythology with geography, turning the mundane into the sacred." References to Kumbha appear in Vedic texts like the Rigveda,



Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. It is also linked to the zodiac sign Aquarius, an astrological interpretation influenced by Greek ideas in the late 1st millennium CE. 'Mela' means "assembly" or "gathering" and signifies fairs or communal celebrations, as found in ancient Hindu texts. Together, Kumbha Mela refers to a "gathering centered around water or the nectar of immortality." Historically, the first recorded mention of the Kumbh Mela can be traced back to the writings of the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century CE. Hiuen Tsang documented several key events during Harsha's (Harshavardhana ruled over much of northern India from 606 to 647 AD and his reign is regarded as one of relative peace and prosperity) reign. Tsang also documented the Kumbh Mela festival in Prayag which Harsha attended. Over centuries, the festival evolved from a modest gathering of ascetics to a colossal event that attracts millions. The historical transformation of the Kumbh Mela underscores its resilience and adaptability, blending spiritual fervour with societal changes. A defining feature of the Kumbh Mela is the presence of saints, seers, and spiritual leaders



REFERENCES TO KUMBH APPEAR IN VEDIC TEXTS LIKE THE RIGVEDA, YAJURVEDA, SAMAVEDA, AND ATHARVAVEDA. IT IS ALSO LINKED TO THE ZODIAC SIGN AQUARIUS, AN ASTROLOGICAL INTERPRETATION INFLUENCED BY GREEK IDEAS IN THE LATE 1ST MILLENNIUM CE

who guide the masses. Various 'Akharas' (monastic orders) play a pivotal role in preserving and propagating Sanatan Dharma. The ascetics, often clad in saffron robes or ash, symbolise the renunciation of worldly desires. The ritual bath in the rivers further holds deep symbolic meaning. It signifies the washing away of one's ego and sins, allowing a fresh spiritual beginning. Historian William Dalrymple observes, "The saints at the Kumbh Mela are the custodians of India's timeless spiritual heritage." The Kumbh Mela beautifully embodies the fusion of religion and science. Its timing, rooted in precise astronomical calculations, reflects the profound significance of Hindu cosmology. When Jupiter enters Aquarius and the Sun moves into Aries, planetary alignments create an auspicious period for spiritual connection. This sacred festival links cosmic phenomena with earthly rituals, highlighting the deep interconnection between the universe and human spirituality. Aryabhata's pioneering work in celestial phenomena, including planetary motion and eclipses, continues to influence the Kumbh's timing. The Kumbh Mela is also a melting pot of cultures,

philosophies, and humanity. Participants range from reclusive ascetics to common people and even international visitors. This diversity underscores the universality of the quest for spiritual enlightenment. Sociologist Sudhir Kakar once wrote that the "Kumbh Mela is not merely a religious event but a grand celebration of human interconnectedness." The exchange of ideas, rituals, and philosophies at the Mela fosters a unique sense of global unity.

Hosting millions of pilgrims at the Kumbh Mela demands meticulous planning, leveraging cutting-edge technologies like AI-powered crowd management systems, drone surveillance for security, and mobile health clinics to handle medical emergencies. Mobile apps and live-streaming services ensured smooth communication and global accessibility for devotees. The 2025 Kumbh will span an expanded area of 800 hectares, featuring 1.8 lakh tents and 101 smart parking facilities for five lakh vehicles daily. Despite the challenges, the event seamlessly blends tradition and modernity. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISRO'S DOCKING MISSION SUCCESSFUL

Madam — ISRO docking two fast-moving spacecraft in space is a highly complex operation with numerous benefits. Docking enables the assembly of modular space stations, telescopes, or other large structures in orbit that cannot be launched in one piece. Example: Docking was essential in constructing the International Space Station (ISS). Docking allows for the transfer of astronauts and cargo between spacecraft or from a spacecraft to a space station. This supports long-term missions, resupply and the exchange of crew. This extends the operational life of expensive assets like communication or scientific satellites. Docking technology allows spacecraft to refuel in space, enabling longer missions or supporting reusable spacecraft. This is crucial for deep space exploration missions. Docking is a critical step for assembling spacecraft or transferring crew for missions to the Moon, Mars, or beyond. Modular spacecraft for such missions often require multiple launches and dockings to combine their components. Docking facilitates international cooperation, as different countries can launch modules or experiments that dock with a shared platform, like a space station. Docking provides a means for evacuation or rescue in case of emergencies aboard a spacecraft or space station. Spacecraft like crew capsules (e.g., SpaceX Dragon, ISRO's Gaganyaan) rely on docking to connect with orbital stations, making them reusable and cost-effective. Successfully executing docking operations demonstrates technological prowess, boosts national pride, and establishes the country as a leader in space exploration. Docking operations are a cornerstone of space exploration and mission sustainability, enabling long-term presence and work in space. This achievement has placed India in the exclusive and elite league of the US, Russia, and China! This docking was successful on January 16, 2025!

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

India strengthens its naval fleet



After two days of the inauguration of the strategically important Z-Morh or Sonamarg Tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated to the nation three frontline naval combatants—the destroyer INS Surat, the frigate INS Nilgiri and the Scorpene-class submarine INS Vaghsheer on their commissioning at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai on the occasion of Army Day on

Wednesday. It is for the first time that all three frontline platforms have been indigenously developed in the country.

The simultaneous commissioning of these vessels is a shot in the arm for the Indian Navy, which is preparing itself to challenge China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. Equipped with the advanced technology, all three vessels have boosted the Indian Navy's capabilities to respond to various maritime challenges more effectively. In fact, public sector shipyards such as GRSE Kolkata, MDL Mazgaon, CSL Kochi, GSL Goa and HSL Vizag Besides immense contributions to defence preparation, the Indian Navy has contributed immensely to boosting operational preparedness of the Indian Navy by completing various shipbuilding projects in a very efficient and time-bound manner.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

ACTOR SAIF ALI KHAN ATTACKED

Madam — Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan was stabbed six times after confronting an intruder, who had a confrontation with Khan's maid before the actor intervened, resulting in a physical struggle, in his Bandra residence early Thursday morning. The intruder fled after a violent altercation. Khan was rushed to Lilavati Hospital by his son, Ibrahim and a caretaker, where he has successfully emerged from surgery and is now out of danger. The actor is currently recovering, with doctors closely monitoring his condition. People wonder how an intruder can enter the building and reach the 11th floor in a high-profile building that is well guarded and then escape also. Moreover, all in Bandra. An area that has the highest concentration of celebrities, which is supposed to have adequate security. No doubt 54-year-old Saif is a fit person, so he could face the intruder. Wishing Saif Ali Khan a speedy recovery, trusting that the law will take its course and those responsible will be held accountable.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

HAMAS-ISRAEL TRUCE DECLARED

Madam — The ceasefire accord emerged after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the US to stop the war that began with deadly Hamas attacks on Israel and saw Israeli forces kill tens of thousands of Palestinians and devastate Gaza. It is a welcome move. As per the deal, Israel and Hamas have agreed to halt the war in Gaza and see the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. It is the most significant breakthrough in 15 months of war that began in October 2023.

