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RAIPUR, WEDNESDAY JANUARY 22, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹3

www.dailypioneer.com

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

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SEBI PLANS TO INTRODUCE PRE-LISTING TRADING IN IPO SHARES TO DETER GREY MARKET ACTIVITY: BUCH



## 14 NAXALS KILLED IN BORDER OPERATION

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RAIPUR/BHUBANESWAR

Fourteen Naxals, including a top leader of the CPI (Maoists) who was carrying a reward of Rs 1 crore, were killed in a joint operation by CRPF and State Police forces along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border. Union Home Minister Amit Shah Tuesday termed the encounter as "another mighty blow to Naxalism" and asserted the Narendra Modi government's resolve for a Naxal-free India and the joint efforts of the security forces to eliminate the menace from the country.



### Four gangsters killed in gunfight with STF in Shamli

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ SHAMLI

Four notorious criminals, including a wanted gangster with a bounty of Rs 1 lakh, were killed in a late-night encounter with the Special Task Force (STF) of Meerut on Monday. The shootout occurred near the Udupur brick kiln in the Jhijhiana area of Shamli district after the STF intercepted the suspects' vehicle while acting on a tip-off about an impending robbery.



Inspector Sunil Kumar was injured in the exchange of fire and has been admitted to a hospital in Gurugram. His condition is reported to be stable. Police recovered pistols and country-made firearms from the scene. Investigations revealed that Manjeet, who had been serving a life sentence, was out on parole and had resumed criminal activities. The gang was reportedly planning a major robbery in the Jhijhiana area when they were intercepted by the STF.

rifle, were recovered from the encounter site. A fresh exchange of firing took place late Monday night and it continued till early hours of Tuesday in a forest under the Mainpur police station areas (Chhattisgarh) along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border, in which 12 more Naxalites were gunned down. With this, the total number of Maoists killed in the operation went up to 14, police said.



### At least 66 dead in hotel fire in Turkey

PTI ■ ANKARA

A fire at a hotel at a popular Aski resort in northwestern Turkey on Tuesday killed at least 66 people, Turkey's Interior Minister said. Ali Yerlikaya said at least 51 other people were injured in the disaster. "We are in deep pain. We have unfortunately lost 66 lives in the fire that broke out at this hotel," Yerlikaya told reporters after inspecting the site. Health Minister Kemal Memisoglu said at least one of the injured was in serious condition. The fire broke out at around 3:30 am in the restaurant of the 12-story Grand Kartal hotel in the resort of Kartalkaya in Bolu province, officials and reports said. The cause of the fire was under investigation.

## Trump signs citizenship order



President Donald Trump talks to reporters as he signs executive orders in the Oval Office of the White House. PTI

AGENCIES ■ WASHINGTON Donald Trump, the newly sworn-in US President, signed an executive order on Monday that would end birthright citizenship in the United States. Set to take effect on February 20, the order specifies that children born to foreign passport holders, even those legally residing in the country on tourist, student, or work visas, will no longer automatically acquire US citizenship. This decision is expected to have far-reaching implications, particularly for over one million Indians currently in line for green cards. Speaking from the Oval Office, Trump criticised the current system, calling birthright citizenship "absolutely ridiculous" and claiming the US is the "only country in the world" that provides automatic citizenship to children born on its soil. He argued that this policy change is necessary and justified, citing "very good grounds" for the shift. The order outlines that children born in the US after the effective date will not be granted citizenship unless the father is a US citizen or lawful permanent resident, and the mother's presence in the country is either unlawful or temporary. This includes individuals on student, tourist, or work visas. The move has provoked strong opposition from civil rights groups and immigrant advocates, with organisations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filing a lawsuit challenging the order's legality. Author and academic Vivek Wadhwa criticised the policy, warning that it would exacerbate the difficulties faced by highly skilled immigrants who are already trapped in a lengthy green card backlog. He argued that while excluding children of undocumented immigrants and "birth tourists" might be one issue, the broader impact of excluding those legally contributing to the US economy and workforce could harm the country's competitiveness.

## Mamata Seeks death for rape convict



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses the media in Howrah. PTI

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Proportionate to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's "disappointment and shock" at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder convict not getting the death sentence, her government on Tuesday moved the Calcutta High Court, seeking the death penalty for Sanjoy Roy, the accused. This, while the parents of "Abhaya", the victim lady doctor who was raped and murdered in the wee hours of August 9, 2024, inside her own hospital premises, literally thrust aside Banerjee's "sympathy", requesting her to "keep off our daughter's matter and let us fight for justice." The Division Bench of Justice Debangshu Basak promptly allowed the matter to be filed after Advocate General Kishore Dutta moved on behalf of the State, seeking the death penalty for Roy. "I was aghast to see that the death penalty was not allowed in this matter... when someone turns a demon, can society be human? If someone commits a crime, should we forgive

them? This will encourage him to commit such crimes again," Banerjee thundered from a public meeting at Malda, asking, "How does the judgment say it is not the 'rarest of rare' (case)? I say it is rare, sensitive, and heinous." Banerjee had on Monday blamed the Central Bureau of Investigation for failing to prove their case in the Sealдах District and Sessions Court, praising her own State Police for ensuring speedy justice in similar other cases. Banerjee's statement was stoutly backed by Trinamool Congress spokesperson Kunal Ghosh, who directly blamed the CBI for its "untidy investigation." He said, "It is for the CBI to explain how the convict eluded the death sentence as the case was being dealt with by them after it was taken away from the Kolkata Police and given to them... in fact, the Kolkata Police had arrested Sanjoy Roy before his custody was transferred to the CBI... the State Police during this period has cracked four cases at Farakka, Mathabhanga, Gurap, and Kultali and ensured the death sentence in all the cases." However, the father of the victim rejected the State Government's approach and requested the Chief Minister to keep off the matter. "You have done enough... we need no more favors... please keep off the case... let us fight our own battle," the father of the victim said rather acerbically. "Had the Chief Minister been serious about the case, she would have acted with purpose when she was required to do so by properly directing the police not to allow tampering of the evidence so that the other bigger and more powerful people involved in the act could be arrested... she did not act while her own police administration was destroying evidence... Whatever the Chief Minister has done till date, she should not do any further."

## BJP unveils welfare manifesto

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

As the Delhi Assembly elections approach, a shower of new freebies continues to pour down on the people of the national Capital with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on Tuesday, promising a slew of welfare schemes, including free education for needy students from 'KG to PG' in government institutions, a one-time assistance of Rs 15,000 for UPSC aspirants, and an insurance cover of Rs 10 lakh, along with a Rs five lakh accident cover for domestic helpers and auto-taxi drivers, as part of the second phase of its 'Sankalp Patra'. Former Union Minister and Lok Sabha MP Anurag Thakur presented the manifesto which has eight poll promises including 'zero tolerance' for corruption. He said that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) will be formed to probe all 'irregularities and scams' of the AAP government if the party comes to power in Delhi. "As soon as the BJP government is formed, we will form an SIT to investigate the Mohalla Clinic scam, classroom scam, DTC bus scam, Delhi Jal Board scam," Thakur said. The manifesto includes a



BJP MPs Anurag Thakur with Delhi party President Virendra Sachdeva, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Vijender Gupta during the launch of the second part of the party's 'Sankalp Patra' (manifesto) for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi, Tuesday. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

number of measures focusing on youth including a one-time financial assistance of Rs 15,000 and reimbursement of fees and travel expenses twice for Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and state civil services examinations. The party also assured that its government in Delhi will launch 'Dr BR Ambedkar Stipend Yojna' to provide Rs 1,000 monthly aid to Scheduled Caste (SC) students at polytechnic and skill centres in the national capital if voted to power. In a bid to counter AAP's promise to provide insurance to auto-drivers, who have traditionally been a voter base of the ruling party, the BJP also promised to form welfare boards for domestic workers and auto-taxi drivers once they form the government. The senior BJP leader added, "Besides, the boards will provide Rs 10 lakh of insurance and Rs 5 lakh of accident cover and offer scholarships to the children of domestic workers and auto-taxi drivers." He also promised six months' paid maternity leave for the female domestic workers.



Under the PM SVANidhi scheme for street vendors, the number of beneficiaries will be doubled, he said, citing the Sankalp Patra-2. Thakur alleged that the AAP government had failed to implement the Jal Jeevan Mission in the national capital, reiterating the BJP's commitment to improve infrastructure and welfare if voted to power. "Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, water comes from taps even at 17,000 feet in the mountains but the AAP-da (AAP) government did not implement it in Delhi," he claimed.

Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal described the BJP's election manifesto as "dangerous for the country". The AAP convener alleged that the BJP plans to shut free education in government schools and dismantle free health services including the mohalla clinics if voted to power.

The first part of the BJP's manifesto for the Delhi polls, Sankalp Patra-1, was released by its president JP Nadda last week. The party has already promised Rs 2,500 per month to Delhi women under the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojna' and assured that all public welfare schemes of the outgoing AAP government will continue in the future.

## WEATHER

AQI	289
MAX	10.6°C(+3)
MIN	24°C(+3.7)

## MARKETS



## Sensex tanks 1,235 pts to 7-month low

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex tanked 1,235 points to settle at more than seven-month low due to an across-the-board selloff triggered by global trade war worries after US President Donald Trump announced tariffs on neighbouring countries on his inauguration day. The 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 1,235.08 points or 1.60 per cent to settle at 75,838.36 dragged by losses in ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries. During the day, the BSE benchmark plummeted 1,431.57 points or 1.85 per cent to hit an intraday low of 75,641.87. The broader NSE Nifty plunged 320.10 points or 1.37 per cent to close at 23,024.65. In the intraday trade, the NSE Nifty plunged 367.9 points or 1.57 per cent to 22,976.85. Among Sensex shares, Zomato, NTPC, Adani Ports, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were the major laggards. UltraTech Cement and HCL Technologies were the only gainers. European markets were trading higher on Tuesday. In Asian markets, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended higher, while Shanghai and Seoul settled on a flat note on Tuesday. US markets were closed on Monday on the occasion of Martin Luther King Jr Day.

## Saif returns home after attack

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI



Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan on his way to home after he was discharged from Lilavati Hospital, in Mumbai. PTI

Six days after he survived a Smurderous attack at his Bandra residence, Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan was discharged from the Lilavati Hospital here on Tuesday evening. Fifty-four-year-old Saif - dressed in a white shirt and a pair of denims - looked hale, hearty and cheerful, as he walked out of the hospital and briefly raised his arm to wave at his fans and media persons, before heading in a car towards his home. A few close aides and private security personnel accompanied him. Saif was seen with friends and neighbours, as he walked into his 'Satguru Sharan' building. Minutes later, the actor returned to his 12th floor apartment where he had sustained six stab injuries, including the one in his spine, in a knife attack on him by an

## R-Day rehearsals choke traffic in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Traffic jam near the Ring Road owing to rehearsal for the Republic Day Parade. Photo: Ranjan Dimri

Massive traffic congestion was seen in central Delhi due to the Republic Day parade rehearsals on Tuesday, leaving hundreds of commuters stranded on the road. Commuters also complained of long queues at metro stations due to heightened security checks ahead of Republic Day. Routes leading to Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg near the ITO, arterial roads of the Ring Road, between Ashram and IP Estate flyover, Man Singh Road, Rafi Marg, Janpath Road, Shahjahan Road, Akbar Road, Ashoka Road and other routes around the Kartavya Path were severely hit. A traveller shared videos and pictures of a traffic jam in Mundka following which the Delhi Traffic Police said the traffic control room has been informed and the needful is being done. "Don't feel like going out for work. The traffic in Delhi is horrible," another user on X said. Motorists blamed traffic personnel for not regulating traffic properly and said

that there was no proper information about the traffic diversions. A user who shared a picture of online maps said, "All the roads leading to Central Delhi are fully jammed. People had to wait more than one hour on the road to reach their destination." Posting a picture of the heavy traffic near Kartavya Path, a user wrote, "Is it too much to ask Delhi Traffic Police to manage traffic? The entire central Delhi is choked."

While some users reported that they were late for work or didn't want to go to work due to Delhi roads being jam-packed. Heavy traffic congestion was also reported in several parts of south Delhi. One of the commuters posted on social media that they were stuck in a traffic jam on MB Road for two hours. Another commuter who commutes daily to his office in his car said, "Usually I start in the early morning to reach my office on time. But today it was a completely different situation. I got stuck in traffic for more than two hours. I had to inform my seniors that I would be late for work." He further said that security has also been increased due to Republic Day with the traffic police conducting vehicle inspections at every checkpoint which adds to the congestion. The snarls persisted despite the traffic police issuing an advisory on January 15, notifying the public about road closures in central Delhi.



Former Delhi Minister and BJP candidate from Gandhi Nagar, Arvinder Singh Lovely on Tuesday started his election campaign Kail Mandir in Multani Mohalla, where hundreds of supporters joined him in a door-to-door campaign. Later, a community meeting was held at Kanti Nagar Extension.



Alka Lamba visits and worships at the Shri Raghunath Temple located in Kalkaji Assembly, N-Block, and prayed for the well-being of the people of the area today.

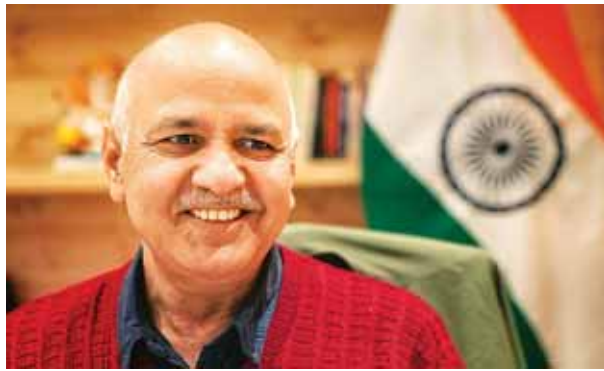


Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann campaigning for AAP candidate from Tri Nagar in a roadshow on Tuesday

# Jangpura Assembly election stands out as clash of leadership, legacy, and future aspirations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The electoral battle in the Jangpura Assembly constituency has become a triangular fight with the entry of former Deputy Chief Minister and senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia. Making it a closely and keenly watched fight, the Congress has fielded former mayor Farhad Suri and the BJP picked Congress turncoat Tarvinder Singh Marwah. The Jangpura Assembly election stands out as a clash of leadership, legacy, and future aspirations. The seat has attained the status of a 'high-profile' seat, which sees a mix of urban and slum voters, with Sisodia entrance in the fray from here. Despite the party's previous successes in Jangpura, Sisodia's candidacy could be seen as a gamble due to his recent controversies, including his alleged involvement in the liquor policy case, which led to his time in custody.



Considered a Congress stronghold once, the Assembly constituency, which is a part of South-east parliamentary constituency, will witness a fierce fight as Sisodia has opted to contest from here rather than the Patparganj assembly constituency, from where he has won three times in 2013, 2015 and 2020. Notably, the BJP has never won the Jangpura Assembly seat, making it a priority to secure its first victory there in the upcoming elections.

Although, the decision to shift to Jangpura, which has 1,47,785 voters, wasn't a big surprise for many following Sisodia narrowly missing losing in Patparganj in the last election in 2020 by defeating Ravinder Singh Negi, a BJP candidate, by over 3,000 votes. However, the elections will not be a cake walk for Sisodia as both the Congress and the BJP will be fighting the polls with their best foot forward making it a triangular contest. Making the battle in the seat more



interesting, the BJP picked Marwah, who has won the seat thrice in 1998, 2003 and 2008. Additionally, Suri is a four-time councillor and represented Darya Ganj ward. He once unsuccessfully contested the Assembly election from Okhla. His mother Tajdar Babar was also a respected figure in political circles. She was elected to the Assembly from the



erstwhile Minto Road seat. The constituency witnesses significant presence of Scheduled Caste voters (21 per cent), Punjabis (21 per cent), Other Backward Caste (OBC) voters (13 per cent), Muslims (10 per cent), Sikhs (8 per cent), Vaishyas (5 per cent) and Pandits (4 per cent). The AAP has won consecutively three times from the



seat. In 2020, the seat witnessed sitting AAP MLA from the area Praveen Kumar winning the seat by defeating BJP's Impreet Singh Bakshi with a margin of 16,063 votes. In 2015, Kumar defeated Maninder Singh Dhir by a margin of 20,450 votes. In both 2020 and 2015, Marwah, who was fielded by the Congress, contested the polls unsuccessfully and stood third. The constituency is divided into Jangpura, Jangpura Extension, Jangpura A and Jangpura B. It has posh neigh-

bourhoods of south Delhi, including Lajpat Nagar, Nizamuddin (East) and Sundar Nagar, urbanised villages like Kilkari, Bhogal, Nizamuddin Basti and Ashram. Like the rest of the city, major issues concerning the assembly are lack of parking facilities, and public toilets, broken streets, poor sanitation, dirty water, waterlogging and sewage. Residents have also complained about the inaccessibility of their sitting MLA. A resident of the area said that

there is a sanitation problem in the locality. "Sewer lines are clogged, leading to drain water overflowing onto market streets, which affects business," he said. He added that despite promises of cleanliness in the market by the AAP government, heaps of garbage are clearly visible on the road. Businessmen in Lajpat Nagar, which falls under this constituency, complained of lack of parking facilities and public toilets despite being such a reputed market in Delhi. An electronics shop owner shared how the market toilet has turned into ruins as it has been closed for more than half a decade. "We have to face several hardships because of this. After several complaints to the concerned authorities, no action was taken," he said. He also highlighted the parking crisis and said, "There is no parking space available near the market, which leads to individuals parking their vehicles on the roads, causing traffic congestion in the area."

## 699 candidates in fray for Delhi Assembly polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 699 candidates are in the fray for the February 5 polls to the 70-member Delhi Assembly, marking a slight increase from the number of people who fought the elections in 2020. Five years ago, 672 candidates had fought the Delhi Assembly polls. According to the Delhi chief electoral officer, the high-profile New Delhi where AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal is locked in a keen contest against the BJP's Parvish Verma and the Congress' Sandeep Dikshit, has the highest number of nominees at 23. Janakpuri follows New Delhi with 16 candidates, while Rohtas Nagar, Karawal Nagar, and Laxmi Nagar have 15 candidates each. In contrast, Patel Nagar and Kasturba Nagar have the lowest number of candidates, at five each. In 2020, the Patel Nagar seat, which is reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates, had the lowest number of contestants at just four.