Firstly, hostages in Gaza and Palestinian prisoners in Israel would be freed, and Gazans who have been displaced would be allowed to start returning home. During this period, Israeli troops would pull out of all populated areas in Gaza while the Palestinians would also return to their neighbourhoods in all the areas of Gaza. The second stage would be a permanent end to the war, according to Biden.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The silent struggles of a daughter-in-law: A call to change

Allowing a daughter-in-law to flourish in her own right doesn't diminish the family's unity—it strengthens it

Living in a joint family is rarely simple, but for a daughter-in-law, it may be a delicate balancing act filled with judgement and criticism. In many households, the role of a daughter-in-law is laden with unspoken expectations, leaving little room for her individuality. It's time we acknowledge these silent struggles and push for a more inclusive and empathetic family dynamic. A daughter-in-law often steps into a household as an outsider, expected to adapt seamlessly to a new way of life. From changing her surname to understanding the intricacies of family traditions, she embarks on a journey of transformation. Yet, the term "in-law" itself can feel like a trap—a constant reminder of her peripheral status in the family. For many, this word symbolises the invisible cage of societal expectations and sacrifices that are seldom reciprocated. "It feels as though I'm constantly being watched," shares Anonymous, 37, who recently relocated to live with her in-laws following her marriage. "It can be exhausting to sense scrutiny at every corner,



whether it's about your outfit or your manner of speaking." These tales are not one of a kind. Across the nation, countless women grapple with the challenge of fulfilling the expectations of others while striving to maintain their sense of self. Some of my friends and cousins have admitted to bending the truth just to carve out a little time for themselves—a brief coffee catch-up or a quick getaway to relax with friends. Some even refer to it as a means of 'escaping' the steadfast pressures of family life. But why should it come to this? Why must a daughter-in-law justify her need for a breather?

The narrative that has been perpetuated for generations—that she must be the glue holding the family together—needs an overhaul. Living in a joint family should not mean sacrificing one's freedom or sense of self. It's high time families rethink the dynamics and extend the same courtesy of individuality and space to their daughters-in-law that they offer their sons.

Empathy and equality within a household aren't luxuries; they are necessities for harmony. Allowing a daughter-in-law to flourish in her own right doesn't diminish the family's unity—it strengthens it. Moreover, it sets an exam-

ple for future generations, teaching them to prioritise respect over rigid roles. Transformation begins with dialogue. It is essential for families to recognise the contributions a daughter-in-law makes and to foster open communication regarding shared responsibilities. Partners also hold a crucial position in connecting their spouses with their families, making certain that everyone feels appreciated and heard. At its core, a family is about mutual love, respect, and support. Let's replace the stifling word "in-law" with something more inclusive—perhaps "in-love," symbolising acceptance and belonging. After all, isn't that what a family should truly be about? For daughters-in-law across the world, the message is clear: You are not alone in your struggle. For families, the challenge is to listen, adapt, and foster a space where everyone, regardless of their title, feels at home. It's not just about rewriting roles—it's about rewriting the narrative for a more equitable tomorrow. (The writer is a freelance writer; views are personal)



RACHNA LAKHPATRI



FIRST COLUMN

OUR ACTIONS
SHAPE OUR LIVES

Karmaphalas—the results of our actions—are an undeniable force shaping our lives



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We all should know about karmaphalas. These are the results of both good and bad karma (acts) done by us in the past with our minds, words and bodies. I have mentioned minds separately from bodies because karmas done by the mind are subtle. And they can be quite lethal. What is a mental disease? You have guessed right; it is caused by our minds. Similarly, words are no less dangerous. Yes, words can be very deadly, as experienced by all of us, when we choose to speak foolishly. And these bad karmaphalas can manifest at any age but they hurt the most in old age when we are weak and not left with many options.

This is when a person laments about his bad luck and there are not many sympathisers. Aren't we written off as we age? This article describes what we can do about it. We are not so helpless after all. The first step is to stop doing all bad acts right from this moment. And we know what these are. Goodness has to increase in us by doing all acts of goodness.

We must speak pleasantly; we should see goodness programmes; we should stick to foods in goodness; and so on. What this will do is protect us from the ill effects of our present acts, to begin with. Controller mental must be curbed; one must become realistic because there is only one controller and that is God. If it wasn't so we will obtain whatever we desire, which hardly even hap-



pens. The ego must be curbed because there is only one superior entity, which is God. All our lives we try to prove our superiority and what happens? We become very unpopular with others, especially with our family members, whom we desperately need in our old age. Spiritual practices must be started in the right earnest. They will make a lot of sense if we realise that we are souls, parts of God.

Shouldn't parts be dependent on the whole? Should we not be respectful towards God, just like a son is supposed to be towards his father? Don't we thank others when they do us some favour? God is forever doing us many favours. To begin with, He has provided all essentials free like the light of the sun, water, air containing oxygen, etc. God has to help ultimately because fate cannot be changed by anyone else. He also doesn't, but helps to deal with bad karmaphalas; we won't end up badly. (9.31) This is a very big 'kripa' but more important is His mercy in protecting us from our good karmaphalas, when we are most likely to hurt ourselves badly. Because it is hard to tolerate good times. And God and only God can help in improving our nature, which is also part of our fate. Doesn't our nature let us down time and again? We see people destroying themselves by angry acts, lusty behaviour, envious attitudes, etc. God protects us from foolish acts, if we remain in His shelter. I am very scared about the prospect of ill fate in my old age when I am already weak. God has to protect me.

I am not taking any chances; I have taken God's shelter. Only God is the one who can help, being the owner and controller. God can intervene and God does for His devotees. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 18.58) Wouldn't this make us peaceful? It has made me gradually as my connection with God is getting strengthened by my spiritual practices. Please don't take chances.

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

Reverse brain drain: A
game-changer for growth

WASEEM JAVED

By harnessing the knowledge, networks and expertise of these returnees, India is laying the foundation for a resilient and competitive economy

India has witnessed a mass exodus of talent for decades, as highly skilled professionals and students left the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This phenomenon, known as 'brain drain', has historically deprived the country of its brightest minds. However, the tide is reversing, with individuals returning to their home country, as seen in the recent past. With acquired skills and rich experience, the 'reverse brain drain' is increasingly becoming a powerful force in India's economic growth and development. This comes against the backdrop of India's fast-paced economic growth, combined with government initiatives and an evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem that has made the country an attractive destination for global talent, including those who once left its shores. This shift is not about just people coming back; it's about knowledge transfer, innovation, and global networks essential to building a competitive and resilient economy.

Economic and Entrepreneurial Opportunities Driving Return

In most cases, what has caused this reverse brain drain is the prospect of available opportunities in India. The growth pattern of India as a country with an upward economic trajectory brings with it demand for science, technology, and innovation skills from professionals in their fields.

Returnees easily get absorbed in suitable roles since their international experience puts them on top of the sought-after candidates at startups, large multinational companies, and research centres. Government initiatives like Make in India, Startup India, and Atmanirbhar Bharat have further made India more attractive. These initiatives encourage entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and innovation by offering financial incentives, regulatory support, and access to infrastructure. Thus, many Indian professionals who had earlier worked in global hubs such as Silicon Valley are returning to start their startups or take up leadership roles in Indian enterprises.

For example, several Indian entrepreneurs who have returned from the United States or the United Kingdom are at the helm of billion-dollar startups in India today. They cut across fintech, e-commerce, health tech, and renewable energy among other sectors that create jobs and spur economic growth. Their global networks and access to venture capital give them a competitive edge that will allow them to scale their businesses quickly and effectively.

The Role of Overseas Education in Shaping Talent

Education in foreign lands serves as the core of the reverse brain drain. In 2024, more than 13.35 lakh students from India pursued education abroad, of which the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Germany were among the top destinations. In general, courses in engineering, business management, medicine, and technology attract Indian students with promising career avenues. This international education equips students with advanced knowledge, technical skills, and a global perspective. Many also gain valuable work experience abroad before deciding to return to India.

A key facilitator in this journey has been the rise of AI-powered consultancy plat-



forms that streamline the process of studying abroad. These platforms help students identify the best courses, universities, and countries based on their aspirations and career goals.

They also help with visa processes, and education loans, and even offer post-admission help, so everything goes off smoothly. These consultancies not only empower students in terms of succeeding abroad but also lay the groundwork for their potential contributions upon returning to India while bridging the gap between students and global education systems.

Benefits of Reverse Brain Drain for India

The reverse brain drain is an economy-changing force for India, bringing skilled professionals back to drive progress across sectors. In the case of technology, returnees provide cutting-edge expertise in areas like artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and clean energy, which ensure that India is not left behind globally.

The knowledge that these returnees provide creates technological advances that benefit both industries and society. Entrepreneurship and innovation also pick up pace as returnees start new ventures, create jobs, and develop innovative products and services that address local and global challenges. This not only increases employment but also makes India a creative solutions hub.

Furthermore, these professionals enhance scientific collaboration by connecting Indian institutions with international research networks, thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources in areas such as healthcare and renewable energy. The economic impact is equally strong as the

reverse brain drain strengthens productivity, draws in foreign investment, and propels GDP growth.

Key Challenges and the Way Forward

Although reverse brain drain promises to boost Indian growth immensely, bureaucratic red tape, infrastructural inadequacies, and differing work environments in India versus the developed world will still prevent most professionals from coming back. This will only come true when registration procedures, tax regimes, and the regime for intellectual property become more simplified, paving the way for returnees to establish enterprises or meaningfully contribute to organizations. To tap into returning talent effectively, India must improve its infrastructure: world-class research facilities, modern educational institutions, and strong health care. More competitive incentives to attract international talent include tax breaks, grants for research, and easier access to funding. Only then will the reverse brain drain convert into practical input toward the nation's economic growth and innovation.

Government Initiatives and Policy Support

The Indian government has been proactively capitalising on reverse brain drain. By setting up innovation hubs, funding startup companies, and collaborating with world-class research institutes, the country is attracting much-needed talent as well as fostering innovation. Many countries have implemented policies and incentives to encourage skilled professionals to return to their home countries. For example, Taiwan created the Hsinchu Science Park and offered tax cuts to encourage the development of high-tech industries. Such poli-

cies not only encourage the return of skilled professionals but also provide them with a platform to flourish.

The Global Context and Its Implications

Interestingly, reverse brain drain is not an Indian phenomenon alone. Developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom are losing talent due to restrictive immigration policies and limited opportunities for career advancement. For example, America's flawed immigration policies have inadvertently driven away skilled professionals who are now contributing to India's growth.

This shift points to a wider paradigm wherein developing countries are transforming centres of innovation and economic activity. It could also help India emerge as a global leader in sectors ranging from technology to healthcare.

A Bright Future for Reverse Brain Drain

The reverse brain drain represents a new paradigm in India's journey to become a global economic superpower. In this new scenario, talent can be an asset to the country by nurturing innovation and fostering collaboration. With government support, private sector participation, and an emphasis on developing world-class infrastructure, the country is poised to turn reverse brain drain into a sustained growth driver. In doing so, this movement is not only for India but reshapes the global talent landscape with a new reality of importance— inclusive and dynamic economies in a more integrated and interconnected world.

(The writer is the founder and CEO of EduVib; views are personal)



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES LIKE MAKE IN INDIA, STARTUP INDIA, AND ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT HAVE FURTHER MADE INDIA MORE ATTRACTIVE. THESE INITIATIVES ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SELF-RELIANCE, AND INNOVATION BY OFFERING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES, REGULATORY SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE

Andhra Pradesh's journey towards zero hunger and inclusive education

The Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal scheme is a testament to the State's commitment to inclusivity and reforming the education system

Since Independence, food security has been a significant concern in India. Despite notable progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger, India still grapples with the challenge of undernutrition.

According to a United Nations report, the country accounts for nearly 195 million undernourished individuals, with children constituting 43 per cent of this population. Various initiatives, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the PM Poshan Mid-Day Meal scheme, have been implemented to address this pressing issue.

Historical Roots of Mid-Day Meal Schemes

The origins of the Mid-Day Meal scheme in India can be

traced back to the colonial era. In 1925, the Madras Presidency proposed the first-ever Mid-Day Meal initiative for underprivileged children. Tamil Nadu became the first state to implement this idea, with Sourashtra Boys Higher Secondary School in Madurai serving meals to children in 1955.

By the 1980s, this programme gained widespread acceptance, particularly with the introduction of the "Nutritious Noon-Meal Scheme" by Tamil Nadu's then Chief Minister, M G Ramachandran. This initiative aimed to provide food to 6.8 million malnourished children in the state. Over the years, the programme has demonstrated the strong correlation between nutritious meals and improved educa-



T V KATTIMANI

tion. For children in tribal and socio-economically disadvantaged communities, the scheme has proven to be a lifeline. Many of these children, previously engaged in household activities or income generation due to food insecurity, could now attend school and pursue their right to education. The programme also had a transformative impact on children from Socio-

Economic Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, De-notified Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, and girl children.

Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme

In a significant step forward, the Andhra Pradesh government recently launched the "Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme." This initiative, named after Dokka Seethamma—revered as Aparna Annapura—provides free meals to students in junior colleges across the state. Seethamma, born in 1841 in Mandapet village, was renowned for her compassion and dedication to serving the needy. Despite limited formal education, she imbibed strong moral values through



stories and songs from her childhood. Along with her husband, Dokka Joganna, she provided food and shelter to travelers and disaster-stricken communities near the Godavari River. Her legacy of humanitarian service remains a beacon of inclusivity and maternal love.

The Dokka Seethamma scheme is the first of its kind in India, targeting intermediate students. Benefiting 148,419 students across 475 government junior colleges in Andhra Pradesh, the pro-

gramme aims to reduce dropout rates, enhance academic focus, and improve overall student health. By lessening the financial burden on low-income families, the initiative also promotes greater equity in education. It sets a model for other states to emulate, addressing hunger while fostering a nurturing environment for academic and personal growth.

Complementary Initiatives for Inclusivity

In addition to the Dokka Seethamma scheme, Andhra Pradesh has revived the "Anna Canteens" initiative. This program offers wholesome meals at just Rs 5 to economically disadvantaged individuals, significantly alleviating hunger and improving living standards. By ensuring affordable

access to food, the state aims to bridge socioeconomic disparities and support marginalised communities.

For tribal students, particularly girls, the Dokka Seethamma scheme has been a game-changer. Tribal communities often face acute food insecurity due to geographical remoteness and limited resources. Free nutritious meals enable tribal children to focus on their education instead of household chores or income generation. The scheme also addresses educational inequity by encouraging families to prioritise their children's schooling. For tribal girls, the program has a transformative impact. Social and financial pressures often force girls to leave school prematurely, but free meals reduce fam-

ily burdens and promote their continued education.

A Vision for a Better Future

The Mid-Day Meal scheme and similar initiatives signify more than just food distribution—they represent a commitment to empowering the marginalised and uplifting the underprivileged. These programs not only ensure access to nutritious meals but also encourage higher education, better living standards, and healthier lifestyles. By fostering cooperation among teachers, students, and staff, the scheme revives the ancient "Gurukula" system of holistic education, emphasising both mental and physical wellbeing.

(The writer is Vice Chancellor of Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh; views are personal)

China launches Pakistani satellite into space

Beijing/Islamabad (PTI): China successfully launched a Pakistani satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on Friday.

Beijing (PTI): Chinese President Xi Jinping held a telephone conversation with US President-elect Donald Trump on Friday.

Xi, Trump hold talks over phone

Beijing (PTI): Chinese President Xi Jinping held a telephone conversation with US President-elect Donald Trump on Friday.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that of Mrs. Parveen Sirohi is the owner of BUILT-UP PROPERTY BEARING NO. 36-A AREA MEASURING 62.5 SQ. YARDS.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concerned that Mr. Sushil Kumar S/o Sh. S. Singh, New Main Road, New Delhi

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GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE. Table with columns: SR., NAME OF BOARD/CORP/AUTH, NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER, OPENING DATE, AMOUNT/END (APPROX.) IN RUPEES, WEBSITE OF THE BOARD, NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL.

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SPACE INCUBATORIES TECHNOLOGIES LIMITED

STANDALONE UN-AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND NINE MONTHS ENDED 31.12.2024. Table with columns: S. No., Particulars, 3 months ended 31.12.2024, Year ended 31.03.2024, 3 months ended 30.09.2024.

NOTES: 1. The above Audited Quarterly financial results as reviewed by the Audit Committee were approved by the Board of Directors in its meeting held on 16.01.2025.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Yati Sirohiwal D/o Satya Prakash, R/o BH-67 East Shalimar Bagh New Delhi - 110088 State that my name has inadvertently got recorded in my passport as Yati Serohiwal.

I, Seema Devi W/o No.4285494M NK Santosh Kumar, R/o- Vill & PO- Belkunda, PS- Mahua, Teh- Vaishali, Dist- Hajipur, Bihar- 844125, have changed my name from Seema Devi to Seema Thakur.

I, Anshuman Sirohiwal D/o Satya Prakash, R/o BH-67 East Shalimar Bagh New Delhi - 110088 state that my name has inadvertently got recorded in my passport as Anshuman Serohiwal.

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE. Table with columns: SR., NAME OF BOARD/CORP/AUTH, NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER, OPENING DATE, AMOUNT/END (APPROX.) IN RUPEES, WEBSITE OF THE BOARD, NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Public in General is informed that my clients Sh. Pradeep Jain, S/o Late Jai Kumar Jain and Krishna Jain W/o Pradeep Jain both R/o CP 233, Pitampura, Delhi-34 has debarred/dismised/Dis-inherited their son Gaurav Jain and his wife Tanu Aggarwal W/o Gaurav Jain from all their movable and immovable properties and severed all relations from them as they are not obeying them.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the Public on behalf of my client HDFC Bank Ltd. who has disbursed a Loan to Mr. Neeraj Jain and Megha Jain (under Loan Account No. 702605837) against the mortgage of property being No. 1362, measuring 160 Sq.Yards, situated at Urban Estate, Sector-4, Gurgaon, Haryana. It has come to the notice of my client HDFC Bank Ltd. that the original Allotment Letter dated 23.12.1968 issued by Estate Officer, Faridabad, in favour of Smt. Shanti Devi have been misplaced.

ESAF SMALL FINANCE BANK GOLD AUCTION NOTICE. Notice is hereby given for the information of all concerned that Gold ornaments pledged with ESAF Small Finance Bank and not redeemed by borrowers, despite repeated reminders and notices, of our branches, are listed below. This will be auctioned as per the details given below.

Indian Overseas Bank BARARI-MATHURA BRANCH. (ADDRESS : BARARI VIA REFINERY P.O., BARARI MATHURA, UTTAR PRADESH - 281005. Phone No. 8925950472 & E-mail id : lob0472@job.in)

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GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE. Table with columns: SR., NAME OF BOARD/CORP/AUTH, NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER, OPENING DATE, AMOUNT/END (APPROX.) IN RUPEES, WEBSITE OF THE BOARD, NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL.