Out of the 70 Assembly constituencies, 38 seats have less than 10 candidates. Notable Assembly segments like Tilak Nagar, Mangolpuri, and Greater Kailash have six candidates each, while Chandni Chowk, Rajendra Nagar, and Malviya Nagar each have seven contestants. As per the details shared by the CEO, Delhi, among the 20 candidates, three each from the Mundka and Nangloi Jat constituencies withdrew. The remaining 14 candidates dropped out of 11 Assembly seats. Notably, 57 constituencies had no withdrawals. Although there could be many reasons for a candidate to withdraw their nomination, change of their opinion is cited a common reason to not contest polls. Among three key political parties in the elections, the BJP and AAP have fielded nine female candidates each whereas the Congress has seven women nominees. All three parties have fielded more women candidates this

time than the 2020 Assembly polls. The prominent women candidates from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) include Chief Minister Atishi, Pooja Balyan, Pramila Tokas, and Rakhi Bidlani. Besides Atishi, it has renominated Rakhi Bidlani, Pramila Tokas, Dhanwanti Chandela, Bandana Kumar, and Sarita Singh. New faces for AAP this time include Anjana Parcha and Pooja Balyan, the wife of MLA Naresh Balyan, who is contesting from Uttam Nagar. Naresh Balyan was recently arrested for his alleged links to gangster Kapil Sangwan. Among the BJP's women nominees, the prominent are Rekha Gupta, Poonam Sharma, Shikha Rai, and Priyanka Gautam. Of the Congress' seven female candidates, the key nominees include Alka Lamba, Ariba Khan, Ragini Nayak, and Aruna Kumari.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Intensifying election fervor ahead of the high octane assembly elections in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with BJP workers, volunteers and supporters from the national capital on Wednesday under the 'Mera Booth Sabse Mazboot' (My booth is the strongest) programme. PM Modi will interact virtually with the party workers on Wednesday at around 1 pm through the NAMO app. With the BJP vying to win the assembly polls after not being in power for more than two decades, he will motivate booth level workers to strengthen their campaign in the election. He will guide the workers to highlight the public welfare schemes of the central government to the public and appeal to them to vote for the BJP. The Prime Minister will also ask the party workers to



amp up their attack against the ruling party and highlight its failures and scams it has been involved in including the money laundering linked excise policy scam. Under this program, workers from approximately 13,033 booths across all 256 wards in Delhi will listen to the Prime Minister's message via video call, and many will also get an opportunity to engage in a conversation. Senior Delhi BJP leader and

National Coordinator of the NAMO App Kuljeet Singh Chahal shared, "Delhi BJP Election In-Charge Baijant Panda, Co-In-Charge Dr. Alka Gurjar and Atul Garg, Delhi BJP President Virender Sachdeva, as well as all Members of Parliament, MLAs, Councillors, State, District, and Ward Organization officials, Booth In-Charges, and Page In-Charges will join the Prime Minister's interaction at designated locations." PM Modi also shared a link on X and called for questions and suggestions from the supporters ahead of the interactive session 'Mera Booth Sabse Mazboot'. "Delhi is determined to give a landslide victory to BJP in the assembly elections. On January 22 at 1 pm, there will be a great opportunity to interact with dedicated workers in the program 'Mera Booth Sabse Mazboot'. For this, you must share your views. I will talk to some of you," he shared in a post on X. In the interactive sessions, he will also answer questions of the few selected booth workers. Ahead of his interaction with party workers and leaders, the BJP on Monday held a meeting of its candidates along with the seven BJP Delhi MPs and senior party leaders including party Vice-President and Delhi BJP Election Incharge Baijant Panda. The candidates were briefed regarding the 'Mera Booth Sabse Majboot' programme

and asked to ensure maximum participation of booth level workers in the programme. "We have asked them to ensure that there is maximum participation of booth level workers in their respective seats," a party leader said. PM Modi will urge BJP booth workers to ensure they reach every household with the message of the party and the vision for the future during the interaction. As part of the 'Mera Booth Sabse Mazboot' initiative, BJP workers are expected to strengthen their outreach efforts at the grassroots level, ensuring that every voter is informed about the party's vision and the accomplishments of the BJP. With the elections just about two weeks away, PM Modi's interaction will galvanize the party's booth workers and boost morale ahead of what is expected to be a closely contested election. The voting for the elections are slated to be held on February 5 and counting will take place on February 8.

## Shinde Sena announces support for BJP in Delhi Assembly polls

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has announced its support to the BJP in the Delhi Assembly elections in which the saffron party is taking on the Arvind Kejriwal-headed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress. Shinde, who is the president of the Shiv Sena and also the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra in the Bharatiya Janata Party-led MahaYuti government in Maharashtra, has conveyed his party's decision to support the BJP in the Delhi Assembly elections, to BJP's national president J P Nadda, who is the Union Health and Family Welfare Minister in the Modi government. In a letter written to Nadda, Shinde stated: "The Shiv Sena under my leadership has been a torch bearer of Hindutva ideology of Balasaheb Thackeray. Following this legacy, the Shiv Sena is a member of the NDA under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi". Shinde also stated that the Shiv Sena would actively support all the candidates of the BJP and

have directed the Delhi unit of the party to align with the BJP state unit and actively participate in the campaign. Shiv Sena's Delhi unit chief Sandeep Chaudhary also met BJP Delhi unit president Virender Sachdeva and handed over the letter of support to the saffron party. Shinde said that for more than three decades, the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance had stood as a powerful force in Indian politics, sharing common ideals of Hindutva and good governance. Their recent victory in the Maharashtra state elections underscored the strength of this partnership. "Delhi, as the nation's capital, requires a corruption-free and efficient government.... Shiv Sena, as a loyal NDA ally, is dedicated to supporting BJP to ensure that Delhi benefits from stable and effective governance, similar to the central government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership," the deputy chief minister stated.

## Six-hour power outages will resume in city if BJP comes to power: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As campaigning for the Delhi assembly polls heats up, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday cautioned voters, claiming six-hour power outages will resume in the national capital if the BJP comes to power. Addressing a 'janasabha' in the Adarsh Nagar constituency, he emphasised the transformation of Delhi under his leadership. Talking about electricity supply, he said, "Today, Delhi gets 24 hours of electricity. Ten years ago, there used to be six-hour power cuts. BJP governs 20 states, yet none of them gets 24-hour electricity. If you press the wrong button, Delhi will return to six-hour power cuts. The moment you press 'Kamalka button', electricity will be gone before you reach home." He also underscored Delhi's affordable electricity rates. "In Gujarat, a 400-unit bill amounts to Rs 4,500. But if



you press the wrong button here, soon you'll be paying Rs 10,000 for electricity," Kejriwal warned. Earlier, addressing a press conference, Kejriwal described the BJP's election manifestos as "dangerous for the country" and said it wants to dismantle free health services and education in government schools. AAP chief accused the BJP of revealing its "true intentions" in the manifestos and warned voters against supporting the party. "If the BJP comes to power, they will stop free education, end free health facilities and make it difficult for the poor to survive in Delhi. This is a direct attack on the welfare of the common man," he said. Targeting the BJP for writing

in its manifesto that free education will be provided to needy students in government institutes, Kejriwal alleged it implies the BJP plans to stop the facility for all students. "BJP's manifesto restricts free education to only 'needy' students. This means parents of other students will have to run after their leaders to avail free education for their children. This is their true intention. They want to end free education for all," Kejriwal alleged. The AAP supremo said a total of 1.8 million children currently benefit from the free education provided in the government schools under his party's governance. BJP's scheme will end the free education being provided to these children, he alleged. Kejriwal further claimed the BJP in its first manifesto announced plans to shut Mohalla Clinics, adding that doing so would burden families with additional expense as they would have to depend on private hospitals and schools which charge hefty amounts.

## Seventh Delhi Assembly held 20 sessions between Feb 2020 and Dec 2024: ADR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The seventh Delhi Assembly held 20 sessions between February 2020 and December 2024. In these five years on an average, Delhi Assembly sat for 15 days per year. The longest session was the 5th session part 1, 2024, from 15th February, 2024 to 8th April, 2024, which had 21 sittings. According to an analysis based on replies to Right to Information (RTI) queries filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Delhi Election Watch, 71 MLAs asked a total of 948 questions and the most frequent questions raised during the seventh Delhi Assembly concerned urban development, the public works department and the Delhi Jal Board. A detailed analysis of the seventh Delhi Assembly, sessions for which stretched from February 2020 to December 2024, revealed key insights into its legislative functioning, attendance records, and the role of members. The Delhi Assembly convened 20 sessions during this period, with



an average of 15 sitting days per year. The fifth session (Part I) of 2024 was the longest, stretching from February 15 to April 8, totalling 21 sittings. In the RTI applications, information was sought from the Delhi Assembly Secretariat on the performance of MLAs and the legislative assembly. While the Delhi Assembly has 70 seats, the report also includes the performance analysis of MLAs who resigned or were elected through bypolls. AAP MLAs topped the chart for participation, with Krishna Nagar legislator SK Bagga achieving

the highest attendance of 99 per cent. Other notable performers included Som Dutt (Sadar Bazar) with 97 per cent attendance and Abdul Rehman (Seelampur) with 96 per cent. While 70 sittings were analysed for attendance, data for four from the fifth session (Part II and Part III) was unavailable. On the legislative front, the MLAs asked 948 questions during the sessions. BJP lawmakers Ajay Mahawar (Ghonda) and Mohan Singh Bisht (Karawal Nagar) asked 45 questions each, the highest among the members.



# BJP slams Kejriwal, accuses him of misquoting Ramayan

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) slammed Kejriwal on Tuesday accusing him of misquoting the Ramayan and "insulting" Lord Ram and Sita, with its Delhi unit president Virendra Sachdeva holding a fast as a mark of absolution. In response, Kejriwal said the BJP was protesting against him in the honour of demon king Ravana and accused the party leaders of having "demonic tendencies". The two parties are indulged in an intense war of words, a blame game over a range of issues with Delhi Assembly polls just around the corner.

Kejriwal found himself under fire from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after his remarks

during an election rally in Vishwas Nagar, Delhi, on Monday, comparing the BJP to the "golden deer" in the Ramayana.

In a major gaffe while referencing Ramayana, Kejriwal said, "I want to warn the slum dwellers that these days they (people of BJP) are staying in slums, they do not love you, they love your vote and will sell all your land after the elections. Lord Ram was exiled for 14 years, so one day he went to the forest to arrange for food, left Mata Sita in the hut and told Laxman that you will protect Sita Maa. Meanwhile, Ravana came in the form of a golden deer. Sita said to Laxman that I want this deer... Laxman went and Ravana kidnapped Sita Maa. These BJP people are

also like that golden deer, do not get involved in their trap." Kejriwal's remarks drew the ire of the BJP, who accused him of insulting Sanatan Dharma and misinterpreting the sacred text of Ramcharitmanas, labelling him a "Chunavi Hindu". Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, who started his fast after a visit to Prachin Hanuman temple, called Kejriwal a "Chunavi Hindu" and sought forgiveness for "disrespect" shown by him to Sita-Ram.

Sachdeva visited the Hanuman Temple at Connaught Place this morning to pay respects to Shri Ram Darbar, Lord Hanuman, and Saint Tulsidas. He sought forgiveness for the AAP chief for sharing a misrepresentation of the Ramayan, and hurting



the sentiments of millions of Hindus. Sachdeva has also decided to observe a symbolic fast on Tuesday as an act of prayer while continuing with his regular activities. He started his fast after a visit to Prachin Hanuman temple, called Kejriwal a "Chunavi Hindu" and sought forgiveness for "disrespect" shown by him to Sita-Ram. "It is regret-

table that Chunavi Hindus like Arvind Kejriwal mention deities in their election rallies but hurt Hindu sentiments by narrating inaccurate stories due to ignorance," he said.

Kejriwal in an election meeting on Monday, quoted Ramayana saying Sita was abducted by Ravana who appeared as a golden deer, when Lord Ram went out in search of food. The BJP leaders objected to it, alleging Kejriwal misquoted the Ramayan story and pointed out that it was another character in the epic, 'Mama Marich' who distracted Lord Rama as a golden deer when Ravana abducted Sita.

"I said yesterday that Ravana took the form of a golden deer. The BJP leaders are sitting

on dharna outside my house for why I insulted Ravan," he claimed. They have so much love for Ravan, they have "demonic tendencies", he charged and added, "I want to warn the slum dwellers and poor in Delhi that they will devour them if they come to power."

Sachdeva hit out at Kejriwal saying he was the same leader who 'previously quoting his grand mother tried to create an "anti-Ram Mandir" narrative and advocated hospitals and schools in place of the temple. "The Hindu community will never forgive Kejriwal for hurting their sentiments," he said.

Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia also attacked the BJP over the issue in a post on X, saying the party leaders were

"defending" Ravan as if they were also "descendants" of the demon king. He alleged the BJP's politics stooped so low that its leaders were using symbols like Ravan to justify their false statements.

BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari launched a scathing attack on Kejriwal, calling him a "Chunavi Hindu" for misquoting Ramayana and said his true face had been exposed in front of the people of Delhi and the country. Bhandari remarked that appeasement runs in the veins of Kejriwal and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and that the AAP supreme was "irritated" with the slogan of "Ek hain toh safe hain" and Lord Shri Ram's temple in Ayodhya and wants to give lands of Delhi to Waqf.

## Rahul Gandhi criticises Modi Government for its economic policies

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday criticized the Modi government for its economic policies and asserted that real development is when everyone progresses, there is a fair environment for business, a fair tax system and the income of workers increases.



adding they are barely able to make ends meet. The real income of workers has either remained stagnant or decreased in the last five years, he said. "The harmful GST and income tax have made life difficult for the poor and the middle class, while corporate loans are being waived off," the former Congress chief said. Due to skyrocketing inflation, now not only the poor but also the salaried class is forced to take loans for their needs, he said. "Real development is when everyone progresses - there is a fair environment for business, there is a fair tax system and the

income of workers increases. Only this will make the country prosperous and strong," Rahul Gandhi asserted. He had announced on Sunday the launch of a 'White T-shirt Movement,' championing the rights of the masses. He had accused the Narendra Modi government of turning its back on the poor. Gandhi had announced the launch in a social media post and urged people to be a part of it. "If you believe in economic justice, oppose rising wealth inequalities, fight for social equality, reject all forms of discrimination, and strive for peace and stability in our country, wear your white T-shirts and join the movement," said the video voiceover posted by Rahul Gandhi on social media. The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy, claiming the issues of rising prices, decreasing private investment and stagnating wages are hitting the common people hard.

## Demand for NRI representation in Parliament at panel meeting

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

A suggestion to give non-resident Indians representation in Parliament was made on Tuesday at the meeting of the parliamentary committee on external affairs due to their growing numbers and unique issues concerning the diaspora interest.

Sources said Congress MP Deepender Singh Hooda cited examples of countries such as Italy, which has reservation in legislature for its citizens residing abroad, to pitch for NRI representation in Parliament to cater to their issues in a better way. The standing committee headed by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor discussed a number of issues concerning the Indian diaspora. As millions of NRIs reside in foreign countries, they deserve to have representation in Parliament, Hooda is learnt to have said.

Some NRI groups in the past have demanded seats in Parliament. As of now, NRIs cannot even vote from abroad



and are required to come to India to exercise their franchise. A bill to allow them to vote through a proxy in the Lok Sabha and assembly elections was introduced in Parliament in 2018 but lapsed later. NRIs are officially described as "overseas electors".

Tharoor said after meeting members had a very detailed and thorough discussion with four organisations working with the diaspora. The MPs were very engaged. It was a lively and full discussion with a lot of questions and answers, he added.

Sources said the organisations participating in the meeting made some good proposals, including one from

Kerala that said Indian organisations could skill people depending on the needs of any foreign country. This will streamline the immigration of skilled workers and curb undesirable activities, including desperate attempts by people to reach foreign destinations, at times illegally, an MP said after the meeting.

The organisations that attended the meeting were Norka Roots from Kerala; the Punjab government's Department of NRIs Affairs; People of Indian Origin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Delhi; and the Centre for Diaspora Studies, Central University of Gujarat.

The Ministry of External Affairs informed the committee in an earlier meeting that a bill focusing on emigration issues was under the government's consideration. Tharoor said the ministry had informed the panel that the bill was under preparation and discussion. One of the requests from state governments is that they should also be consulted, he added.

## Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya takes oath as Chief Justice of Delhi HC



**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya on Tuesday took oath as the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court. Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena administered the oath to the judge at a ceremony in Raj Niwas. The ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Chief Minister Atishi and judges of the Delhi High Court.

Justice Upadhyaya, who was the chief justice of Bombay High Court, was appointed to the post on January 14. The Supreme Court Collegium on January seven recommended

his transfer. Born on June 16, 1965 at Muskarai, UP, Justice Upadhyaya enrolled as an advocate in May 1991 after completing his LLB from Lucknow University. He was appointed as a judge of the Allahabad High Court on November 21, 2011, and took oath as its permanent judge on August six, 2013. He took oath as the Chief Justice of Bombay High Court on July 29, 2023.

After the elevation of Justice Manohan to the Supreme Court, Justice Vibhu Bakhrui was serving as acting Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.

## Ten years of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative celebrated with nationwide events

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**



The government will organise weeks-long celebrations to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative, the Union women and child development ministry said on Tuesday. Beginning on Wednesday, the celebrations will continue till March eight, observed as International Women's Day.

The inaugural event in Delhi on Wednesday will feature Union ministers J P Nadda, Annapurna Devi and Savitri Thakur, alongside senior women officers from the armed forces, paramilitary forces and the Delhi Police.

Officials from central ministries, Anganwadi workers, student volunteers and representatives from international organisations such as UNICEF, UN Women and the World Bank will also participate.

The occasion marks the beginning of nationwide celebrations reflecting the scheme's trans-

formative impact over the past decade, according to a ministry statement. The celebrations will include events at the state and the district levels.

Special programmes will be held on Wednesday, Sunday (January 26), and March eight, engaging communities through rallies, cultural performances, and felicitation ceremonies for women achievers.

The ministry has also announced sustainability initiatives, including a nation-

wide plantation drive, and will run awareness campaigns across print, digital and social media to further amplify the message of gender equality and empowerment.

Launched on January 22, 2015, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Haryana's Panipat, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative was created to address the critical issues of gender imbalance and declining child sex ratio.

Over the years, the initiative

has driven significant progress. The national sex ratio at birth improved from 918 in 2014-15 to 930 in 2023-24, and the gross enrolment ratio of girls at the secondary level rose from 75.51 per cent to 78 per cent during the same period.

Institutional deliveries rose from 61 per cent to 97.3 per cent, and first-trimester antenatal care registrations surged from 61 per cent to 80.5 per cent, reflecting the programme's far-reaching impact.

The scheme has gone beyond numbers to drive cultural and social change.

Initiatives such as the Kanya Shiksha Pravesh Utsav returned more than a lakh out-of-school girls to education while programmes like the Yashaswini Bike Expedition showcased the empowerment of women in action.

The scheme has also utilised creative campaigns, including collaborations with television shows, to address societal issues such as girl child abandonment and to spread awareness about the value of daughters.

## WHO expresses regret over US withdrawal from global health body

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has expressed regret over President Donald Trump's announcement of the US withdrawal from the global health body as it hoped the country would reconsider its decision and engage in a constructive dialogue to maintain the partnership.

Soon after his swearing-in on Monday, Trump signed an executive order beginning the process of withdrawing America from the WHO. This is the second time in less than five years that the US has ordered the withdrawal from the world body.

Trump has long been critical of the WHO and sought to pull out the US from the UN body during his first term Presidency, but his successor Joe Biden reversed Trump's decision. The executive order signed by Trump said the president was sending a presidential letter to the United



Nations secretary-general to formally notify him of the US plan to withdraw.

"The World Health Organization regrets the announcement that the United States of America intends to withdraw from the organization," the apex global health body said in a statement.

"We hope the United States will reconsider and we look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue to maintain the partnership between the

USA and WHO, for the benefit of the health and well-being of millions of people around the globe," it stated.

The statement said WHO plays a crucial role in protecting the health and security of the world's people, including Americans, by addressing the root cause of diseases, building stronger health systems and detecting, preventing and responding to health emergencies, including disease outbreaks, often in dangerous

places where others cannot go. The United States was a founding member of WHO in 1948 and has participated in shaping and governing its work ever since, alongside 193 other member states, through its active participation in the World Health Assembly and Executive Board, the statement said.

"For over seven decades, WHO and the USA have saved countless lives and protected Americans and all people from health threats. Together, we ended smallpox, and together we have brought polio to the brink of eradication. American institutions have contributed to and benefited from membership in WHO," it said.

"With the participation of the United States and other member states, WHO has over the past seven years implemented the largest set of reforms in its history, to transform our accountability, cost-effectiveness, and impact in countries," the global health body said.

## Need to see gravity of contempt on tree felling in Delhi Ridge: SC

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it needed to see the gravity of contempt after a plea alleged tree felling in Delhi Ridge area for widening of a road in violation of its orders.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh, reserved its verdict on the contempt plea filed by one Bindu Kapurea, who alleged trees were cut despite top court's last year's March 4 order denying permission to the DDA. He said the fact of tree felling was suppressed from the court.

"We need to see the gravity of contempt in this matter. Whether the trees were felled for widening of road to the hospital, meant for paramilitary jawans, who serve in remote areas like in jungles or in Leh, where there are minimal medical facilities. Or, were the trees felled to widen the road for the

benefit of affluent persons of the area," said the bench.

It added the court needed to take a fresh look of the entire matter and wouldn't be swayed by previous orders passed by different benches of the apex court on the issue.

"We need to take an independent approach on this issue. So, that we are not swayed by the earlier orders of the court or the view taken by the court. We would like to form our own view and finish off this matter," the bench said.

Senior advocate Vikash Singh, appearing for Delhi Lieutenant Governor, said he had filed an affidavit and was not aware of court's embargo on tree felling in the area.

He said irrespective of what had happened, the authorities would plant around 70,000 saplings to purge the contempt instead of the mandated 5,340 saplings.

The bench said it would consider what needed to be done



on the issue.

Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for Delhi Development Authority (DDA) vice-chairman, had said there was a 7.5-foot wide road but it was supposed to be widened to 15 feet to enable vehicles ferrying soldiers a hassle-free entry into the hospital.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Kapurea, said the contempt was not as simple as being projected and there was a deliberate violation of court orders apart from the suppression of

crucial information about trees already being felled when the DDA sought court's permission.

He alleged there were already three roads for the hospital but the authorities wanted to benefit the affluent residing near the hospital.

Sankaranarayanan submitted a map of the area to claim the alignment of road was changed to enter into the forest area which led to felling of trees for widening of the road.

The bench said it would examine all the aspects and pass the order on the issue.

In December last year, the top court asked for a list of affluent persons, who reportedly benefited from illegal tree felling in Delhi's Ridge area and sought to know the site plan for afforestation.

The ridge is an extension of Aravalli Hill range in Delhi and a rocky, hilly and forested area. It is divided into four zones - south, south-central, central

and north -- for administrative reasons. These four zones make up a total of about 7,784 hectares.

Sankaranarayanan had referred to a Forest Survey of India report stating a total of 1,670 trees were cut, but the DDA claimed it was only 642 trees.

The top court had issued a contempt notice to the DDA vice-chairman Subhasish Panda for felling of trees for the construction of an approach road to the hospital and directed Lieutenant Governor and DDA Chairperson V K Saxena to file a personal affidavit detailing actions against errand officials for allegedly illegally felling around 1,100 trees in Delhi Ridge area in February, 2024.

The tree felling drive was purportedly done for widening the road going towards Central Armed Police Forces Institute of Medical Sciences (CAP-FIMS) Hospital.

## Construction work of RRTS from Delhi to Shahjahanpur to begin soon: Minister

**PNS ■ GURUGRAM**

Union Minister Rao Inderjeet Singh said that the construction work of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) from Delhi to Shahjahanpur will start soon. He said that before the Union Budget, he has talked to Union Urban Development Minister Manohar Lal over phone on this matter and requested to complete all the formalities regarding this project as soon as possible.

Rao told that Union Urban Development Minister told him that the project will cost around Rs 22,000 crore and the project will start soon.

Rao said that this project will prove to be a milestone for the region in the field of public transport and the people here will be able to travel to Delhi and Rajasthan easily.



While giving this information, Singh also disclosed that earlier this project was revised and a proposal was given by the officials to do it in the first phase from Delhi to Dharuhera.

When people gave him this information during the Lok Sabha elections, he talked to the then Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Puri and requested him to extend it only till

Shahjapur in the first phase. Rao asserted that Union Minister has also agreed to the proposal to extend it only from Delhi to Shahjahanpur in the first phase.

Rao said that in the first phase of Delhi-Shahjapur, the train will go to Shahjahanpur via Gurugram, Manesar, Bilaspur, Dharuhera, Rewari, Bawal Neemrana on this route of about 100 kilometers.

"22 stations are proposed on this route, for which an action plan is being prepared. Earlier the approval of this plan was to turn from Mahipalpur in Delhi and go through Old Delhi Road Signature Tower in Gurugram, but later it was revised and a proposal was made to take it along the highway through the Delhi Jaipur National Highway via Sarhaul Border," the Minister said.

## Shaktidham: A melting pot of foreign spiritual leaders



**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Among the myriad spiritual centers at the ongoing Kumbh Mela, Shaktidham Ashram in Sector-17 holds a distinctive place. It is the only ashram where all nine Mahamandaleshwars, the highest spiritual leaders of the institution, are foreigners. While most of them are not fluent in Hindi, they astound visitors with their eloquent recitation of Sanskrit scriptures, showcasing their deep connection to Indian spirituality. The nine Mahamandaleshwars come from diverse countries, including the United States, Israel, and Japan. Out of the nine, seven are men, and two are women, each having fully embraced Indian culture and traditions. "We may have been born in different parts of the world, but Sanatan Dharma has made us one with this land," said Anant Das Maharaj, a devotee from the United States. Anant Das Maharaj shared his spiritual journey, describing how his path to Sanatan

Dharma began with a chance meeting with Sai Maa in the United States. "I attended one of Sai Maa's discourses and was mesmerized. Her teachings on Sanatan Dharma opened my eyes to a profound way of life," he said. Inspired by her philosophy, he decided to dedicate himself to the path of spirituality. He later joined Sai Maa's ashram and eventually became part of Shaktidham in Varanasi, where he was conferred the title of Mahamandaleshwar. "Being given the responsibility of Mahamandaleshwar is not just an honor but a commitment. It is my mission now to use education and yoga to introduce more people, especially from abroad, to the principles of Sanatan Dharma," he added. What makes Shaktidham even more remarkable is the deep cultural transformation undergone by its Mahamandaleshwars. Despite their international origins, they have adopted Indian attire, customs, and spiritual practices as their own. "When I first arrived in India, I thought the culture would feel

foreign, but now it feels like home," said a Japanese Mahamandaleshwar, adding, "The teachings of the Ganga, the wisdom of the Vedas, and the energy of this sacred land have transformed my soul." The spiritual leaders of Shaktidham believe that Sanatan Dharma's universal values have the power to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. "Spirituality knows no nationality," said one of the female Mahamandaleshwars, originally from Israel. "What matters is the soul's journey, and India is where I found my true calling." Shaktidham Ashram is not just a center for meditation and learning but also a bridge between the East and the West. Through its foreign Mahamandaleshwars, it exemplifies how the essence of Indian spirituality has the power to unite people from diverse backgrounds under a shared spiritual umbrella. The ashram continues to inspire thousands of pilgrims at the Kumbh Mela, standing as a testament to the inclusive and transformative power of Sanatan Dharma.



## CM Yogi to hold special Cabinet meeting in Prayagraj on January 22

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
LUCKNOW

The Yogi government is set to hold a special Cabinet meeting in Prayagraj on Wednesday, January 22. All 54 ministers of the Uttar Pradesh cabinet have been invited to this meeting, which is expected to approve several significant proposals and schemes for the state. Following the meeting, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, along with the entire cabinet, will take the holy dip in the sacred waters of the Triveni Sangam. This is not the first time CM Yogi has led his cabinet to the Sangam. In 2019, during the Kumbh Mela, he took a ceremonial dip along with his ministers, Akhada Parishad President Narendra Giri, and other saints. The cabinet meeting will be held at the Triveni Sankul in Arai, starting at 12 noon. The location was changed to avoid inconvenience to pilgrims visiting the Sangam.

Initially, the meeting was planned at the Mela Authority Auditorium, but concerns over VIP security disrupting pilgrims' movement led to the shift in venue. After the meeting, the ministers will travel from the Arai VIP Ghat to the Sangam by motorboats. At the Sangam, CM Yogi and the cabinet members will perform the worship rituals and take the holy dip in Sangam. As per reports, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, along with Cabinet Ministers Suresh Kumar Khanna, Surya Pratap Shahi, Swatantra Dev Singh, Baby Rani Maurya, Jaiveer Singh, Laxmi Narayan Chaudhary, Dharampal, Nand Gopal Nandi, Anil Rajbhar, and all 54 ministers, including those with independent charge and state ministers, will take the holy dip in the Sangam after attending the cabinet meeting.

## Kalpavasa: A sacred tradition at the Sangam



## Double-decker bus restaurant opens in Kumbh Media Centre

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a unique addition to the ongoing preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025, Uttar Pradesh's first double-decker bus restaurant, named Pumpkin, was inaugurated at the Media Center in Prayagraj on Monday. The innovative eatery not only offers a glimpse of the grand Maha Kumbh through its design and ambiance but also serves pure vegetarian and sattvic meals, making it a popular attraction for pilgrims and visitors. The two-level restaurant is ingeniously designed, with the lower level housing a fully functional kitchen and the upper level serving as a



cozy dining area with a seating capacity of 25 people. Pumpkin promises a culinary experience that caters to all, including special meals for those observing fasts. Speaking at the

inauguration, Pumpkin's founder, Manveer Godara, said, "We are thrilled to launch the Pumpkin brand from the holy land of Kumbh. This is just the beginning. Soon, we plan to expand to other spiritual cities like Kashi, Mathura, and Ayodhya. Our aim is to offer hygienic, delicious, and affordable food to devotees visiting these sacred sites." The restaurant's menu is priced keeping the budget of common pilgrims in mind. "We have carefully designed the menu to ensure that everyone, from pilgrims to journalists, can enjoy good food without feeling a pinch in their pockets," Godara added.

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

According to religious beliefs, the entry of the Sun into Capricorn (Makar Rashi) marks the beginning of the sacred month-long Kalpavasa at Prayagraj, offering devotees spiritual rewards equivalent to an entire kalpa (a day of Brahma). Ancient scriptures such as the Mahabharata and Ramcharitmanas also mention this ritual, emphasizing its spiritual significance. During Kalpavasa, pilgrims, known as Kalpavasins, live on the riverbanks, sleeping on the ground, eating only one meal a day or fasting entirely, and bathing in the holy waters of the Ganga thrice daily. As per the Mahabharata, the spiritual merit attained through a century of penance without consuming food equals the

merit of observing Kalpavasa during the auspicious month of Magha, at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. It is believed that in the month of Magha, all sacred pilgrimage sites converge at Prayagraj to pay homage to their spiritual king. Bathing at the confluence (Sangam) during this time is said to bestow eternal blessings, making Kalpavasa a sacred tradition that attracts millions of devotees. The tradition of Ardh Kumbh and Kalpavasa is unique to Prayagraj and Haridwar. Historians trace the first documented mention of the Kumbh Mela to the Mughal-era text Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh in 1665. However, many scholars dispute this, citing ancient scriptures and Vedic texts to argue that the Kumbh Mela has existed for millennia.

## Timely medical intervention saves over 100 devotees who suffered heart attacks

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The ongoing Mahakumbh in Prayagraj stands as a remarkable blend of spirituality and exceptional healthcare under the Yogi government. So far, over 100 devotees who suffered heart attacks have been saved, 183 critical patients received ICU care, and 580 minor surgeries successfully performed. Additionally, 170,727 blood tests have been conducted, and 100,998 people have availed OPD services so far. Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, the Central Hospital at Mahakumbh is providing world-class medical care to ensure the safety and well-being of millions of devotees. Dr. Gaurav Dubey, Nodal Officer



of the Mahakumbh Medical Establishment, shared that devotees from across India and abroad are receiving exceptional healthcare in Mahakumbh Nagar. Highlighting recent cases, he said, "Two devotees from Madhya Pradesh, who experienced chest pain, were successfully treated at Central Hospital. Under the guidance of Dr. SK Pandey, both were admitted to the ICU, underwent examinations, and received prompt treatment. Now, they are fully healthy and have expressed their gratitude to CM Yogi Adityanath and the medical team." Dr. Pandey explained that ECGs were conducted for both patients, leading to effective treatment and recovery. Among other cases, 105-

year-old Baba Ram Jane Das from Hanumanganj, Phulpur, sought treatment at Central Hospital for stomach pain. Praising the advanced medical facilities, he thanked Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for ensuring such excellent healthcare at the Mahakumbh. A dedicated team of specialist doctors is providing healthcare services at the Central Hospital, including experts in general medicine, dental surgery, orthopedics, gynecology, pediatrics, and child care. The hospital is equipped with a 10-bed ICU for critical cases. Additionally, AI-based cameras are being utilized to monitor patients, ensuring advanced and efficient care.

## First trial run on Sealdah-Esplanade stretch of east-west Kolkata metro successful

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
KOLKATA

The first trial run on the 2.63 km Sealdah-Esplanade stretch of East-West Metro in Kolkata was conducted successfully on Tuesday. A Metro Railway Kolkata statement said that through the west-bound tunnel of the Green Line, the first trial run was conducted successfully in the presence of Metro Railway General Manager and Chairman of Kolkata Metro

Rail Corporation Limited (KMRCL) P Uday Kumar Reddy and other senior officers. The general manager was in the motorman's cabin during the trial run which began at 11.20 am from Sealdah Metro station, reached Esplanade Metro station at 11.31 am. Reddy congratulated everyone for the successful trial run and held a meeting with Metro Railway and KMRCL officers at the Esplanade Metro station. This stretch, once commissioned, would enable people of Kolkata

and the suburbs to reach different parts of the city and adjoining areas from the Sealdah and Howrah terminal stations of the railways through the Esplanade underground metro station, where they can interchange. The Howrah Maidan to Sector V corridor - the entire 16-km stretch of East-West Metro - is expected to become operational by this year. Currently, East-Metro trains run between Howrah Maidan-Esplanade and Sealdah-Sector V stretches.

## RSS affiliates on ground in strife-torn Manipur, says a book

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

A new book has revealed rise of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) through its various affiliates in Manipur even while "militants killing several of its functionaries." India's New Right: Powering the Current Wave of Nationalism and Civilisational Revival' claims that the RSS functionaries faced violent backlash from militants for "combating drug addiction and extremism" in Manipur. "While a BJP-backed government rules Manipur, the

groundwork in the state was also laid with much blood and sacrifice," said the book, which documents the rise of right-wing nationalism in various spheres and regions. It gives an example of Madhumangal Sharma from Imphal who was "the first mining engineering graduate from Manipur. He retired as the additional director of the state industry department and joined the BJP. His grassroots work for the RSS, VHP, and other organisations began far earlier. He would sometimes travel 75 km on his bicycle to the remote areas of

his state, combating drug addiction and extremism. The book said that he was shot by unidentified gunmen belonging to one of Northeast's many militant groups in 1995. "Imphal's autowallahs formed a strong information network for insurgents. Undeterred by the dangers, grassroots workers of the RSS bodies continued their focused, quiet work..." added the book "Since 2014, there has been a significant increase in the number of RSS shakhas in Manipur, with more than 120 shakhas and mandalas now

active. Across the Northeast, the RSS and its affiliated organisations ran about 650 educational units in 1995. This number has grown to more than 6,000 today," added the book authored by senior journalist Abhijit Majumder. The book states that "there are more than 3,000 ekal vidyalayas or single-teacher schools in the region while education has been one of the focus areas of the Sangh Parivar in the Northeast." "Its many organisations, such as Sewashram, ekal vidyalayas, VKA, Sewa Bharati, Kisan

Sangha, ABVP, Vidya Bharati, Friends of Tribal Society or Van Bandhu Parishad, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharatiya Jan Seva Sansthan, Bharat Kalyan Pratishthan, Bal Sanskar Kendra, and the Akhil Bharatiya Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh, run educational institutions across Manipur and most other northeastern states," added the book. "The book argued that the RSS-run 'centres are not only cultivating a new generation of nationalist students but also exerting significant influence on parents.