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Indian Overseas Bank GLA ENGINEERING COLLEGE-AJHAI BRANCH. (Address: GLA Engineering College Village & P. O. Ajhai, NH-2 Aahai 281406 Uttar Pradesh. Phone No. 8925951999 & E-mail id : lob1999@job.in)

Indian Overseas Bank BARARI-MATHURA BRANCH. (ADDRESS : BARARI VIA REFINERY P.O., BARARI MATHURA, UTTAR PRADESH - 281005. Phone No. 8925950472 & E-mail id : lob0472@job.in)

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Union Cabinet approves ₹11,440 Crore revival plan for Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved a Rs 11,440 crore revival plan for debt-laden Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), according to a statement released on Friday. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the revival plan for RINL for Rs 11,440 crore, it added. The infusion includes Rs 10,300 crore as equity capital into RINL and conversion of Rs 1,140 crore working capital loan as 7 per cent non-cumulative preference share capital redeemable after 10 years to keep RINL as a going concern, the official statement said. With this revival package, many of the legacy problems that RINL used to face will be resolved, Information and



Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said. The equity infusion of Rs 10,300 crore into RINL will help it overcome the operational problems related to raising working capital and start blast furnace operations in the most productive way, the statement said. The revival package would allow the company to gradually reach its full production capacity, which is critical and is in the national interest to have stability in the Indian steel market by augmenting steel production and also save the livelihoods of employees (regular and

contractual) and those dependent on the operations of the steel plant. The revival plan envisages that RINI will start full production with two blast furnaces in January 2025 and with three blast furnaces by August 2025. Under the Ministry of Steel, RINL operates the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), the only offshore steel plant in Andhra Pradesh. It has an installed capacity of 7.3 Mtpa of liquid steel. As per the statement, the financial condition of RINL is critical. RINL has exhausted the sanctioned borrowing limits from banks for working capital and was not in a position to get further loans from banks. RINL also defaulted on the capex loan repayments and interest payments in June 2024.

Eight former, current Paytm officials pay ₹3.32 Crore to settle case with Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as eight current and former officials of One97 Communications, which owns and operates Paytm, have collectively paid Rs 3.32 crore to markets regulator Sebi to settle allegations of flouting securities market norms. Those who have settled the case are the company's former compliance officer and company secretary Amit Khara; Ashit Ranjit Lilani, Neeraj Arora, Mark Schwartz and Pallavi Shardt Shroff, who were holding the positions of independent directors; and then non-executive nominee directors - Douglas Feagin, Munish Varma and Ravi Chandra Adusumalli, according to a Sebi order. The order came after these officials proposed to settle the proceedings initiated against them through a show cause notice issued on May 17



"without admitting or denying of the findings." "In view of the receipt of settlement amount by Sebi, the instant adjudication proceedings initiated against the notices vide show cause notice...Dated May 17, 2024, are hereby disposed of," Sebi said in its settlement order. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) initiated adjudication proceedings in the matter of One97 Communications for the alleged violations of provisions of LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) norms and ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations. It was alleged that independent directors being part of NRC (Nomination and Remuneration Committee) failed to discharge duties with unbiased and independent approach while decision-making with respect to matters involving benefits to

the company's MD and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma and his relatives, in violation of LODR Regulations, 2015. These directors allegedly approved and signed offer documents containing incorrect statements and incomplete disclosures, in violation of ICDR rules. Besides, other directors signed offer documents containing incorrect statements and incomplete disclosures with respect to the company, being a professionally managed firm having no identifiable promoter whereas the company having promoter Sharma, in violation of ICDR Regulations rules. These individuals settled the allegations by paying a settlement amount to Sebi. Individually, Lilani and Arora paid Rs 53.62 lakh each, Adusumalli, Schwartz, Shroff, Feagin and Varma remitted Rs 42.9 lakh each and Khara shelled out Rs 11.05 lakh.

India's economic growth poised to rebound, says RBI Bulletin

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's economic growth is poised to rebound as domestic demand regains strength, though the stickiness in food inflation warrants careful monitoring, the latest RBI Bulletin released on Friday said. An article on the 'State of the Economy' published in the January Bulletin also noted that the economic outlook for 2025 is divergent across countries with some loss of speed in the US; weak-to-modest recoveries in Europe and Japan; more moderate growth profiles in emerging and developing countries alongside a more gradual disinflation relative to advanced economies. "In India, there is a conducive quickening of high-frequency indicators of economic activity in the second half of 2024-25, bearing out the implicit pick-up in real GDP growth for this period in the annual first advance estimates of the NSO," it said. It further said, the headline



inflation eased for the second successive month in December, although the stickiness in food inflation warrants careful monitoring of second order effects. The article has been authored by a team lead by Michael Patra, who demitted the office of RBI Deputy Governor earlier this month. "India's economic growth is poised to rebound as domestic demand regains strength. Rural demand continues to gain momentum, reflecting a resilience in consumption, supported by brighter agricultural prospects," the article said. A revival in public capex on infrastructure is likely to stimulate growth in key sectors. It also noted that rising input cost pressures in the manufacturing sector, coupled with weather-related exigencies and global headwinds could, however, pose risks to this outlook. The central bank, however, said the views expressed in the Bulletin are of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India.

India's forex reserves drop by USD 8.714 Billion to USD 625.871 Billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 8.714 billion to USD 625.871 billion in the week ended January 10, the RBI said on Friday. Earlier, the overall kitty dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended January 3, the Reserve Bank of India said. The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. For the week ended January 10, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 9.469 billion to USD 536.011 billion, the data released on Friday showed.



Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by USD 792 million to USD 67.883 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 33 million to USD 17.781 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 4 million to USD 4.195 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed.

Gold jumps ₹700 to ₹82K per 10 gms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rising for the third consecutive day, gold prices on Friday surged Rs 700 to trade near a record high at Rs 82,000 per 10 grams in the national capital due to persistent buying in the local markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 81,300 per 10 grams on Thursday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity continued to shine for the third straight day by jumping Rs 700 to Rs 81,600 per 10 grams against Rs 80,900 per 10 grams in the previous close. However, silver prices declined Rs 500 to Rs 93,500 per kg on Friday. The metal had ended at Rs 94,000 per kg in the previous trading session. On October 31 last year, gold of 99.9 per cent purity and 99.5 per cent purity hit a record high of Rs 82,400 and Rs 82,000 per 10 grams, respectively, in the local markets. Despite a weak trend in the international markets, the precious metal gained in the



domestic market, mainly due to higher demand from jewellers, traders said. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery declined Rs 424 or 0.54 per cent to Rs 78,802 per 10 grams. "Gold witnessed minor profit booking from higher zones on MCX, retreating towards Rs 78,800," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The decline comes as white flags emerge in the Middle East, signalling easing tensions, and the recent positive data from the US, including CPI, retail sales, and the Federal Reserve's dovish outlook, appear to have been largely priced in, Trivedi

added. Silver contracts for March delivery plummeted Rs 1,093 or 1.18 per cent to Rs 91,710 per kg on the MCX on Friday. Globally, Comex gold futures fell USD 21.10 per ounce or 0.77 per cent to USD 2,729.80 per ounce. "Gold dipped slightly below USD 2,750 per ounce ahead of upcoming US housing and industrial production data," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP of Commodity Research at Kotak Securities, said. Fed Governor Christopher Waller on Thursday said if economic data continues to weaken, the central bank might implement three or four rate cuts this year further stoking the optimism for rate cut expectations which lent support to the metal. Additionally, Comex silver futures quoted 1.47 per cent lower in the Asian market hours at USD 31.26 per ounce. Further, uncertainties surrounding US President-elect Donald Trump's trade policies and tariff plans should contribute to limiting losses for the safe-haven asset, according to commodities experts.

Cabinet approves refarming of 687 Mhz of spectrum, more to come: Scindia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved the refarming of 687 Mhz spectrum for mobile services and more will be done based on the study by a committee of secretaries put in place by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Friday. Speaking at an event of industry body COAL, the minister said mobile services need 2,000 Mhz of spectrum by 2030 and the Cabinet decision takes the total quantum of radiowaves to 1,587 Mhz. "Yesterday's Cabinet approved the refarming of 687 Mhz. This means this takes us from 900 Mhz to 1,587 Mhz. (of



which) 320 (MHz) will be released immediately, some by the end of next year and some by the end of 2028-29, which makes us ready for 2030," Scindia said at Digicom Summit 2025. The government, through refarming, earmarks or arranges spectrum of services based on the demand and where the radiowaves can be used efficiently.

The telecom industry has been demanding to make available 2000 megahertz of radiowaves available for mobile services in mid-bands, which are frequencies in the range of 1000 Mhz to 6000 Mhz. Scindia said the government will ensure that the requirement of the industry is met and there are no hurdles in the digital telecom landscape of the country. "That still leaves a gap of roughly 300 (Mhz). So, the ask is not over. The second round of this, the Committee of Secretaries, is working on it. The report will come by mid of this year. We will take that step to ensure that there are no bottlenecks for our digital telecom landscape to grow in India," Scindia said.

He said that telecom services are empowering people, and farmers, supporting several economic engines like digital payments and a backbone to the digital economy. Scindia said that it is his dream that India by 2030, transpends herself into a telecom product nation. "I am in conversation, as we speak, with our telecom majors and OEMs (original equipment makers) to see if there are possibilities to set up telecom manufacturing zones (TMZ). I think that time for TMZs has come," he said. The minister said that transformations in the sector are based on five key pillars, including policy level, technology, and ease of doing business.

Rupee ends one paisa down at 86.62 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee traded in a tight range and settled 1 paisa lower at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as massive outflow of foreign funds and falling domestic equity markets dented investors' sentiment. A firm American currency and higher crude oil prices also weighed on the domestic unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.60, stayed range-bound between the high of 86.55 and low of 86.62 throughout the day and ended at 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback, 1 paisa down from its previous closing level. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 21 paisa to close at 86.61 against the US dollar.



In two back-to-back sessions, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the local unit had gained 30 paise from its lowest-ever closing level of 86.70 against the dollar. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee weakened on a negative tone

housing market data from the US," he said and projected the USD-INR spot price to trade in the range of 86.55 to 86.95. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.09 per cent higher at 108.91. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.36 per cent to USD 81.58 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 423.49 points, or 0.55 per cent, to settle at 76,619.33 points, while the Nifty declined 108.60 points, or 0.47 per cent, to 23,203.20 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,341.95 crore on Thursday.

Rail operators likely to post double-digit growth in FY25: India Ratings

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rail operators' revenue is expected to grow into double-digit, while warehousing sector is projected to log a 3-5 per cent year-on-year growth in organic rentals this fiscal even as the demand for Grade-A space may remain intact, ratings agency India Ratings said on Friday. For sea transport, the ratings agency said, it is expecting port volumes will be supported by the coastal movement of goods and global container freight, with the easing of geopolitical tensions, including the Red Sea crisis and the normalisation of US-bound traffic. Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) for container freight stations is expected to remain range-bound due to the increase in

the proportion of direct port delivery and high competition intensity at large ports, according to Ind-Ra (India Ratings). Ind-Ra has also assigned an improving outlook for the logistics industry for FY26 and said that macro-tailwinds arising from the government's multipolar investments across ports, rail, road, and air transport are expected to bode well for the industry. Sustained investments and the resultant increased scale of operations are expected to improve cost efficiency and operational flexibility which could lead to higher profitability for Ind-Ra-rated integrated logistics companies, said Pratik Mundhada, Associate Director, Corporates, Ind-Ra. "In Ind-Ra's base case, we see double-digit revenue growth for rail operators in FY26, supported by huge private investments in rakes and dry



terminals in 2024. For warehousing entities, we project organic rental growth of 3-5 per cent year-on-year while demand for Grade-A spaces is expected to remain intact in FY26," he stated. Container freight stations' profitability, according to Mundhada, is likely to remain subdued in this fiscal due to intense competition. "Lastly, for freight forwarders, revenue growth and EBITDA

are likely to be impacted by a moderation in the global freight rates," he added. The ratings agency noted that initiatives such as the National Logistics Policy and the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan aim to enhance multimodal connectivity and foster interdisciplinary coordination. Further, it stated that public-private partnerships are expected to be supported by scale-

up the ports portfolio. Also, increased private capital expenditure towards the network expansion of trains, dry terminals, and warehousing will support the growth of the logistics market in India, it said and added that India's Logistics Performance Index ranking improved to 38 in 2023 from 44 in 2018, with an aspiration to break into the top 25 by 2030 as part of Maritime Vision 2030. This will necessitate a reasonable budgetary allocation towards logistics infrastructure in the upcoming budget, it said. Ind-Ra said it believes the full commissioning of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor will improve the utilisation of rakes and terminals, thereby enhancing the operating profitability of container train operators. On the flip side, increased competition and revisions of

INBRIEF

NRDC SIGNS MOA WITH IISC TO DRIVE TECHNOLOGY COMMERCIALISATION

BENGALURU: The National Research Development Corporation (NRDC), a Government of India enterprise under the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), India's premier institution for advanced scientific research and education, have signed a landmark Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) to accelerate the commercialisation of IISc-developed technologies. The MoA was signed and exchanged today at IISc by Cmde Amit Rastogi (Retd.), CMD, NRDC and Prof. Govindan Rangarajan, Director, IISc in the august presence of key officials from NRDC and IISc.