## Kerala's festival of colors draw hundreds of wannabe painters

**KUMAR CHELLAPPAN** KOCHI

VARNOLSAVAM (Malayalam for Festival of Colors), a painting competition for children in the age group of five to fifteen has become Kerala's biggest cultural event if the number of participants and quality of their work are any indication. The national capital was once synonymous with Shankar's International Painting Competition for Children, launched by cartoonist Shankar. But over the years, the mega event lost its charm and has become almost defunct. But VARNOLSAVAM, held in connection with the annual Ernakulam International Book



Festival, is going from strength to strength every year. The main attraction of the 27th edition of the EIBF turned out to be the recently held competition which drew nearly 800 kids from across the State. "It was a visual treat and words may not be sufficient to describe the happiness and freedom enjoyed by the children," said Dr Radha Meera, poetess and teacher in St Xavier's College, Aluva. She had travelled across five districts in the State to select children who are passionate about colors and painting. "Our mission is to bring out the best from the kids who has a passion for painting," said

Meera. While children in the age group of five to nine were free to paint and draw whatever they feel like doing, the "seniors" (10-15) were given topics to exhibit their skill, said E N Nandakumar, organizer of the EIBF and the painting competition. The six-hour long competition made the children sit glued to the canvas and try different color combinations to bring to reality their dreams and imaginations. Villages of Kerala, the State's fragile ecology, wild life facing threat from all walks of life and even the social life turned out to be topics of the children's brushes

and paints. "There is no need to have canvas or paints or high-end drawing instruments to make the paintings lively. Even charcoal and walls can act as canvas for these children. Children without any basic training in painting and drawing thrilled us with their outputs," said Dr Meera. Nandakumar is happy that despite a fall in the reading habit of grown up persons, present-day children hold great promises for the future. "They are good readers and have a passion for colors. There is life beyond mobile phones, cartoon films and video games," said Nandan.

Deepu from Kannur and Lakshmi from Thiruvananthapuram, both aged 12, would eclipse professional painters and artists. "What I found was that children without any initiation or coaching in these art forms excel their peers. Their works based on the topic which we gave at the spot turned out to be exhilarating," said Dr Meera. Marine scientist-turned-painter Dr Ratish Menon describes drawing and painting as powerful tools for cognitive, emotional, and social development. "Art encourages children to think outside the box, experiment with colors,

shapes and textures and develop unique ideas. Holding crayons, brushes, and other art tools strengthens hand-eye coordination and prepares children for writing and other tasks. It is a non-verbal way for children to express their feelings, thoughts and experiences. Creating something beautiful can boost a child's self-esteem and sense of accomplishment," said Dr Menon. According to Aisha Foucik Kadukkappilly, a poetess cum motivational speaker, the painting and drawing competitions have the potential to increase a kid's creativity and aesthetic sense.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Pak army calls the shots

Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan gets 14-year jail sentence but it won't fix Pakistan politics

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent conviction and 14-year prison sentence mark a critical juncture in the country's turbulent political history. Accused of corruption in a high-profile case involving illegal acquisition of land through a deal with property tycoon Malik Riaz, Khan's sentencing further diminishes his political standing. This development not only underscores the enduring influence of Pakistan's military establishment but also raises concerns about the country's democratic trajectory. The accountability court verdict found Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, guilty of illegally obtaining plots of land worth billions of rupees in exchange for facilitating Riaz's laundering of \$239 million. While Khan received a 14-year sentence and a fine of 1 million Pakistani rupees, his wife was handed a seven-year sentence. The Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has condemned the sentence, labeling it a politically motivated attack. Khan has consistently dismissed the charges as a "witch hunt" orchestrated by his rivals, particularly Pakistan's powerful military, which he accuses of engineering his ouster and imprisonment. Khan remains one of Pakistan's most popular leaders, with a dedicated following that views him as a symbol of resistance against entrenched corruption and military dominance. His imprisonment, however, presents significant challenges for his party and supporters. PTI's ability to mobilise mass protests and maintain its political momentum is constrained by the increasing crackdown on its members and leaders. For Pakistan's political system, Khan's conviction deep crisis. It highlights the judiciary's perceived partiality and its use as a tool to settle political scores. Moreover, the case illustrates the broader struggle between civilian leaders and the military establishment that has long dominated Pakistan's political landscape. Despite Khan's claims of standing against dictatorship, his tenure as prime minister (2018-2022) was marked by a close alliance with the military, which eventually soured. His falling out with the military's top brass, particularly after accusing them of plotting his assassination, set the stage for his political downfall. The military's role in orchestrating Khan's ouster and subsequent legal troubles underscores its continued dominance. For decades, the military has acted as Pakistan's ultimate power broker, influencing elections, judicial proceedings, and policy decisions. This has impeded the growth of democratic institutions in the country. Khan's case reaffirms that no civilian leader can challenge the military's authority without facing severe consequences thus subverting the democracy. The implications of Khan's conviction extend beyond his personal political future. It sets a precedent for the use of legal mechanisms to neutralise opposition and raises concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions. Pakistan, indeed has a long way to go on the road to democracy!



democratic tsunami. The old guard employed the constitutional court to ban Pita from politics for ten years which prevented the formation of a democratic coalition government despite 284 members in a House of 500 lawmakers; instead, Shinawatra's Pheu Thai formed a fractured coalition government of six parties which initially included another former Army Chief, Gen Prawit Wongsuwan-led PPP. In the present government Shinawatra's daughter, Paetongtarn is PM ( it was Shinawatra's sister, Yingluck once earlier) and is backed by six parties. Shinawatra's return from exile in August 2023 and rehabilitation in politics was the result of a royal pardon as part of a deal to maintain the status quo with the old guard calling the shots. Unlike in Nepal where two adversarial political parties have formed a coalition government (after nearly two decades of musical chairs) for political stability, Thailand is subjected to a wobbly government led by an inexperienced Shinawatra scion remotely controlled by the patriarch. Peoples Party and Pheu Thai will not be allowed to form a coalition by vested interests. The big challenge for the government is the economy which has declined from a growth rate of 4.5 per cent in 2000 to 1.6 per cent between 2014 and

### PICTALK



Devotees celebrate 'Komuravelli Mallanna Jathara' festival, at Komuravelli in Siddipet

## Why new generation may force change in Thai politics

The nation grapples with economic challenges, political turbulence and the enduring influence of its old guard monarchy-military alliance



ASHOK K MEHTA

The tourist-undiscovered jewel is Siracha in the Gulf of Thailand, 90 km southeast of Bangkok and 30 km north of Pattaya. Ascott Group's Oakwood Hotel is your strategic compass to assimilate Siracha as I am doing. Blissfully quiet alongside a park caressing the sea, it caters to all: Koreans who come in droves to play golf even while their president was being arrested; Japanese with corporate interests are also in plenty; soon Chinese will descend for the Year of Snake but hardly any Indians though 200 of them are building an oil refinery close by. Koh Sichang island 40 minutes in a steamer is worth getting lost in as King Rama V loved to do 200 years ago.

Ripened Sirachans belt their favourite melodies in the park as joggers and wanderers freeze to a halt when the national anthem plays in the mornings. Unlike in fading monarchies elsewhere, the Royals are ubiquitous: pictures of the present King Maha Vajiralongkorn, the Queen, the highly respected late king and the King's sister are familiar sights in the Kingdom of Thailand which escaped being colonised. But lately political parties like now in its third avatar, the People's Party led by the Harvard-educated Pita Limjaroenrat and the past nemesis of the old guard, Pheu Thai party led by old fox Thaksin Shinawatra, have tried to unseat the old guard consisting of the monarchy-military alliance. In the 2023 elections, these parties sought a review of the crime of lese majeste (Royal Defamation) which is a seditious law to repress dissent and reforms in the military but the coalition could not unite. The old guard maintains its authoritarian indirect rule through the unelected constitutional court and a 250-member Senate (Upper House) formed by the Army after the 2014 coup. Incidentally, Thailand holds the dubious record for the maximum number of attempted and successful coups (30). A military-backed government of former Army Chief Gen Prayut Chan O'Shea became Prime Minister- from khaki to Savile Row suit -from 2014 to 2023 when his Palang Pracharath Party (PPP) was overwhelmed by the



2023. The government has not been able to fulfil its promise of giving Thaibaht 10,000 (around Rs 25,000) for all 45 mn Thais to boost consumption, though, in September 2024, it did provide some of the dole in Phase 1. On January 27, 2025, four elderly will receive Thaibaht 10,000 to trigger the economy. Other steps proposed to revive the economy are negotiating additional Free Trade Agreements and implementing infrastructure projects. Thailand's most ambitious project is the land bridge connecting the Andaman Sea in the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea in the Pacific Ocean across the Isthmus of Kra costing USD 35 bn which will be a shorter alternative route through the Malacca Strait - China's historic dilemma for its sea trade. China will be the leading investor in the strategic project that will alter the economic dynamics for Thailand and the region, especially China. Thailand holds the magic wand for tourism. As targeted, foreign travellers in 2024 crossed 35 mn increasing the country's revenue by 34 per cent over the previous year. Integrated entertainment is the new slogan and includes gambling in casinos while visa-free long-term entry has been extended. Chinese are by far the largest number of visitors followed by Malaysians and Indians. Saarc countries especially Nepal have much to learn about integrated tourism. India and Thailand have enjoyed fruitful relations, especially the religious connection with Hinduism and Buddhism. Thailand is part of Bimstec and as part of ASEAN closely involved with Track I and Track II meetings on locating a political resolution of Myanmar's civil war in which India as a neighbour is a key stakeholder. Myanmar's Generals envy the old guard's hold over power but they have no King to invoke divinity. Thailand relies heavily on China (14 per cent population is of Chinese origin) while having good relations with the West, especially the US. Thaksin Shinawatra is again under the scanner booked for an old case of lese majeste. The old guard has perfected all tricks of the trade to check the growing aspirations of the new generation represented by Pita's reincarnated People's Party (and other parties) whose slogan for the 2027 elections is "government of change". That should worry the old guard, not Siracha. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)



THE OLD GUARD MAINTAINS ITS AUTHORITARIAN INDIRECT RULE THROUGH THE UNELECTED CONSTITUTIONAL COURT AND A 250-MEMBER SENATE (UPPER HOUSE) FORMED BY THE ARMY AFTER THE 2014 COUP

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### UPROAR OVER JUDGEMENT

Madam — It is with reference to the news "Justice for murderers most foul" -January 21. The Sealdah Court in Kolkata has ordered Sanjay Roy, the convict in the rape and murder case of a trainee doctor at the state-run RG Kar medical college and hospital, to life imprisonment until death and noted that it was not in the rarest of rare categories. Also, the court has ordered Sanjay Roy to pay a 50,000-rupee fine and directed the West Bengal government to pay 17 lakh rupees as compensation to the victim's family. Though the Court convicted Sanjay Roy, the convict, on different sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, it refrained from imposing the death penalty for raping and murdering a young doctor on a hospital campus itself. It is unfortunate. As per the Indian legal system, the CBI, which investigated the case, has the right to challenge the sentencing order and seek enhancement of the sentence to death before the High Court. Many people, including the CM of West Bengal, are not satisfied with the sentence awarded to the convict Sanjay Roy. The incident led to nationwide outrage and prolonged protests by junior doctors in West Bengal demanding justice for and stronger security measures in government hospitals. At the same time, a court in Kerala has awarded a 24-year-old woman the death penalty for the sensational murder of her boyfriend in 2022 by administering him with a concoction laced with lethal herbicide, a planned murder.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

#### ISRO'S MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT

Madam— Apropos to "A Giant Leap in Space," published on January 21. Former President of India, late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, would have been the happiest person had he been alive today as ISRO scripted another history in space. India has entered into the niche club along with the US, China, and Russia. It is a huge



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

## ISRO's space docking: A new era for India's space exploration

This pioneering feat showcases India's growing expertise in advanced space technologies and paves the way for ambitious space odysseys

The Indian space research landscape has consistently been characterised by a combination of resilience, ingenuity, and ambition. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which has consistently advanced the frontiers of science and technology, recently accomplished another significant milestone with the successful completion of its docking experiment. This accomplishment represents a pivotal moment in India's space exploration endeavours, emphasising the nation's expanding capabilities in sophisticated space technologies.



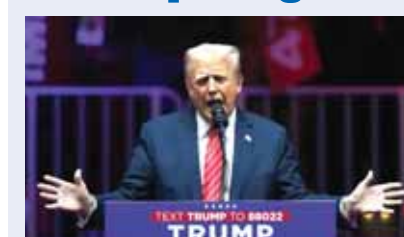
The process of docking, which is an essential and difficult manoeuvre in space operations, entails two spacecraft coming together in orbit and securing their attachment to one other. This technology serves as the basis for several advanced space missions, such as the construction of space stations, the exploration of space with crews, and interplanetary missions. ISRO's successful docking experiment demonstrates its capability to manage precise manoeuvring and

synchronisation of spacecraft in space—a complex technological feat. India has joined the select group of spacefaring nations that possess docking skills because of the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) successful demonstration of this capability. To establish permanent human settlements beyond Earth, space colonisation necessitates the development of sophisticated capabilities, including the ability to construct space habitats, transfer resources between spacecraft or from Earth, and manage maintenance and logistics in space. Docking technology is essential for these activities as it facilitates the construction of large modular structures, such as space stations or habitats. This capability guarantees that multiple components can be launched inde-

pendently and assembled in orbit, thereby reducing the complexity and cost of the mission. Additionally, docking enables the exchange of resources and the transfer of crew members, which are both critical for maintaining long-term missions and developing self-sufficient systems in space. ISRO is establishing the foundation for India's involvement in humanity's endeavours to become a multi-planetary species by mastering docking technology. ISRO's success in docking technology positions India as a significant player in global space exploration and enhances its strategic importance in the space sector. By demonstrating its capability to execute complex space manoeuvres, India strengthens its ability to develop Indigenous space infrastructure, including modular space habitats and stations. The Gaganyaan mission, India's inaugural human spaceflight program, is one of the immediate beneficiaries of this accomplishment. Critical functionalities, including the assembly of modular space habitats and the execution of

in-orbit refuelling, will be facilitated by docking technology. These capabilities will guarantee mission flexibility and efficiency, which are essential for the long-term preservation of human existence in space. Furthermore, the success of docking technology will expedite the fulfilment of India's vision of having its space station, "Bharatiya Antriksh Station," by 2035. Docking proficiency augments ISRO's potential for intensified engagement with international space agencies. As the International Space Station (ISS) approaches the end of its operational lifespan, there is a worldwide initiative for next-generation orbital platforms. India's proven docking capabilities position it as a significant partner for collaborative missions, potentially enhancing its influence in global space governance and diplomacy. This scientific achievement enhances India's standing in the burgeoning space economy. (The writer is the Dean Academic Affairs, at Garden City University, Bangalore. views are personal)

## Trump begins his second term



Donald Trump is all set to write the new world order with his second term as the 47th President of America. The inauguration ceremony of Mr. Donald Trump is jam-packed with the tech titan guest list from all around the world; interestingly, Indian industry tycoon Mukesh Ambani is also part of the delegation. The reign of Donald Trump is already a matter of

deep discussion, speculation and sensitivity for the whole world. After his 'America First' commitment, he is making a comeback with MAGA, i.e., Make America Great Again. His inauguration speech will act as the ultimate trailer as for the whole world, he highlight his commitment and plans for the upcoming four years, and the way he want to shape the future world order. Now that Mr. Trump has officially begun his presidency 2.0, we all have to wait and watch what churning will come out for the rest of the countries of the world from the presidency of Donald Trump. India also has to closely test the new avatar of Mr. Trump, wishing for more strategic cooperation and proximities in the years to come. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

technological milestone that underscores our ambitions to expand our share, which is just 2 per cent now, in the 400 billion USD global space market. Space docking is a stepping stone in our desire to build a space station or other various complex missions like Chandrayaan-4 and Gaganyaan. Along with other payloads, eight cowpea seeds were sent to space, which germinated within four days of the mission launch, which demonstrates that food can be grown in long space missions. China-our hostile neighbour-whose ambitions of becoming a space power are not hidden from anyone-so India must continue to develop cutting-edge capabilities to safeguard its space assets. Further, the GoI has approved the setting up of a third launch pad at Sriharikota, which will further boost ISRO's space ambitions and future projects. Bal Govind | Noida

#### HOSTAGES RELEASED IN GAZA

Madam — Apropos "Gaza ceasefire begins, handover of hostages started,"

published on January 20. The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas raises hopes for a possible end to a devastating 15-month conflict. The ceasefire, agreed upon after a year of intensive mediation by the United States, Qatar and Egypt, is the first step in a long and fragile process aimed at winding down the war. Interestingly, Qatar, punching above its weight, has set itself up as the world's leading mediator, which is probably because the West Asian nation wants to establish its own security in an unstable region, analysts say. Global relationships are key, and Qatar is known for its wide and varied network of contacts. Meanwhile, the ceasefire does mark the start of a new chapter for Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza, and Israelis. While ceasefires are not legally binding, they can perhaps best be thought of as a type of contract between warring parties. Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

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## FIRST COLUMN

THE MATERIALISM  
DILEMMA

How Gen Z can break free from consumer-driven values and have a life of their own



SHAINY SHARMA

In a world that is increasingly driven by consumerism, the rise of materialistic values among Generation Z, or Gen Z as it is often abbreviated has become a topic of growing concern. Gen Z as defined as the age group between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has grown up in an era that is undoubtedly dominated by social media, influencer culture, and hyper-connectivity. While technological advancements have brought undeniable benefits, they have also fostered a culture that often equates self-worth with possessions and appearances. Gen Z must reassess these values and prioritise more meaningful aspects of life. The rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and many more have created an environment where materialism thrives. The relentless exposure to idealised lifestyles and extravagant displays of wealth has fostered feelings of inadequacy and pressure to conform or compete.

Today, social media influencers, often incentivised by brands showcase expensive products as symbols of success and happiness which has reinforced a cycle where material possessions are viewed



as essential for validation and social status. The pressure to abide by these standards is so overpowering, especially for young individuals who are still forming their identities resulting in profound psychological effects. Recent studies have examined the spending behaviours of Gen Z, highlighting a complex relationship with materialism. Various studies have also shown that individuals who prioritise material wealth and possessions often experience increased anxiety, reduced life contentment, and higher rates of depression.

Gen Z which is already grappling with a mental health crisis, the fixation on materialism exacerbates the problem as it shifts focus away from intrinsic values such as personal growth, relationships, and community involvement, which are far more fulfilling and enduring sources of happiness. There is no denying that materialism has significant environmental repercussions.

The fast fashion industry, a key driver of consumerism, is notorious for its unsustainable practices, contributing to pollution, waste, and the exploitation of labour. Gen Z, which is often touted as the most environmentally conscious generation, faces a paradox and their inclination toward materialistic consumption undermines their efforts to combat climate change.