GREAT PLACE TO WORK HONOURS BSES: A CULTURE OF TRUST AND INCLUSIVITY

BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) have been awarded the highly coveted "Great Place to Work" Certification, a globally recognised benchmark for workplace excellence. This certification underscores BSES' commitment to fostering a workplace culture rooted in trust, respect, and inclusivity. The recognition reflects the organisation's focus on creating an environment where employees feel valued, empowered, and inspired to excel.



CLAY SHAPED EMOTIONS



connection. The earthy textures and intricate details of the terracotta forms draw viewers into an intimate engagement with the art. Reghu's ability to blend Dravidian and African features results in works that feel rooted in tradition while addressing contemporary sensibilities. The energy within the sculptures invites viewers to pause and reflect, creating a quiet dialogue between art and audience. Reghu draws inspiration from ancient traditions, including the art of the Indus Valley and Harappan civilisations. His sculptures are not replicas of the past; they reinterpret these influences to explore identity and human emotion in a modern context. His figures, with their expressive stances and thoughtful

An exploration of life and emotion through G. Reghu's evocative terracotta sculptures at Art Magnum Gallery, says SAKSHI PRIYA

gestures, evoke narratives that are both universal and deeply personal. The exhibition showcases Reghu's mastery of terracotta as a medium, bringing his forms to life with an emotional resonance that remains long after one leaves the gallery. The contours and expressions of his sculptures suggest movement and thought, compelling the audience to engage with the works on a deeper level. Whether through the tension in a figure's posture or the serenity of a tilted head, each piece carries an emotional weight that connects with the viewer.

Touchable Emotions celebrates clay as a material with both historical significance and contemporary relevance. Reghu's work honours ancient traditions while pushing their boundaries, demonstrating the enduring power of this medium to express complex themes. Through his art, he creates a bridge between the past and the present, showing how heritage and innovation can coexist. This exhibition is an invitation to reflect on universal themes of life and emotion.

Reghu's terracotta sculptures serve as a poignant reminder of art's ability to connect us to shared experiences. The world of G. Reghu's evocative terracotta sculptures, on display until February 15, 2025, at Art Magnum Gallery, New Delhi. Don't miss the chance to connect with his transformative journey from traditional pottery to emotionally powerful human forms.



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Art has the power to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, offering a language beyond words. Rainer Maria Rilke's observation, "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden for a long time," resonates deeply when considering the process of sculpting with clay. This medium, both humble and evocative, captures human emotions in their rawest form, narrating stories that connect with the core of our shared experiences.

The Touchable Emotions exhibition at Art Magnum Gallery features the terracotta sculptures of renowned sculptor G. Reghu. Curated by Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya, the exhibition ruminates into themes of life, heritage and emotion. Reghu's relationship with clay is deeply personal, as he shapes it to express stories that reflect universal human experiences. Each sculpture explores facets of existence, joy, introspection and



Classical Singing at its Best

By SAKSHI PRIYA

What is it about music and dance that can stir our hearts and minds in ways words never could?

The Power of Classical Music:

The 26th Swami Haridas-Tansen Sangeet Nritya Mahotsav curated by Padma Bhushan Dr. Uma Sharma. The Festival opened with a captivating Dhrupad performance by Ustad F. Wasifuddin Dagar, whose renditions of Raag Kambhoji and Raag Adana drew listeners into a peaceful space. The stillness in the room was striking, as Dagar's music seemed to speak directly to the heart, offering a rare moment of calm in an otherwise busy world. His mastery of the Dhrupad tradition set a perfect tone for the evening, allowing the audience to experience the beauty of classical music in its purest form.

The night took on new energy when Ustad Shujaat Khan stepped on stage. His sitar playing was truly magical. The audience, enraptured by the fluidity of his performance, responded with a standing ovation. The smooth flow of notes and the intricate patterns he created with his strings left a lasting impression on everyone present. His performance was an experience that



pulled the listener into the depths of his artistry.

Following this, the legendary Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia brought a sense of serenity to the evening with his flute recital. His ability to draw emotion from the bansuri (flute) was clear as he moved through ragas with ease. The sound of his flute seemed to fill the room, evoking a wide array of emotions, from joy to contemplation, as he effortlessly navigated complex melodies. Each note he played invited the audience to listen closely and reflect on the feelings embedded in his music.



The Fusion of Traditions: Day two of the festival continued to impress, with Pt. Vishwamohan Bhatt and his son, Pt. Salil Bhatt, bringing a unique touch to the proceedings. Their performance on the Mohan Veena and Satvik Veena captivated with its fusion of classical and folk traditions. The melodies were rich and moving, connecting deeply with the audience. Along with the Manganiyars from Rajasthan, their performance was a journey through the cultural heart of India, showcasing the diversity and vibrancy of its musical heritage.

A standout moment on day two was the collaboration between Pt. Shubendra Rao on the sitar and Smt. Saskia Rao on the cello. Their

performance merged Eastern and Western classical music with remarkable ease. The fusion of sitar and cello was both unexpected and beautiful, offering a fresh perspective on the possibilities of musical collaboration.

Smt. Shubha Mudgal's vocal performance rounded off the evening, showcasing her remarkable ability to convey emotion through song. Her renditions in Raag Kedar and Raag Megh captured the essence of Indian classical music, leaving the audience in wonders of her vocal range and depth.

Kathak and the Divine Connection: The final evening was a celebration of Kathak, with Padma Bhushan Dr. Uma Sharma presenting a moving performance, despite health challenges. Her seated portrayal of Kathak Bhav in 'Maiyaa Mori Mein Nahi Maakhan Khayo' showcased the grace and power of the dance form. Accompanied by her disciples, Sharma's performance took the audience through a spiritual journey, demonstrating the depth and beauty of Kathak.

The festival closed with a powerful performance by Begum Parween Sultana, whose voice filled the space with an intensity that left the audience in standing ovation. Her final rendition was the perfect conclusion to a festival that had showcased the very best of India's classical music and dance. It was a celebration of tradition, passion and artistry, an event that will remain etched in the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to witness it.



KALP: Experience Life in Art

By TEAM VIVA

KALP (Phases), is an exhibition of exquisite artworks by artist Poornima Dayal from Mumbai. This exhibition is taking place at The Lalit Kala Academi, 35, Rabindra Bhavan, Ferozshah Road, New Delhi from 15th January 2025 to 21 January 2025. It was inaugurated on 15th January by Padam Shri Dr. Shovana Narayan, Amita Sarabhai, Joint secretary, Ministry of Culture, Nidhi Kulpati, M.D Ndtv. Poornima Dayal is an internationally acclaimed, award winning artist who has exhibited extensively across the globe.

She is the recipient of the Winner prize Award by The Golden Duck Gallery, Hungary, Budapest in early 2024. She also has received the Honorable Awards and Talent Prize awards from Teravarna Art Gallery, Los Angeles. Poornima had the privilege of representing India at The Venice International Art Fair in 2023. Her artworks have also been displayed several times at the prestigious Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, Telangana Art Gallery, Hyderabad, The Bombay Art Society, Mumbai, The Nehru Centre Art Gallery, Mumbai, Amethyst and Jadoka Art Galleries, Chennai. The 'Vishwarang' program by the Government of India, The Rabindranath Tagore University of Art, Kolkata, The Peak Galleria, Hong Kong, The Holy Art Gallery, Athens and Paris respectively and The Line Contemporary, London. Having had the opportunity to exhibit at The Vienna Biennale, she has been



painting since 33 years. 'Abstract conceptual' is how she describes her style of art. 'I use a lot of textures and colors in my style of painting', continues Poornima. KALP, her latest Solo Exhibition at The Lalit Kala Academi is a depiction of life's journey through the various phases of life. In this exhibition, true to its name are exhibited different series of her Acrylics on Canvas, each representing a different phase. 'KALP' signifies the importance of living a life in reverence loving and accepting life. Of being grateful for everything has a Divine purpose. 'For me Art is very precious. It's something I respect. It is a way of self expression for me and I am grateful for it', quotes Poornima. A treat for Art Lovers the exhibition is on from 11 am to 7pm at The Lalit Kala Academi from 15 to 21 January 2025.



Australian Open: Naomi Osaka stops playing because of injury against Belinda Bencic

PTI ■ MELBOURNE Two-time Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka stopped playing because of a strained abdominal muscle after dropping the opening set of her third-round match against Belinda Bencic on Friday.

seasons because of mental-health breaks, then was off the tour while pregnant. Her daughter, Shai, was born in July 2023. Osaka began 2025 by making it to the final of a tournament at Auckland, New Zealand, on Jan. 5, but she stopped playing in the title match there because of the abdominal injury.



On Friday, Osaka — a former No. 1-ranked player who owns a total of four Grand Slam titles — was visited by a trainer during the changeover while she led 6-5. The trainer examined Osaka's abdominal area and gave her a pill to take, and play resumed.

“Hopefully she'll be fine soon and be able to play the rest of the season,” said Bencic, who won a singles gold medal for Switzerland at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. Bencic, who is also a mother, drew a heart on the lens of a court-side TV camera and wrote: “Get well soon Mama.”



Ranji Trophy: Kohli named in 22-member provisional squad for Delhi's next game

PTI ■ NEW DELHI Star batter Virat Kohli has been named in Delhi's 22-member provisional squad for their next Ranji Trophy game against Saurashtra in Rajkot but doubts remain

match starting January 23. Whether he will play or just fly down to Rajkot for a couple of days' training will be clear only after he details his position to DDCA president Rohan Jaitley. Kohli had last played a red-

“Rishabh felt the existing captain (Badoni) should continue to lead the side. He feels that since he is not available consistently, one shouldn't tinker with

leadership,” a member of the DDCA apex council told PTI on conditions of anonymity. “When he was offered captaincy, he said that he is very happy to play under

Badoni. We have picked 22 players including five U-23, who would fly to Bhillai for their CK Nayudu U-23 match against Chattisgarh, starting January 25,” he added.

Dream is still alive to play for India: Karun Nair

PTI ■ BENGALURU After a prolonged wait on the sidelines and a melancholic social media post nearly three years back, Karun Nair has made a sensational reunion with cricket, scoring five hundreds in the ongoing Rishi Hazare Trophy and he is now cautiously optimistic about wearing the Indian jersey after eight years.

persistence, you know, the coming together of all of it. And probably you can say, taking each day as a new one and making sure that I respect every single innings that I play.” But there were days when the 33-year-old was apprehensive about his cricketing future, when runs totally dried up in domestic matches and in the IPL.

and make me feel like I have been playing with them for many years. “And I never got the feeling that I am a professional or an outsider. So, it was really comfortable. And very humble people. So, they all helped me get through each and every game with a smile and a positive environment,” he said.



about his participation after it came to light that he is nursing a niggle. It is learnt that Kohli has intimidated the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) top brass that he has a neck niggle that he sustained in Sydney during the final Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test against Australia. He was treated by the physio there and as of now, there is no clarity on availability for the Ranji

ball game for Delhi back in 2012 against Uttar Pradesh in Ghaziabad. A year after that, the legendary Sachin Tendulkar played his last Ranji Trophy match against Haryana at Lahli. Talismanic wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant will feature in a Ranji Trophy game after nearly seven years although it has been learnt that he has declined captaincy, which means Ayush Badoni will continue in the role.

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But as someone who has endured massive setbacks and near-misses in his career, Karun does not want to think too far ahead. “I think this is my third comeback (laughs). And I need to keep doing what I am doing at the moment. Keep scoring runs whenever I can in every single game that I play. That's the most that I can do. Everything else is not in my control.

“It was a tough situation to be in. Emotionally, mentally. But yeah, it really taught me a lot of things about myself as a person and about my cricket. So, I am really grateful for those learnings. Without that, I don't think I would be in this situation at the moment.” Shifting to Vidarbha was a good move The first hint of change in his fortunes came along with a shift to Vidarbha from Karnataka ahead of the 2023-24 season.

But the tough passage made him more aware about himself and his game. “It was a tough situation to be in. Emotionally, mentally. But yeah, it really taught me a lot of things about myself as a person and about my cricket. So, I am really grateful for those learnings. Without that, I don't think I would be in this situation at the moment.”

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D Gukesh to take on Anish Giri in Tata Steel opener

PTI ■ WUJK AAN ZEE World champion D Gukesh will take on local star Anish Giri in the opening round of the 87th Tata Steel Chess tournament here on Saturday, marking his first competitive outing since claiming the coveted crown last month. Giri, the 2023 winner, holds the reputation of being a tough cookie thanks to his impeccable theoretical knowledge and research that has been the Dutchman's forte for many years now.

opener. Arjun, known for his ability to complicate any position, will have an arduous task against Harikrishna who is super-solid with white pieces. Interestingly, Harikrishna came in the mix of things as another Indian Vidit Gujrathi withdrew due to personal reasons. The most interesting battle of the first round is likely to be between R Praggnanandhaa who takes on Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. Praggnanandhaa did not have a great 2024 and would like to make amends by starting the year on a positive note.