While materialism has been ingrained in modern society, it is not an inevitable path for Gen Z. By recognising the pitfalls of this mindset and striving for a more balanced and intentional approach to life, they can pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable future. It is time for Gen Z to redefine success, not as the accumulation of material possessions but as the cultivation of meaningful relationships, personal growth, and contributions to the greater good. In conclusion, Gen Z has the opportunity to break free from the traps of materialism and redefine success by prioritising intrinsic values such as personal growth, meaningful relationships, and sustainability. By embracing a more intentional and balanced approach to life, they can shape a healthier, more fulfilling and environmentally conscious future.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

## Dangers of China's mega-dam plans on the Yarlung Tsangpo



B K SINGH

With the Tibetan region's seismic vulnerability due to tectonic plate activity, such mega-dam projects could exacerbate risks to life, biodiversity and regional stability

Earthquake of 7.1 magnitude on the Richter scale on January 7 in Tibet killed 126 people and injured 188 making rescue and relief difficult as the temperature dropped to -60 Celsius. Tremors were also felt in Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal. The epicentre of the quake was Tibet's Tingri County, 75 km north of Mount Everest, the World's highest mountain. The quake brings focus on China's latest plan to build the World's biggest dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Tibet, very close to the Indian territory of Arunachal Pradesh. Tibetan region and its fringe areas in China are seismically quite active.

This is the area where the Indian and Eurasia plates clash and the force generated can be strong enough to cause uplifts and increase the height of the Himalayan peaks. In Sichuan province alone earth earthquake of 7.9 magnitude was struck in May 2008 killing 90,000 people, another of 7.1 magnitude in April 2013 killing 196 people, and the third one of 6.8 magnitude in September 2022 killing 93 people has been recorded. Qinghai province has also seen two major earthquakes of 7.1 magnitude in April 2010 and 6.2 magnitude in December 2023 killing 2698 and 126 people respectively.

Two earthquakes have also struck Gansu province in July 2013 and December 2023. A report released after the 7th January earthquake in Tingri, Tibet, NASA has brought out that the speed of earth rotation has slowed down after the water was impounded in three gorges dam (607 meters in height and 2 km long) on the River Yangtze in China. The report further says that the earth takes .06 microseconds more to complete a rotation about its axis, post-construction of the dams. Earth rotation is linked to interplanetary activities, and can influence activities from Sun as well as the atmosphere.

The dams make the region seismic prone increasing the vulnerability of the population. More such dams in the region would increase the vulnerability further. Seismic activities have the potential to damage large dams too. If any such dam bursts in an earth quake, a large quantity of water would outflow through human areas washing away lives and properties. This can be catastrophic in the region. The world's mightiest river Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, which becomes Brahmaputra as it flows in Arunachal Pradesh has several gigawatts of energy stored as it runs down the steep mountains. China has projected 60 gigawatts of power by damming this river in Tibet at the cost of \$137 billion. The power output of this project is two and half times the output of the Four Gorges Dam, along the river's upper and middle reaches. These are Dagu dam (640 megawatts), Zangmu Dam (510 megawatts), Jiacha Dam (320 megawatts) and Jiexu Dam (300 megawatts). The Zangmu dam project is the only one among these that has been operational so far. The other three projects are still in the construction stage and are marred by logistical and technical challenges posed by steep



WITH THE LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS, THE COUNTRY POSSESSES, THE REMAINING DAM PROJECTS WILL ALSO BE A REALITY AND EVENTUALLY, VERY LITTLE WATER WILL BE ALLOWED TO FLOW IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA IN THE LEAN PERIOD

mountains and deep gorges. China being an upper riparian state should not work on such projects in secrecy and put lower riparian states like India and Bangladesh to a disadvantage. It is irresponsible and aggressive posturing of China that it plans to change the flow of water in the Brahmaputra River during lean as well as peak seasons. Data suggest that the total annual outflow of Yarlung Tsangpo in China is significantly lower than the Brahmaputra in India. Brahmaputra, therefore enjoys a much bigger catchment in steep mountains than Yarlung. This is when only the Zangmu dam project is operational. The challenges encountered by China in completing other projects in the middle reaches are not unsurmountable.

With the level of technological advancements, the country possesses, the remaining dam projects will also be a reality and eventually, very little water will be allowed to flow in the Brahmaputra in the lean period. This is likely to hurt biodiversity conservation and agricultural production in India and Bangladesh. For more than a decade China has been dumping the maximum amount of greenhouse gases nearly 14 gigatons annually into the atmosphere. The US is the distant second with 8 gigatons annually.

With the warming Sea surface huge amount of moisture is dumped in the atmosphere having the potential to bring heavy downpours for one or two days.

In such circumstances, 400 mm of rain in 48 hours is not uncommon these days. It would result in unprecedented flooding and the authorities would be forced to release water from the dams, to save the lives and livelihood of the population.

The Brahmaputra in India during the rainy season always swell. It has more disadvantages than advantages. While the floodplains of Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam become fertile when the water recedes and leaves silt behind, the flooding brings misery to people and biodiversity. Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO hotspot, is world world-famous site for biodiversity conservation. It is one of the best conservation sites for endangered single-horn rhinoceros. Though Kaziranga is a tiger reserve, but state of Assam gives first preference to rhinoceros conservation. Poachers kill this huge animal for a single horn. Forest personnel sacrifice their life to protect it. During the flood, many species of even big mammals get washed away with the flow of water.

The Forest department of the Assam government has made several arrangements including the construction of high-rise embankments using earth, to ensure that wild animals take shelter on these embankments during peak flooding. The release of any additional quantity of water from the Chinese dams will cross the threshold and wash away wild animals in even bigger numbers. Though there is no formal water

treaty between the two countries, the Chinese plan for the dam without consulting riparian states and UNESCO is morally inappropriate. Since China won't listen to anyone on earth, India must take certain actions in its interest.

We should enhance our monitoring system and record the volume of flow of water in different seasons in rivers flowing from China. Satellite imagery should also be used in mapping and forecasting flood risk. More storage facilities should also be created so that the flood water can be diverted into them, whenever the river crosses the high flood level mark. While selecting sites for flood storage structures, local and ecological factors must be taken into consideration. Further seismic activities must also receive proper consideration. State governments and the centre must boost navigation activities in the Brahmaputra basin. The central government has already prioritized investments in inland waterways. Brahmaputra Waterway 2 has direct access to Chittagong Port in Bangladesh and Haldia in West Bengal.

It can be a very good economic corridor for trade with south-east Asian countries. In the absence of a water treaty, we should flag the issues relating to climate change, wetland conservation, and biodiversity conservation on all forums where both India and China are signatories.

*(The writer is retired principal chief conservator of forests, head of Forest Force, Karnataka. Views are personal)*

## Maha Kumbh 2025: A timeless 'sangam' of faith, mythology and modernity

the event reaffirms its status as an intangible cultural heritage, blending ancient mythology and lived religious practices to embody the unity in diversity of Indian spirituality

Mark Tully, the well-known former BBC correspondent depicted the 1989 Maha Kumbh at Prayag as an enigmatic and enchanting interplay of time and timelessness. Navigating the kaleidoscopic unfolding of saints from Akhadas, pilgrims called Kaplvas, stakeholder communities such as Prayagwals and Ghatiya priests, Kewats and Khatiks, and overall householders and renouncers, Tully reported on the mythology and history aimed at a greater common goal, the spiritual uplift of the participating humanity. The religion of the Hindus at Maha Kumbh beyond the reality of history, a religion of the imagination which goes beyond reason.



DEV NATH PATHAK

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur is engaged in reviewing the Prayag Maha Kumbh of 2025, enabling a fresh perspective on the interplay of time and timelessness surrounding the intangible heritage. At various levels, the intangible heritage seems to have found tangible manifesta-

tion. The enormity of Mahakumbh is not merely in the formidable statistics on the whopping number of participants or even the scale of the organisation. The numbers have increased over the decades and the organisation has entered an art of state level. In the past Mahakumbh was spotted by the Indian Space Research Organisation satellite as one of the most jaw-dropping visuals.

The 2025 version has ensured that more elaborate facilities for the pilgrims and sadhus, diverse categories of accommodations on three sides of Sangam, and the latest technology for the upkeep of hygiene are in place. The administrators of the Kumbh district have seemingly left no stone unturned to ensure highly

efficient, technologically supported services. Yet the most significant is the power of the mythology, history and social embeddedness of the Hindu religion, the Sanatan dharma. No wonder UNESCO had to declare Kumbh as an intangible heritage of India in 2017. But the intangible and abstract have very tangible and concrete expressions in the Kumbh, the latest addition being an up-marketed Akshaya Vat, a mythical tree adjoining the precincts of the fort of emperor Akbar. Even though Maha Kumbh is conceived and communicated through abundant textual references, it is a manifestation of lived religious tradition and collective memory of India. The ancient texts of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Atharva



Veda, Matsya Purana, Skanda Purana, Vishnu Purana, and the epics such as Valmiki's Ramayana and Ved Vyas's Mahabharata provide ample references to the religious congregation, premised on the origin myth of Hindu mythology. Gods in collaboration with demons conducted a churning of the ocean, the sagar-manthan. The boatmen tell us that the sagarmanthan shall contin-

ue in our minds. Of the fourteen priceless outcomes of the churning one was a Kumbh of Amrit, a pitcher filled with immortality nectar. Many versions of the myth and tales inform that some drops of nectar fell in the confluence of rivers, Ganga, Jamuna and mythical Sarasvati. On certain celestial occasions, the nectar in the confluence becomes available for the pilgrims, who stay by the confluence and observe a daily life of austerity, piety, and spiritual practices, called Kalpwaas, aimed at transforming the body and mind.

Unlike the modern historians' dispute about the origin of Mahakumbh, many travellers, chroniclers and intellectuals from ancient to modern times have found it mystical. The

Chinese Buddhist scholar Hsuan Tsang attended a Kumbh in the 7th century CE in which the emperor of Kannauj Harshavardhan participated and gave away his wealth. In the 9th century CE, the Hindu reformer saint and scholar Adi Shankar transformed the Mahakumbh into a more pan-Hindu event. Much later Mughal emperor Akbar constructed ghats and fortifications by the Sangam contributing to the infrastructure of the Kumbh Mela, as described by Abu Fazal in Akbarnama. In modern India Mahatma Gandhi had more critical comprehension of the Mahakumbh.

He mentioned in his biography that self-realisation was not a hostage to the pilgrimage in the Kumbh, yet in 1915 he

attended the Kumbh at Haridwar. Jawaharlal Nehru, however, fondly remembered in The Discovery of India, "What was the tremendous faith, I wondered, that had drawn our people for untold generations to this famous river of India?" A microcosm of India, Maha Kumbh represents unity in diversity and lived religion described in Dhananjay Chopra's book published in 2024 by the National Book Trust of India. Perhaps that ensures an interplay of time and timelessness and thus a long future of the Maha Kumbh.

*(The author is Associate Professor of Sociology at South Asian University and is a member of the Maha Kumbh review team of IIT Kanpur; views are personal)*

# Trump pardons Jan 6 defendants, including violent rioters

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Monday pardoned, commuted the prison sentences or vowed to dismiss the cases of all of the 1,500-plus people charged with crimes in the Jan 6, 2021, US Capitol riot, including people convicted of assaulting police officers, using his clemency powers on his first day back in office to undo the massive prosecution of the unprecedented assault on the seat of American democracy.

Trump's action, just hours after his return to the White House, paves the way for the release from prison of people found guilty of violent attacks on police, as well as leaders of far-right extremist groups convicted of failed plots to keep the Republican in power after he lost the 2020 election to former President Joe Biden.

The pardons are a culmination of Trump's yearslong campaign to rewrite the history of the Jan 6 attack that left more than 100 police officers injured as the angry mob of Trump supporters — some armed with poles, bats and bear spray — overwhelmed law enforcement, shattered windows and sent lawmakers and aides running into hiding.

While pardons were expected, the speed and the scope of the clemency amounted to a stunning dismantling of the Justice Department's effort to hold participants accountable over what has been described as one of the darkest days in the country's history.

Trump also ordered the attorney general to seek the dismissal of roughly 450 cases that are still pending before judges stemming from the largest investigation in Justice Department history.

Casting the rioters as "patriots" and "hostages," Trump has claimed they were unfairly treated by the Justice Department that also charged him with federal crimes in two cases he contends were politically motivated.

Trump said the pardons will end "a grave national injustice that has been perpetrated upon the American people over the last four years" and begin "a process of national reconciliation."

The pardons were met with elation from Trump supporters and lawyers for the Jan. 6 defendants. Trump supporters gathered late Monday in the cold outside the Washington jail, where more than a dozen defen-



President Donald Trump, from right, with first lady Melania Trump and Vice President JD Vance, from left, with his wife Usha Vance, dance at the Commander in Chief Ball, Monday, in Washington, during the 60th Presidential Inauguration. AP/PTI

dants were being held before the pardons.

"We are deeply thankful for President Trump for his actions today," said James Lee Bright, an attorney who represented Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who was serving an 18-year prison sentence after being convicted of seditious conspiracy and other crimes.

It's unclear how quickly the defendants may be released from prison. An attorney for Enrique Tarrio, the former Proud Boys national chairman who was sentenced to 22 years in prison for seditious conspiracy, said he expected his client to be released from prison Monday night.

"This marks a pivotal moment in our client's life, and it symbolizes a turning point for our nation," attorney Nayib Hassan said in a statement. "We are optimistic for the future, as we now turn the page on this chapter, embracing new possibilities and opportunities." Democrats slammed the move to extend the pardons to violent rioters, many of whose crimes were captured on camera and broadcast on live TV. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called it "an outrageous insult to our justice system and the heroes who suffered physical scars and emotional trauma as they protected the Capitol, the Congress and the Constitution."

# Trump signs order to withdraw from Paris climate agreement

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump on Monday signed an executive order to withdraw from the ambitious Paris Agreement on Climate Change, a fulfilment of a campaign promise.

"I am immediately withdrawing from the unfair one-sided Paris climate accord," Trump said before signing the executive order at an inauguration event at Washington's Capital One arena here.

Notably Trump had withdrawn from the Paris Agreement immediately after his first inauguration on January 2017. Joe Biden reversed that decision later.

The Paris Agreement places unfair economic burdens on American workers, businesses, and taxpayers. It hampers the economic and national security of the United States while allowing the world's leading polluters such as China to continue to pollute, according to the Trump team. Describing it as a one-sided

agreement, Trump said the United States will not sabotage its own industries while China pollutes with impunity.

"China, I mean, look, they use a lot of dirty energy, but they produce a lot of energy and when that stuff goes up in the air, you know, it doesn't stay there," he said.

"It's not like you got a wall. We love walls, don't we? Not like you have a wall around it and it floats into the United States of America after three and a half to five and a half days. It floats across the oceans and it comes right over your neighbourhood and it falls into your neighbourhood. So, they all say we have to fight for cleaner air, but the other dirty air is dropping all over us, so what the hell are they talking about," Trump said. "Unless everybody does it, it just doesn't work."

We had the cleanest air and the cleanest water that this country has ever had under the Trump administration,

# US President signs executive order extending TikTok ops for 75 days

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump on Monday signed an executive order that extended the operations of TikTok, the Chinese controlled video short sharing platform, by 75 days, during which he plans to pursue a resolution that protects national security while saving a platform used by 170 million Americans.

"I am instructing the attorney general not to take any action to enforce the Act for a period of 75 days from today to allow my Administration an opportunity to determine the appropriate course forward in an orderly way that protects national security while avoiding an abrupt shutdown of a

communications platform used by millions of Americans," said the executive order signed by Trump.

Signed into law by Joe Biden in April last year, the bill passed by wide bipartisan majorities in the House and the Senate gave TikTok's parent company ByteDance 270 days to divest from the app or face a ban from US app stores. The popular video sharing app went dark on January 18, but it restored its services after Trump promised to extend its deadline a day later.

"During this period, the Department of Justice shall take no action to enforce the Act or impose any penalties against any entity for any noncompliance with the Act,

including for distributing, maintaining, or updating (or enabling the distribution, maintenance, or updating) of any foreign adversary controlled application as defined in the Act," said the executive order. Trump, in his executive order said, he has the unique constitutional responsibility for the national security of the United States, the conduct of foreign policy, and other vital executive functions.

"To fulfil those responsibilities, I intend to consult with my advisors, including the heads of relevant departments and agencies on the national security concerns posed by TikTok, and to pursue a resolution that protects national security while saving a platform used by 170 million

Americans. "My Administration must also review sensitive intelligence related to those concerns and evaluate the sufficiency of mitigation measures TikTok has taken to date," Trump said in the executive order.

"The unfortunate timing of section 2(a) of the Act — one day before I took office as the 47th President of the United States — interferes with my ability to assess the national security and foreign policy implications of the Act's prohibitions before they take effect," he said.

"This timing also interferes with my ability to negotiate a resolution to avoid an abrupt shutdown of the platform while addressing national security concerns," he added.

# Senate confirms Marco Rubio as secretary of state, first cabinet member for US Prez

Washington (PTI): The Senate quickly confirmed Marco Rubio as secretary of state Monday, voting unanimously to give President Donald Trump the first member of his new Cabinet on Inauguration Day.

Rubio, the Republican senator from Florida, is among the least controversial of Trump's nominees and vote was decisive, 99-0. Another pick, John Ratcliffe for CIA director, is also expected to have a swift vote. Action on others, including former combat veteran and Fox News host Pete Hegseth for defence secretary, is expected later in the week.

"Marco Rubio is a very intelligent man with a remarkable understanding of American foreign policy," Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the senior-most Republican, said as the chamber opened.

It's often tradition for the Senate to convene immediately after the ceremonial pomp of the inauguration to begin putting the new president's team in place, particularly the national security officials.

During Trump's first term, the Senate swiftly confirmed his defence and homeland security secretaries on day one, and President Joe Biden's choice for director of national intelligence was confirmed on his own Inauguration Day.

With Trump's return to the White House, and his Republican Party controlling majorities in Congress, his outsider Cabinet choices are more clearly falling into place, despite initial scepticism and opposition from both sides of the aisle.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune moved quickly Monday, saying he expected voting to begin "imminently" on Trump's nominees. Democrats have calculated it's better for them to be seen as more willing to work with

Trump, rather than simply mounting a blockade to his nominees. They're holding their opposition for some of his other picks who have less support, including Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence and vaccine skeptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for health secretary.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said his party will "neither rubber-stamp nominees we feel are grossly unqualified, nor oppose nominees that deserve serious consideration."

Rubio, he said, is an example of "a qualified nominee we think should be confirmed quickly."

Senate committees have been holding lengthy confirmation hearings on more than a dozen of the Cabinet nominees, with more to come this week. And several panels are expected to meet late Monday to begin voting to advance the nominees to the full Senate for confirmation.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced Rubio's nomination late Monday. The Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate Intelligence Committee, respectively, advanced the nominations of Hegseth and Ratcliffe.

Rubio, a well-liked senator and former Trump rival during the 2016 presidential race, has drawn closer to the president in recent years. He appeared last week to answer questions before the Foreign Relations Committee, where he has spent more than a decade as a member.

As secretary of state, Rubio would be the nation's top diplomat, and the first Latino to hold the position. Born in Miami to Cuban immigrants, he has long been involved in foreign affairs, particularly in South America, and has emerged as a hawk on China's rise.

# Major influx of aid into Gaza on Day 2 of ceasefire: UN

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

Gaza has received a major influx of aid and goods, with 915 trucks crossing into the territory on the second day of the ceasefire, the United Nations said.

UN deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said colleagues in Gaza informed the UN that 915 trucks — significantly higher than the 600 trucks called for in the ceasefire — entered Gaza on Monday, based on information from Israeli authorities and the guarantors of the ceasefire agreement.

UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said Sunday the

needs in Gaza are staggering and his office said Monday that aid workers are ramping up the delivery of food, clean water, shelter materials and other essential supplies.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the more than 2 million people in Gaza, about half of them children, depend on this aid, Haq said. The World Health Organization, meanwhile, has a 60-day plan to increase beds and deploy overseas health workers to Gaza hospitals, but some 30,000 Palestinians have life-specialised care, Haq said.

# '2 Americans freed in Af prisoner exchange'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A prisoner swap between the United States and Afghanistan's Taliban freed two Americans in exchange for a Taliban figure imprisoned for life in California on drug trafficking charges, officials said Tuesday.

The deal came as President Joe Biden, who oversaw the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, handed power over to returning President Donald Trump. The Taliban praised the swap as a step toward the "normalisation" of ties between the US and Afghanistan, but that likely remains a tall order as most countries in the world still don't recognize the militants' rule.

The Taliban's Foreign Ministry in Kabul confirmed the swap, saying two unidentified US citizens had been exchanged

for Khan Mohammed, who was sentenced to two terms of life imprisonment in 2008. The family of Ryan Corbett, one American held by the Taliban, confirmed he had been released in a statement. Corbett, who had lived in Afghanistan with his family at the time of the 2021 collapse of the US-backed government, was abducted by the Taliban in August 2022 while on a business trip.

"Our hearts are filled with overwhelming gratitude and praise to God for sustaining Ryan's life and bringing him back home after what has been the most challenging and uncertain 894 days of our lives," the family's statement said. They thanked both Trump and Biden, as well as many government officials, for their efforts in freeing him.

Corbett's family also praised

the Middle East nation of Qatar for "for their vital role in facilitating Ryan's release, and for their visits to Ryan as the United States' Protecting Power in Afghanistan."

Energy-rich Qatar, which hosted negotiations between the US and the Taliban over the years, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Before Biden left office, his administration had been trying to work out a deal to free Corbett as well as George Glezmman and Mahmood Habibi in exchange for Muhammad Rahim, one of the remaining detainees at Guantanamo Bay. Glezmman, an airline mechanic from Atlanta, was taken by the Taliban's intelligence services in December 2022 while traveling through the country. Habibi, an Afghan American businessman who worked as a

contractor for a Kabul-based telecommunications company, also went missing in 2022. The Taliban has denied that it has Habibi. It wasn't immediately clear if either of the two men was the other released. Officials in Washington did not respond to requests for comment early Tuesday after Trump's inauguration the day before. The Taliban called the exchange the result of "long and fruitful negotiations" with the US and said it was a good example of solving problems through dialogue. The Islamic Emirate looks positively at the actions of the United States of America that help the normalization and development of relations between the two countries," it said. The Taliban has been trying to make inroads in being recognized, in part to escape the economic tailspin caused by its takeover.

# 10 dead, 32 injured in hotel fire at ski resort in northwestern Turkiye

PTI ■ ANKARA

A fire at a hotel at a ski resort in northwestern Turkiye on Tuesday killed at least 10 people and hospitalised 32 others, officials said.

The fire broke out at around 3:30 am in the restaurant of the 12-storey Grand Kartal hotel in the resort of Kartalkaya in Bolu province, officials and reports said. The cause of the fire was under investigation.

Two of the victims died after jumping from the building in a panic, Gov. Abdulaziz Aydin told the state-run Anadolu Agency. Private NTV television said some people tried to climb down from their rooms using sheets and blankets.

There were 234 guests staying at the hotel, Aydin said. Necmi Kepceturcan, a ski instructor at the hotel, said he was asleep when the fire erupted and he rushed out of the

building. He told NTV television that he then helped some 20 guests out of the hotel.

He said the hotel was engulfed in smoke, making it difficult for guests to locate the fire escape.

"I cannot reach some of my students. I hope they are OK," the ski instructor told the station.

Television images showed the roof and top floors of the hotel on fire.

The government appointed six prosecutors to lead an investigation into the fire. NTV television suggested that the wooden cladding on the exterior of the hotel, in a chalet-style design, may have accelerated the spread of the fire.

The 161-room hotel is on the side of a cliff, hampering efforts to combat the flames, the station also reported. NTV showed a smoke-blackened lobby, its glass entrance and

windows smashed, its wooden reception desk charred and a chandelier crashed to the ground. Kartalkaya is a popular ski resort in the Koroglu mountains, some 300 kilometres east of Istanbul. The fire occurred during the school semester break when hotels in the region are packed. Aydin's office said 30 fire trucks and 28 ambulances were sent to the site. Other hotels at the resort were evacuated as a precaution and guests were placed in hotels around Bolu.

Meanwhile, a natural gas explosion at a hotel at another ski resort in central Turkiye, injured four people. The explosion took place at the Yildiz Mountain Winter Sports Center in Sivas province. Two alpine skiers and their instructor were slightly injured while another instructor received second-degree burns on the hands and face, the Sivas governor's office said.

# Landslides, flash floods on Indonesia's Java island leave 17 dead, 8 missing

Jakarta (PTI): Indonesian rescuers recovered the bodies of at least 17 people who were swept away in flash floods or buried under tons of mud and rocks that hit hilly villages on the country's main island of Java, officials said Tuesday. Eight people were missing.

Torrential rains on Monday caused rivers to burst their banks, tearing through nine villages in Pekalongan regency of Central Java province, as mud, rocks and trees tumbled down on mountainside hamlets, said Bergas Caturarsi, who heads the local Disaster Management Agency.

He said rescue workers by Tuesday had pulled out at least 17 bodies in the worst-hit village of Petungkriyono, and rescuers are searching for eight villagers who are reportedly still missing. Eleven injured people managed to escape and were

rushed to nearby hospitals, Caturarsi said.

Television reports on Tuesday showed police, soldiers and rescue workers used excavators, farm equipment and their bare hands to sift through the rubble looking for the dead and missing in devastated villages, while others carried victims on bamboo stretchers or body bags to ambulances or trucks.

"Bad weather, mudslides and rugged terrain hampered the rescue operation," Caturarsi said, adding that people who were fishing in the river and those who were taking shelter from the rain were swept away by flash floods.

National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said flash floods swept away villagers and vehicles passing through devastated villages and triggered a landslide that buried two houses.

# Starmer: Killing of 3 girls calls for 'fundamental change'

London (PTI): Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Tuesday that the killing of three girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class must lead to "fundamental change" in how the British state protects citizens. Starmer said the government must also answer "tough questions" about how authorities failed to stop a violence-obsessed teenager before he stabbed three young girls to death in the seaside town of Southport in July.

In a televised statement, the prime minister said that a public inquiry would tackle failings in the case of Axel Rudakubana, who injured another eight children, their instructor and a passer-by. "The tragedy of the Southport killings must be a line in the sand for Britain," Starmer said. Rudakubana, 18, unexpectedly changed his pleas to guilty on Monday, the first day of his trial at Liverpool Crown Court.

He is due to be sentenced on Thursday.

His guilty plea means that details that had been withheld from the public to try to ensure a fair trial can now be reported. They include the fact that Rudakubana was referred three times to the government's anti-extremism program, Prevent, when he was 13 and 14, and was in contact with multiple state agencies — all of whom failed to spot the danger he posed.

The killings in Southport in northwest England triggered days of anti-immigrant violence across the country after far-right activists seized on incorrect reports that the attacker was an asylum-seeker who had recently arrived in the UK.

Rudakubana was born in Cardiff to Rwandan parents. Critics have accused Starmer's government of withholding information about the suspect

in the aftermath of the attack. Starmer said there was no conspiracy of silence, just a desire to see justice done.

"The only losers if the details had been disclosed would have been the victims and the families because it ran the risk the trial would have collapsed," he said.

Police and prosecutors also face questions about why the case was not labelled terrorism, despite Rudakubana facing charges of possessing an al-Qaida manual and the poison ricin alongside charges of murder and attempted murder. Starmer said the case showed that "terrorism has changed" and the law might need to be changed to deal with "a new threat... (from) acts of extreme violence carried out by loners, misfits, young men in their bedrooms."

"It's clearly extreme violence. It's clearly intended to terrorise," he said.



Putin discusses 'multipolar global order' with China's Xi

PTI ■ MOSCOW
Russian President Vladimir Putin had a call Tuesday with Chinese President Xi Jinping, emphasising the two countries' close ties, a day after Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th US president.



administration. The Chinese president had a call with Trump on Friday and expressed hope for positive ties with the US. Trump had threatened to

impose tariffs and other measures against China in his second term, while also hinting at ways in which the two rival powers could cooperate on issues such as regional conflicts and curbing the export of substances used in the production of fentanyl. Putin, who is yet to talk to Trump, congratulated him on taking office in televised remarks during a video call with officials and welcomed his intention to open a dialogue with Moscow.

KPK CM Gandapur plans to send delegation to Afghanistan

Peshawar (PTI): Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has announced plans to send a delegation to Afghanistan within two weeks to address Pak-Afghan issues, including cross-border militancy.

Negotiations between Pak govt, Imran's party hang in balance over formation of judicial commissions

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
The future of negotiations between the government and the opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), remains uncertain due to disagreements over the formation of judicial commissions to investigate the events of May 9, 2023, and Nov 26, 2024.

South Korea's Yoon defends his martial law decree in first public appearance since arrest

Seoul (PTI): South Korea's impeached president denied Tuesday that he ordered the military to drag lawmakers out of the National Assembly to prevent them from voting to reject his martial law decree.

Public Notice: It is hereby brought to the notice of the public at large, that the Original of Sale Deed dated 12.08.1996 registered as Document No. 6382 on 12.08.1996 executed by Mr. D.K. Raina in favour of Mrs. Sushila Aggarwal in respect of land measuring 2 Biswa, Khasra No. 640/151/2/3/13 and Sale Deed dated 12.08.1996...

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NOTICE OF EXTRA ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

PUBLIC NOTICE
The general public is hereby informed that Mr. Raju Kumar Kanthi intends to purchase Residential House No. E-29, measuring 50 square yards (i.e., 41,805 square meters), out of Khasra No. 64, situated at Panchsheel Colony, Village Brahampur alias Bhopura, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghaziabad, U.P.-201005, from Mrs. Manorama Devi/Mrs. Manorama Devi and Mrs. Chandra Rani jointly purchased the said property through a Sale Deed dated 20.09.2013 from Mrs. Sushila Chaudhary.

ENGINEERING WORKS
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 03 of 2025: Date: 17-01-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No.: DCSTML/G-06-2025. Name of work & Location: At Maligaon- Development of existing pond with provision of park including afforestation and landscaping in Central Gotanagar Colony under jurisdiction of SSE/WHQ/Maligaon.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Bhuvan Singh Taragi who is purchasing the THIRD FLOOR, PROPERTY BEARING NO. B-87, AREA MEASURING 66.89 SQ. METRS., OUT OF KHASRA NO. 41/15, SITUATED IN THE VILLAGE OF NILOTHI DELHI AND COLONY KNOWN AS GURU NANAK ENCLAVE IN BLOCK-B, NILOTHI EXTN, NEW DELHI-110041 from Mr. Nareesh Kumar who is owned the same by virtue of Authorization Slip dated 05.11.2024 executed by Delhi Development Authority, vide Document/Regn.No. 2024/177204, Book No.1, Volume No.5933, on pages 13-26, dated 05.11.2024.

MP INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.
Regional Office : 101, First Floor, Atulya IT Park, Near Crystal IT Park, Khandwa Road, Indore-452001 (M.P.)
Phone : (0) 731-2970611, 2974363, 2971311, Fax No. : 0731-2972629
CIN : U51102MP1975GCO01392, Website : invest.mp.gov.in | E-mail : e.rodind@mpidc.co.in
No. MPIDC/ROIND/TECH/24-25/664 DATE : 20.01.2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER - IInd Call
Online bids for the following work are invited from Contractors and Firms of Repute fulfilling registration and eligibility criteria. Tender for the following work has been processed on the e-procurement system http://mptenders.gov.in:

PUBLIC NOTICE
For kind attention of allottees of the real estate project "Aashiyara" developed by M/s Renuka Traders Private Limited.

- 1. The above-mentioned project was registered with the Interim RERA Gurugram vide registration no. GGM/294/2018/26 dated 28.11.2018 and the registration was valid up to 31.07.2023 (including 6 months of COVID 19).
2. The promoter has made an application with the request to the authority that instead of revoking the registration on its expiry, the authority may permit it to remain in force subject to such further terms and conditions as it thinks fit to impose in the interest of the allottees, and any such terms and conditions so imposed shall be binding upon the promoter.
3. Further the Occupation Certificate (OC) for the project has been applied to Director of Town and Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh, on 16.09.2024 same as under Review for the grant of approval.
4. The Authority is considering an application of the promoter to permit the continuation of the registration certificate under section 7(3) of the Act for this project to remain in force and hereby invite objections from the allottees in particular and any other concerned persons in general in this regard.
5. Those objections shall be filed in the registry of the Authority before 03.02.2025 and appear in the Authority on 05.02.2025 at 3.00 PM for considering the objections received, failing which the Authority will consider present application for continuation of the registration under Section 7(3) of the Act.
DATED: 22.01.2025 Secretary For Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority

सार्वजनिक सूचना
मिसे मुवबिल अश्वनी गुप्ता पुत्र स्वो जयकिशन गुप्ता निवासी सी-8/57, यमुना विहार दिल्ली-110053. उमरोक समर्पित के वसोत द्वारा मालिक जो फि रजिो सं. 453, वॉलम सं. 1580, बुक नं. 3, पेज नं. 86-88, दिनांक 22.07.2016 सब रजिस्ट्रार नृतीय दिल्ली में पंजीकृत है जो फि माता कल्पना देवी ने की है उनकी मृत्यु 03.06.2024 को हो गई है यह अनिच वसोत है अन्य कोई दावेदार नहीं है।
Rajkumar Jain (Advocate) Ch. 735 K, Western Wing Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-54

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Ph.D Admission- January, 2025
Online applications are invited for admission to Ph.D. programme January 2025 in various courses latest by 05-02-2025. For details consult University website www.gndu.ac.in
Director of Research NA/12/27625/2023/40972 Dated CHD :- 1/21/2025

ग्रेटर नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण
सार्वजनिक सूचना
ग्रेटर नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण के अन्तर्गत M/s Solaris Realtch Pvt Ltd भुखण्ड सख्या-GH-16B, Sector-01, Greater Noida को दिनांक 01.05.2023 को मानचित्र स्विकृति प्रदान की गयी थी। तदनुसार विकासकर्ता द्वारा (Group Housing project) को आंशिक अधिभोग प्रणया - पत्र हेतु ऑनलाइन के माध्यम से अवेदन सख्या-CC-8687 दिनांक 12.07.2024 है। तदनुसार म.प.उ.प.अपार्टमेंट अक्ट-2010 Amendment 2016 in Section-4 Sub Section-B के अन्तर्गत परियोजना के आवंटनों से आपत्ति/सुझाव आमंत्रित किये जाने का प्रावधान है। इस सख्य में विकासकर्ता द्वारा प्रस्तुत स्विकृति मानचित्र एवं Declarations as per UP Apartment Act-2010 परीक्षण किसी भी कार्यवाही में सुदृढ़ 9:30 से सय 6:00 बजे के मध्य नियोजन विभाग में तथा प्राधिकरण के वेबसाइट पर किया जा सकता है।
अतः उमरोक परियोजना के आवंटनों द्वारा Sanction Map वरुं Declarations as per UP Apartment Act-2010 के सम्बन्ध में सूचना प्रकाशित करने के 30 दिनों के अन्दर आपत्तियां/ सुझाव आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। उमरोक के निविदाई अर्पण आजीव्या लिखित रूप में अपने आवेदन पत्र, मान, पत्रा एवं दृश्यात्मक नक्शे के साथ कार्यालय समय व कार्यवाही में ग्रेटर नोएडा प्राधिकरण के मुख्यालय कार्यालय, भुखण्ड सख्या 1 नोएडा पार्क 4 ग्रेटर नोएडा में स्थित महाप्रबन्धक (नियोजन / वास्तु) को सम्बन्धित करते हुए सूचना प्रकाशित होने के 30 दिनों के अन्दर जमा करवायी जा सकती है।
महाप्रबन्धक (नियोजन/वास्तु) ग्रेटर नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण

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CIN : U51102MP1975GCO01392, Website : invest.mp.gov.in | E-mail : e.rodind@mpidc.co.in
No. MPIDC/ROIND/TECH/24-25/664 DATE : 20.01.2025

Table with 6 columns: Name of Work, Probable Amount of Contract (P.A.C.) (in Rs.), Cost of Tender Form (Non-Refundable) (in Rs.), Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (in Rs.), Time Period (i/c rainy season), Last Date of Bid Submission. Row 1: Operation & Maintenance of Smart Industrial Park, Pithampur, Dist. Dhar for 24 months. 2.93 Crore, 17,700/-, 2,93,000/-, 24 Months, 10.02.2025

PUBLIC NOTICE
For kind attention of allottees of the real estate project "Aashiyara" developed by M/s Renuka Traders Private Limited.

- 1. The above-mentioned project was registered with the Interim RERA Gurugram vide registration no. GGM/294/2018/26 dated 28.11.2018 and the registration was valid up to 31.07.2023 (including 6 months of COVID 19).
2. The promoter has made an application with the request to the authority that instead of revoking the registration on its expiry, the authority may permit it to remain in force subject to such further terms and conditions as it thinks fit to impose in the interest of the allottees, and any such terms and conditions so imposed shall be binding upon the promoter.
3. Further the Occupation Certificate (OC) for the project has been applied to Director of Town and Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh, on 16.09.2024 same as under Review for the grant of approval.
4. The Authority is considering an application of the promoter to permit the continuation of the registration certificate under section 7(3) of the Act for this project to remain in force and hereby invite objections from the allottees in particular and any other concerned persons in general in this regard.
5. Those objections shall be filed in the registry of the Authority before 03.02.2025 and appear in the Authority on 05.02.2025 at 3.00 PM for considering the objections received, failing which the Authority will consider present application for continuation of the registration under Section 7(3) of the Act.
DATED: 22.01.2025 Secretary For Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority

# Sebi plans to introduce pre-listing trading in IPO shares to deter grey market activity: Buch

PTI ■ MUMBAI  
Sebi is looking at introducing a system where an investor can sell shares as soon as they are allotted in an Initial Public Offering (IPO) to curb grey market activity, chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch said on Tuesday.  
The chief of the capital markets regulator also announced that the top two proxy advisory firms are on the verge of launching a portal which will be a repository of related party transactions and will be useful in judging the governance standards in a company for any stakeholder.  
It can be noted that many IPOs in the recent past have seen very high subscriptions, and many of the issuances have also made huge listing-day gains which result in the grey market activity of passing on allotted



shares. Buch, an i-banker turned markets regulator, reminisced that during her banking days, this grey market activity used to be called "curb trading". "We feel that if anyway investors want to do that, why not give them that opportunity in a proper regulated way?" Buch said, addressing an Association of Investment Bankers of India (AIBI) event here.

"The idea is whatever is the grey market that is going on, pre-listing, we think that is not suitable. If you got an allotment and want to sell your right, sell it in the organised market," she explained reporters later.  
Buch said discussions are underway with two stock exchanges to put in place the "when listed" facility where shares can be traded during the three days between the allotment and listing.  
"As soon as the allotment is over, the entitlement to that share gets crystallised. Then the person should have the right to sell that entitlement," Buch said.  
On the plans of proxy advisors to launch the Related Party Transactions (RPT) portal, the Sebi chief said the two major entities in the fray are on the verge of launching the facility.

# Government disburses ₹1,596 Crore in six PLI schemes this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI  
The government has disbursed Rs 1,596 crore under Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for six sectors, including electronics and pharma, during the April-September this fiscal, an official said.  
The government in 2021 announced PLI schemes for 14 sectors such as telecommunication, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, drones, and pharma with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.  
Out of the total Rs 1,596 crore, the maximum amount of Rs 964 crore was disbursed under the PLI scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing. It was followed by pharma (Rs 604 crore), food products (Rs



11 crore), telecom (Rs nine crore), bulk drugs (Rs six crore) and drones (Rs two crore).  
Incentives disbursed till 2023-24 stood at Rs 9,721 crore, the official said adding the scheme is having a cascading effect on the country's MSME ecosystem.  
The anchor units that will be built in every sector will require a new supplier base in the entire value chain. Most of these ancillary units will be built in the MSME sector.  
Further as of August 2024, across 14 sectors, investment of Rs 1.46 lakh crore have been realised, which has resulted in incremental production/sales of over Rs 12.50 lakh crore, employment generation of over 9.5 lakhs, and exports surpassing Rs 4 lakh crore. Over 760 applications have been approved under PLI schemes.  
The departments implementing their respective schemes are responsible for the disbursals.

# Chemical industry seeks tweaking in customs duties in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI  
The chemicals industry has sought tweaking in customs duties in the forthcoming Budget on certain products such as Polyethylene Terephthalate and Polyvinyl Chloride with a view to cut imports from China and boost domestic manufacturing.  
China is currently the world's biggest exporter of key products like Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) resins, Purified Terephthalate Acid (PTA), Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) and polyester fibre.  
Industry sources said that this global overcapacity, coupled with flat demand growth in many countries and a changing geopolitical landscape, poses a threat of cheap imports flooding into India.  
Though India has significantly increased its domestic capacity for PET bottle-grade chips, there has been an increase in the low-cost imports, especially from China, which has eroded the competitiveness of India's domestic producers, they said.  
Similarly, in the case of PVC, a critical material used in sectors like construction, needs a relook in terms of tariff treatment considering its crucial role in the economy.  
"Restoring PVC duty back to pre-2022 levels of 10 per cent would provide desired impetus for creating domestic capacity," they added.  
Further in the Man-made Fiber (MMF) polyester segment where domestic capacity utilisation is being hindered by low-cost imports, especially from China warrants an upward revision of tariff to 10 per cent.  
"A tariff increase on polyester would not only safeguard domestic manufacturers from unfair competition but also bolster local production capacities, aligning with the ambitious textile sector growth target of USD 350 billion by 2030," the source said.  
The industry has shared these issues with the government for their consideration.  
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Budget on February 1.

# Rupee falls 14 paise to close at 86.59 against US dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI  
The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day lower by 14 paise to 86.59 (provisional) against US dollar on Tuesday, tracking heavy sell-off in the domestic equity market and a recovery in the US dollar index.  
Forex traders said the dollar weakened from its 109 levels but clawed back to 108.66 as Donald Trump declared tariffs against Canada and Mexico in the near future but stopped short of declaring any tariffs against China.

Rupee is expected to see high volatility ahead of key events in the global and domestic economic landscape, they added.  
At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a positive note at 86.28 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.28 and a low of 86.59. It finally closed at 86.59 (provisional), registering a fall of 14 paise over its previous close of 86.45 against the US dollar.  
According to Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the Indian rupee opened higher on a weak tone in the US dollar and overnight decline in crude oil prices.  
However, the domestic currency lost initial gains as the domestic markets tanked. A recovery in the US dollar index also pressurised the rupee. The US dollar recovered after US President

Donald Trump threatened Canada and Mexico with 25 per cent tariffs by February 1. "We expect the rupee to remain weak on underlying strength in the US dollar and weak domestic markets. Importer demand for dollars may further pressurise the rupee," Choudhary said.  
However, any further decline in crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels. Markets may see some volatility amid announcements by the US government, Choudhary added.  
Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading down 0.62 per cent to 108.66. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.97 per cent to USD 79.37 per barrel in futures trade.  
On the domestic equity market front both the benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty witnessed a highly volatile trade.

# Bridgestone India expects seven-eight per cent growth in replacement demand in 2025

PTI ■ MUMBAI  
Bridgestone India is expecting around seven-eight per cent growth in the replacement demand this calendar year after seeing a disruption owing to multiple factors in 2024, a top company executive has said.  
The Indian arm of the Japanese tyre company Bridgestone Corporation also said that along with increasing its product offerings, it is also expanding its market footprint by ensuring its presence in tier three and four towns of the country. The company in November announced a USD 85-million investment plan for enhancing production capacity and capability across its two plants in the country to reinforce its premium-mass strategy.  
"We are focusing on providing premium products and services to Indian consumers as part of



our mid-to-long term strategy with focus on sustainability at the core of our business. India is the fastest-growing market in our portfolio and our recently announced investments of USD 85 million is a reflection of our confidence in the Indian market," Hiroshi Yoshizane, Managing Director at Bridgestone India told PTI. Stating that the company aims to be the premium mass leader in the passenger cars radial tyre segment in India, he said, "We have a very positive outlook as far as the Indian market is

# Prateek Group launches luxury project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI  
Prateek Group, a prominent Noida-based real estate developer, has unveiled its ambitious luxury project, Prateek Grand Begonia, in Siddharth Vihar, Ghaziabad. Valued at approximately ₹5,000-6,000 Crore, the project offers 2,400 meticulously designed 2, 3, and 4 BHK units.  
Strategically located along NH24, the development ensures excellent connectivity to Delhi, Meerut, and key NCR hubs. The first phase of the project, comprising 1,200 units priced from ₹1.2 crores, has already seen over 50% sales, highlighting its appeal among buyers. Prashant Tiwari, CMD, Prateek Group, said, "The overwhelming response reflects our commitment to quality and excellence."

# BlueVerse to unveil sustainable vehicle washing solutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI  
BlueVerse, a DPIIT-recognised start-up, will showcase its innovative automated vehicle washing solutions at the Bharat Mobility Summit 2025, taking place from January 17 to 22 at Bharat Mandapam,

New Delhi. Visitors can explore BlueVerse's revolutionary technologies at Stall No. three, Hall No. nine. Aligned with India's sustainable mobility vision, BlueVerse's systems recycle 98 per cent of water, leveraging IoT-enabled effluent monitoring and patented recycling

technologies to address water wastage and environmental hazards in the vehicle washing sector. India's vehicle washing industry consumes 2.5-3 billion cubic meters of water annually, exacerbating groundwater depletion and untreated waste issues. "BlueVerse is committed to

innovation that drives sustainability and social responsibility," said Rushang Shah, Founder, BlueVerse. Having saved 10 million liters of water and safely managed 16,712 kg of sludge, BlueVerse invites summit attendees to witness its transformative impact on mobility.

# Tata Power-DDL partners with TPEVCSL

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI  
Tata Power Delhi Distribution (Tata Power-DDL) on Tuesday announced its partnership with Tata Power EV Charging Solutions Ltd (TPEVCSL) for developing public electric vehicle charging infrastructure at Delhi Municipal Corporation sites. The tie up aims to promote the adoption of electric vehicles in Delhi, aligning with Tata Power-DDL's vision of a 'Green Tomorrow' and supporting India's goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2070, according to a statement.  
Tata Power-DDL, a power utility supplying electricity to a populace of around nine million in North Delhi, has announced a strategic partnership with TPEVCSL to develop public EV charging infrastructure across the parking sites of Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The agreement was signed between Tata Power-DDL and TPEVCSL in the presence of senior officials of both organisations.

# INBRIEF

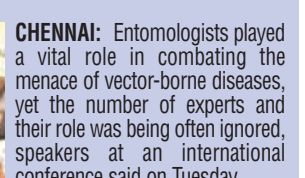
## PROF. KARAMJEET SINGH'S FIRST SENATE MEETING AS VICE-CHANCELLOR OF GNDU

AMRITSAR: In his first Senate meeting as Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Prof. Karamjeet Singh emphasized the importance of making higher education globally competitive and employment-oriented.



## SIMATS HOSTS INTL. MEET ON VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES, AWARDS HANDED OVER TO EXPERTS

CHENNAI: Entomologists played a vital role in combating the menace of vector-borne diseases, yet the number of experts and their role was being often ignored, speakers at an international conference said on Tuesday.



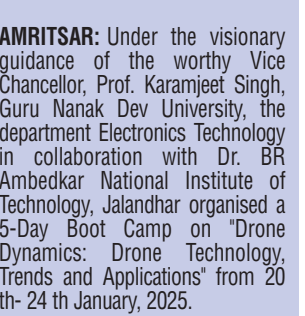
## VIT-AP UNIVERSITY AND IIT MADRAS INK MOU TO PROPEL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN DEEPTECH

AMRAVATI: In a landmark move aimed at fostering innovation and strengthening research collaborations, VIT-AP University, Amaravati, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the esteemed Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM), Chennai.



## FIVE-DAY BOOT CAMP ON DRONE TECHNOLOGY COMMENCED AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

AMRITSAR: Under the visionary guidance of the worthy Vice Chancellor, Prof. Karamjeet Singh, Guru Nanak Dev University, the department Electronics Technology in collaboration with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar National Institute of Technology, Jalandhar organised a 5-Day Boot Camp on "Drone Dynamics: Drone Technology, Trends and Applications" from 20th-24th January, 2025.



## RECPDCL HANDOVERS HVDC TRANSMISSION PROJECTS TO ADANI ENERGY SOLUTIONS LIMITED

GURUGRAM: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharashtra CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, has handed over the project specific SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) of HVDC Transmission Project under TBCB route viz, Rajasthan Part I Power Transmission Limited to Adani Energy Solutions Limited on 20th January 2025 at Gurugram.



# Futures market suspension sparks debate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI  
Ashish Bahuguna, Chairman of NCDEX, criticised the suspension of futures markets, highlighting its adverse effects on farmers. He argued that the suspension, seen as a government attempt to control prices, benefits consumers at the expense of farmer incomes, potentially undermining the goal of doubling farmer earnings. With farmers' per capita income still at a 1:3 ratio compared to non-farmers, Bahuguna emphasised that suspensions fail to reduce price volatility and overlook global and local price influences like tariffs and import duties. Market expert Vijay Sardana supported Bahuguna's stance,



calling for studies to examine the political motivations behind the suspension. Meanwhile, Neeraj Jat, CEO of AwantikaFPC, praised the

futures market for helping farmers secure better prices and reduce dependence on traditional mandis. Advocates argue that

developing futures derivatives could enhance agricultural value chains, improve infrastructure, and better support farmers.

# Karur Vysya Bank reports 20.39 per cent rise in Oct-Dec 2024 net at ₹496 Crore

PTI ■ CHENNAI  
Private sector Karur Vysya Bank has reported a 20.39 per cent rise in its net profit for the October-December 2024 quarter to Rs 496 crore, the bank said on Tuesday.  
The Tamil Nadu bank had registered a net profit of Rs 412 crore during the corresponding quarter of last financial year. For the nine month period ending December 31, 2024, the net profit surged by 24.28

per cent at Rs 1,428 crore, as compared to a net profit of Rs 1,149 crore recorded during the corresponding period of last financial year. "We have continued another strong quarter of performance, guided by our three key metrics: growth, profitability and asset quality. The bank's performance indicators align with our guidance, demonstrating consistent and inclusive growth," said The Karur Vysya Bank

Managing Director and CEO Ramesh Babu B. The total income during the nine month period ending December 31, 2024 stood at Rs 8,482.33 crore, from Rs 7,049.21 crore registered in the same period, a year ago. For the quarter under review the total income of the bank went up to Rs 2,953.44 crore from Rs 2,497.17 crore registered year ago. Babu said, "We have maintained strong trajectory of growth in RAM (retail,

agriculture and micro, small and medium enterprises) verticals, continuing the solid start we made at the beginning of the year. I am confident that the same will be maintained going forward." The total business of the bank as on December 31, 2024 stood at Rs 1,81,993 crore, from Rs 1,58,357 crore registered in the same quarter of last financial year. "Our total business crossed Rs 1.81 lakh crore. The

inclusive growth from all the business segments has supported for reaching net profit of Rs 1,428 crore for the nine month period", Babu added.  
As on December 31, 2024 the bank's distribution network was at 866 branches and one digital banking unit and 2,197 ATM networks. About 55 per cent of the branches are located in semi-urban and rural areas, he said.  
The Gross Non-Performing

Assets (GNPA) has improved by 75 basis points and stands at 0.83 per cent of gross advances as on December 31, 2024 (Rs 691 crore) vis-à-vis 1.58 per cent as on December 31, 2023 at Rs 1,152 crore.  
Net Non-Performing Assets is below one per cent and stands at 0.20 per cent of net advances as on December 31, 2024 (Rs 167 crore) as against 0.42 per cent as on December 31, 2023 at Rs 305 crore, the bank said.

# Aryna Sabalenka reaches the Australian Open semifinals

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Aryna Sabalenka's bid for a third consecutive Australian Open championship will continue after she got past Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 2-6, 6-2, 6-3 in a surprisingly difficult quarterfinal Tuesday night.

The No. 1-ranked Sabalenka has now won 19 matches in a row at Melbourne Park and will face her good friend, No. 11 seed Paula Badosa, in the semifinals Thursday. Sabalenka had run her set streak to 25 at the place — dating all the way to the 2023 final — when she grabbed the opener against 2021 French Open runner-up Pavlyuchenkova. But Sabalenka had a hard time harnessing her intimidating strokes on a windy evening in Rod Laver Arena until doing so down the stretch and collecting the last three games after the third set was tied at 3-all.

"Honestly," Sabalenka said, "I was just praying."

She won her first major championship at Melbourne Park in 2023, then added another last January, before raising her total to three Grand Slam trophies at the U.S. Open last September.

The last woman to win the Australian Open three straight years



was Martina Hingis from 1997 to 1999. Badosa's 7-5, 6-4 victory over No. 3 Coco Gauff in the day's first quarterfinal was surprising, sure, but nothing compared with how significant a win by No. 27 Pavlyuchenkova over Sabalenka would have been. And that certainly seemed like it might occur for much of the second set and at least the start of the third.

Instead, Pavlyuchenkova fell to 1-8 in Grand Slam quarterfinals, including 0-4 at the Australian Open.

So how did Pavlyuchenkova nearly pull off the win this time? By handling Sabalenka's big serves, first and foremost, reading them well and delivering deep returns. It took a bit of time to find the range, but once she did, Pavlyuchenkova was nearly perfect: After Sabalenka held all four of her service games in the first set, she lost five of the next six.

Pavlyuchenkova also produced stinging groundstrokes that equaled her powerful opponent's for much of the contest. And by showing off some talent with her volleying, claiming eight of the first nine points she finished at the net — one even appeared to be a sort of mistake but landed in, eliciting a wry smile from Pavlyuchenkova.

As things stayed tight, Sabalenka grew frustrated, her shot-accompanying grunts and post-point screams growing louder. After getting broken to fall behind 1-0 in the third set, she hit her racket against the blue court.

Eventually, though, she was able to smile and look ahead to trying to return to the final with one more victory.



# Chelsea defeats Wolverhampton 3-1 in Premier League

PTI ■ LONDON

Chelsea ended a five-game winless run in the Premier League by beating Wolverhampton 3-1 to move above Newcastle and Manchester City into fourth place.

Tosin Adarabioyo put the home side ahead after 24 minutes when he scored from close range after Reece James's shot was deflected into his path six meters from goal. It was his third goal in three games after a recent double in the FA Cup against Morecambe.

Wolves was on the back foot for most of the first half but grabbed an equalizer in stoppage time with the help of a mistake by Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez. Amid a flurry of pushing and shoving, Sanchez dropped a corner kick at the feet of Matt Doherty who stabbed the ball home from a meter out.

However, a revamped Chelsea, with James making a first league start since Nov 3 and Trevoh Chalobah impressing after his unexpected recall from loan club Crystal Palace, was too strong for a Wolves side that is now winless in four league games.

Marc Cucurella made it 2-1 when he chested down a cross from the right and bundled the ball into the net on the hour mark. Five minutes later, Chalobah's goal-bound header was helped on by

Noni Madueke as Chelsea put the game beyond doubt. Madueke said he apologized to Chalobah for nicking his goal but defended his "attacker's instinct" for being in the right place at the right time to make sure the ball crossed the line.

He also paid tribute to his teammate for showing what he called "leadership, character (and) bravery on the ball."

"He slotted in seamlessly so I am delighted for him," Madueke said. "It is no coincidence with players like him and Reece (James) back in we won the game."

Doherty, meanwhile, lamented his team's poor defending at set pieces. "You have to want the ball to come to you, or you have to want to attack it. We need to start putting our head in where it hurts and defending set pieces with an over my dead body attitude," Doherty said. "Against every team in the Premier League you have to be on it for 90 minutes and I just thought tonight there were too many times where we weren't on it."

Chelsea moves onto 40 points, two clear of Newcastle and Man City and four behind Arsenal and Nottingham Forest. Liverpool tops the table with 50 points.

Wolves remains in 17th spot, one above the relegation zone but equal on points with 18th-placed Ipswich.



# Manchester City signs Palmeiras defender Vitor Reis for \$36 Million

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City signed a second defender in two days, this time 19-year-old Vitor Reis from Palmeiras for 35 million euros (\$36 million) on Tuesday.

Lens' Abdoukodie Khusanov signed on Monday for a 4 1/2-year contract. The length of Reis' contract wasn't given.

"I'm excited to join Manchester City," Reis said. "I want to make my mark as we seek more trophies."

The four-time defending Premier League champion has been unusually busy in the January transfer window following an alarming run of form leading up to Christmas. City was fifth in the standings and 12 points



behind leader Liverpool, and fighting to reach the last 16 in the Champions League. Eintracht Frankfurt forward Omar Marmoush is reportedly another target for 75 million euros (\$77 million).

City director of football Txiki Begiristain said. The moves for Reis and Khusanov, also a center back, come after injuries to City defenders including Ruben Dias, John Stones and Nathan Ake. An ACL injury for Ballon d'Or winner Rodri has also undermined City's challenge in the Premier League and Europe, with manager Pep Guardiola admitting recently his squad was too small to cope.

City has traditionally preferred to save major transfers for the off-season, but Guardiola has chosen to strengthen now.

City plays Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League on Wednesday, with both teams in danger of being eliminated.

# Bengaluru FC eye return to winning ways against Odisha FC in ISL

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Bengaluru FC would be keen to return to winning ways when they host a defensively struggling Odisha FC in their Indian Super League match here on Wednesday.

The Juggernauts are currently seventh on the table with 21 points from 16 games, while the Blues sit third with 28 points from as many matches as the Sergio Lobera-coached team.

Odisha FC have won once and drawn twice in their last five games and will eye registering their first league double over Bengaluru FC, following their 4-2 victory in the reverse fixture on December 1.

Bengaluru FC, on the other hand, have struggled recently, losing their last home game 0-1 to Mohammedan SC on January 11, 2025, followed by a 1-1 draw to Hyderabad FC on the road. A loss in this match would mark their first back-to-back home defeats in over two years.

The Blues will look to bounce back and stay in the hunt for the first spot, though they now trail the top-placed Mohun Bagan Super Giant (36) by eight points (28), slightly undoing their impressive run in the earlier parts of the season.

In their last five games, the Gerard Zaragoza-coached team have faced two defeats, as many draws, and a solitary

# Satwiksairaj-Chirag sail into Indonesia Masters second round

PTI ■ JAKARTA

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty stormed into the second round of the USD 475,000 Indonesia Masters super 500 badminton with a clinical straight-game win against Chinese Taipei's Chen Zhi Ray and Lin Yu Chieh here on Tuesday.

The Asian Games champions, who reached back-to-back semifinals at Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750 in the last two weeks, outwitted Chen and Lin, ranked 38th in the world, 21-16 21-15 in their opening match.

World No. 19 combination of Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa stamped their authority over Thai pair of Ornicha Jongsathapornpan and Sukitta Suwachai 21-6 21-14 in the women's doubles opening round. Satwik and Chirag, the former world number ones, will face the



winner of the match between Indonesia's Raymond Inra and Patra Harapan Rindorindo and Thailand's Kittinupong Kedren and Dechapol Puavaranukroh. Ashwini and Tanisha, who won the Guwahati Masters super 100 title, last month will take on Malaysia's Pei Kee Go and Mei Xing Teoh next.

# Coco Gauff loses to Paula Badosa

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Coco Gauff's forehand and serve Cabandoned her in the worst way and at the worst time at the Australian Open on Tuesday, and the No. 3-seeded American was eliminated in the quarterfinals by No. 11 Paula Badosa of Spain 7-5, 6-4.

Gauff entered the match at Rod Laver Arena with a 9-0 record in 2025 and on a 13-match winning streak that dated to her title at the WTA Finals in November. Using tweaks to some key strokes to great effect in the hopes of earning a second Grand Slam title at age 20, the 2023 U.S. Open champion had only dropped one set through four matches at Melbourne Park this year.

"She's full of confidence. But I'm playing well, too," Badosa said ahead of the contest. "I'm ready to face her."

Was she ever. And Badosa now heads to her first Grand Slam semifinal at age 27. "I'm a bit emotional," said Badosa, who had been 0-2 in major quarterfinals. "I wanted to play my best tennis. I think I did. ... I'm super proud of the level I gave today."

She kept the pressure on Gauff, who only briefly managed to showcase her skills. Gauff finished with 41 unforced errors, a total that included six double-faults — including on the last point of the game that put Badosa ahead 5-2 in the second set — and 28 missed



forehands. Gauff had to contend with 10 break points and lost four of her 11 service games. She never earned so much as a single break point while returning until after she already trailed by a set and a break in the second.

One key game — and one that illustrated Gauff's problems on this afternoon — was the second of the second set. It lasted 22 points spread over more than a dozen minutes, and Badosa converted her fifth break chance after Gauff missed two forehands in a row.

Of Badosa's 12 points in that game, 11 came via mistakes by Gauff, including seven off the American's forehand.

That sort of thing kept happening throughout the 1-hour, 43-minute matchup, and Gauff often would

respond to a miss off her racket by covering her face with her palm or slapping one of her legs. After one error, she dropped her racket to the blue court.

When the quarterfinal ended with a forehand winner, Badosa placed her hand over her mouth, then knelt on the ground. This was a big moment for someone who reached a career-best ranking of No. 2 in 2022, but then dealt with a serious back injury that made her contemplate ending her tennis career.

"I would never think that, a year after, I would be here," Badosa said. "I've been through a lot. In the past, I was one of the best players in the world."

She next will go up against No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, the two-time defending champion in Melbourne, or No. 27 Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, the runner-up at the 2021 French Open. Their quarterfinal was to be played Tuesday night.

That was scheduled to be followed by the day's most-anticipated matchup: Novak Djokovic vs. Carlos Alcaraz in the men's quarterfinals.

Djokovic, 37, is aiming for an 11th Australian Open trophy and a record 25th Grand Slam singles title overall.

Alcaraz seeks to complete a career Grand Slam at age 21 by adding a championship in Australia to the ones he already owns: two from Wimbledon plus one apiece from the U.S. Open and French Open.

# Praggnanandhaa beats Arjun, shares lead with Abdusattorov

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa scored a finely-crafted victory over compatriot Arjun Erigaisi to share the lead with Uzbek Nodirbek Abdusattorov after the third round of the Tata Steel Chess Tournament here.

Both Praggnanandhaa and Abdusattorov have 2.5 points each.

It turned out to be an excellent day for the 19-year-old Indian as he handled the Catalan opening to perfection, getting a tiny advantage and squeezing out the defensive resources right from the early middle game stage.

After the trade of Queens, the players reached a rook and knight endgame wherein Erigaisi's fractured pawns on the queenside came under the scrutiny.

Slow manoeuvring ensued and



fighting for an advantage was probably not on cards. This was the first game to end in the Masters' section and it just lasted 24 moves when the draw was agreed to vide repetition of moves.

Harikrishna was held to a draw by debutant Leon Luke Mendonca who finally opened his account.

The Nimzo Indian by

Harikrishna did not have the desired impact as Mendonca, for once, decided to be very solid and not take too many chances.

Harikrishna forced a perpetual in the end to move to 1.5 points.

With nine rounds still remaining in the first super tournament of the year, Gukesh, Caruana and Vincent Keymer of Germany share the third spot while Harikrishna is in the next bunch of four players on 1.5 points each.

In the challengers' section, the Indian girls had a forgettable day as R Vaishali lost to Nogerbek Kazybek of Kazakhstan while Divya Deshmukh found her nemesis in Aydin Suleymanli of Azerbaijan.

It was a very entertaining day in the challengers for the chess buffs as all seven games ended decisively with the player as white winning all the games.

**Results round 3:** Masters: Anish Giri (Ned, 1)

drew with Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 1.5); Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 2) drew with D Gukesh (Ind, 2); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 2.5) beat Erigaisi Arjun (Ind, 0.5); Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 0.5) drew with P Harikrishna (Ind, 1.5); Max Warmerdam (Ned, 1) lost to Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 2.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 1.5) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2); Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 1) drew with Alexey Sarana (Srb, 1.5).

Challengers: Aydin Suleymanli (Aze, 2) beat Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 0.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5) beat Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 1.5); Nogerbek Kazybek (Kaz, 1.5) beat R Vaishali (Ind, 1.5); Miaoyi Lu (Chn, 2.5) beat Svane Frederik (Ger, 1.5); Ediz Gurel (Tur, 2) beat Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 0.5); Oro Faustino (Arg, 1) beat Irima Bulmaga (Rom, 0); Erwin L'Ami (Ned, 2.5) beat Benjamin Bok (Ned, 1.5).

# Shami in focus as India eye fresh start against England

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Fit-again pacer Mohammed Shami's comeback would be keenly watched when the Suryakumar Yadav-led Indian T20 team takes on an evenly-matched England in a five-match series starting here on Wednesday, aiming to make up for the recent Test disasters that have caused considerable turmoil and heartbreak.

The white-ball rubber, comprising five T20Is and three ODIs after that, presents an ideal platform for both the teams to experiment with combinations and assess form before next month's Champions Trophy.

Shami, despite missing four matches, emerged as India's leading wicket-taker in the ODI World Cup 2023 with 24 scalps, including a sensational 7/57 in the semifinal against New Zealand at the Wankhede.

Interestingly, the pacer has claimed the same number of wickets - 24 at an average of 29.62 - in his limited T20I career and will aim to improve on that while proving his fitness.

Shami was sidelined after the last final against Australia on November 19, 2023 due to an ankle injury that

required surgery. The recovery from that was followed by swelling on his left knee during the domestic comeback some weeks back.

Following his inclusion in India's Champions Trophy squad, Shami's return will garner national attention.

With pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah nursing a back injury and his Champions Trophy participation doubtful, Shami's comeback assumes greater significance.

The 34-year-old made his competitive return in the Ranji Trophy for Bengal, guiding them to their first win of the season with a seven-wicket haul.

He followed it up with impressive performances in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (11 wickets) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (five wickets). Shami's T20I career has been sporadic, with just 23 appearances since his debut in 2014. His last outing in the format was against England in the 2022 T20 World Cup semifinal.

With the Rohit Sharma-led Indian Test set-up still reeling from a horror tour of Australia, a good performance from the T20 side has become imperative especially after the Board had to step in to reinforce



diktats on team discipline.

**Axar's new beginning**  
All-rounder Axar Patel will debut as India's vice-captain in the T20I format.

He has been rewarded for his stellar all-round contributions in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign in the Caribbean last

year.

Axar played a crucial knock of 47 off 31 balls in the final against South Africa and took nine wickets at an average of 19.22 across eight matches.

The Gujarat player has already outlined his vision for India's middle order, emphasising a flexible

approach with players floating between No. 3 to 7 depending on match situations.

**Curious case of Sanju Samson**  
All eyes will also be on Kerala's Sanju Samson, who faces another critical juncture in his career after being omitted from India's Champions Trophy squad.

He was subsequently ignored by Kerala selectors for their Ranji Trophy match against Madhya Pradesh.

The wicketkeeper-batter has proven his mettle several times, becoming the first Indian to score successive T20I centuries in the recent series against South Africa being a case in point.

Promising all-rounder Nitish Reddy, who scored his maiden Test century against Australia in December at Melbourne, has also earned a spot in the squad, giving the team another option pace-bowling all-rounder along with the redoubtable Hardik Pandya.

**England's fresh start**  
For the Jos Buttler-led England, the series marks a new chapter under head coach Brendon McCullum, who signed a three-year contract following Matthew Mott's resignation following their T20 World Cup exit.

Known for revolutionising Test cricket with his aggressive 'Bazball' approach, McCullum will now seek to replicate that success in the limited-overs format.

It would not be a new territory for the New Zealand great, who was also at the helm of Kolkata Knight Riders after playing for the

franchise in the inaugural IPL.

England will miss key players Reece Topley, Sam Curran, and Will Jacks, but promising 21-year-old Jacob Bethell, who impressed in the ODI series against the West Indies last year, will look to shine.

Bethell has averaged 57.66 and struck at 167.96 in his seven T20I appearances. Test opener Ben Duckett has been given the position in the shortest format for the first time in six years.

Like Shami, England's fiery pacer Jofra Archer will be under the spotlight as he returns from injury to lead their pace attack ahead of the Champions Trophy.

The playing XI finalised for Wednesday also includes pace bowler Mark Wood, who has recently recovered from a right elbow injury.

But conditions in India, with the possibility of heavy evening dew, could pose a challenge for bowlers.

After Wednesday's game, the series would move to Chennai for the second T20I (January 25), followed by matches Rajkot (Jan 28), Pune (Jan 31) and Mumbai (February 2). The ODI leg will start in Nagpur on February 6, followed by Cuttack (February 9) and Ahmedabad (February 12).



## T20s won't affect England's CT preparation: Jos Buttler

PTI ■ KOLKATA

England skipper Jos Buttler is confident that the T20I series against India will not hamper their preparation for the upcoming Champions Trophy, and he also hopes to build a working relation with new head coach Brendon McCullum on this tour.

The ODI-format Champions Trophy will start from February 19, and England will play just three 50-over matches against India in the run-up to the marquee tournament.

"It's going to be a great series against a really top side in their own conditions. There's loads to look forward to. I'm not worried about schedules at the moment. I'm just looking forward to playing some games," Buttler said on the eve of the first T20I here at the Eden Gardens.

"I think it's going to be a really exciting T20 series. Obviously, there's some ODIs to follow, so yeah, I'm just looking forward to the games," he added.

McCullum, the red-ball coach, had succeeded Matthew Mott as England's limited over formats coach, and Buttler wanted to build the bond with the Kiwi.

"Obviously, it's not a new setup because Baz (McCullum) has been around for a while," Buttler said.

"There are a lot of players in this squad who have worked with him in the Test team over the years. So, yeah, I'm just looking forward to building that relationship in the white-ball setup."

England have arrived in India with a full-strength squad with Jofra Archer and Mark Wood leading the pace department.

"Sometimes there's so much cricket that certain players have to be rested or managed, but that's certainly not the case for us at all in this series.

"So we're a full complement of players, which is really exciting. Obviously, Baz is coming into the white-ball setup for the first time, and there's plenty to look forward to here and now."

He further mentioned that bowlers like Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carson, and Adil Rashid, who has multiple first-class centuries, provide depth to the line-up.

"I think we're really blessed, actually, in terms of the bowlers that we have here on this tour. They're all very, very capable batsmen. I think if you look at guys like Gus Atkinson with a Test hundred, Brydon Carson is an excellent hitter, and even Adil Rashid sometimes is down at 11 who's got multiple first-class 100s.

"I think we're very fortunate in that sense it gives a lot of confidence to the guys at the

top. There's plenty to come, so we can be really aggressive and not worry too much about our wicket, because we've got guys behind who can do exactly the same job," he added.

**Bethell special**  
Buttler also praised young talent Jacob Bethell, who has been making waves in English cricket.

"He's done brilliantly well coming into international cricket. He's got a good head on his shoulders and obviously he's got the game for it, as you've seen in the white-ball stuff.

"Moving into Test cricket, it was fantastic to watch him in New Zealand. This is again a new challenge for him, playing in India, and one I know he's excited for," Buttler said.

**Salt to keep wickets**  
As for England's playing XI, Buttler indicated that the team is almost settled, with some final decisions pending on the bowling front.

"Yeah, pretty much. Just waiting on a couple of the bowlers to see how they pull up through training. Phil Salt will keep wickets. He's obviously been playing brilliantly in T20 cricket for a while now.

"Ben Duckett will be with him at the top of the order. Jofra will play, Woody will play, and then we're just waiting on a couple of bowlers," he said.

## Australian Open: Bopanna-Zhang pair lose mixed doubles quarterfinal

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Rohan Bopanna and Shuai Zhang had a match point in the Super Tie-break but could not close out the mixed doubles quarterfinals in their favour as local wild cards John Peers and Olivia Gadecki emerged winners in an exciting contest at the Australian Open here on Tuesday.

Bopanna and Zhang lost 6-2 4-6 9-11 in one hour and eight minutes at Kia Arena, bringing curtains on India's campaign at the first Grand Slam of the season.

Bopanna had earlier made exit from the men's doubles. India's other contenders, including singles exponent Sumit Nagal, and doubles specialists Yuki Bhambri and N Sriram Balaji, had also lost at various stages of the hard-court Major.

Bopanna and Zhang ran away with the opening set but the Australian wild-card pair



bounced back strongly.

The Chinese player lost her serve in the third game of the second set and that gave Peers and Gadecki an opening to force a Super Tie-break.

There was no surprise, and that break remained with the wild cards, who wrapped up the second set.

The windy conditions also occasionally made the returns a bit tough.

Serving to stay in the set, Bopanna came out with his booming serves even as Peers tried to put pressure on him with an aggressive approach from the baseline, targeting Zhang on the net.

Peers gifted a free point with his double fault while serving for the set but came back strong with Gadecki hitting a volley winner on the next point.

Solid serving handed the local favourites two set points. They converted when Zhang's service return sailed over the baseline.

Bopanna lost his serve on the first point of the Super Tie-break with Peers finding a quick duel with Zhang. The Chinese also lost a point on her serve with super-fast returns being fired from across the net.

Bopanna's on-the-jump forehand winner made it 3-3 but Peers found a stunning service return winner on the Indian's serve to earn another mini break.

A Peers return on Zhang's second serve gave the Aussies a 7-5 lead. Gadecki lost both points on her serve and it was 7-all.

At 8-8, Gadecki's feeble return went wide giving Bopanna and Zhang their first match point. Peers saved the chance with a strong serve.

## Mandhana climbs to second position in ICC women's ODI rankings



PTI ■ DUBAI

India opener Smriti Mandhana inched closer to the top position, climbing to the second spot in the latest ICC women's ODI batting rankings following a stellar series against Ireland.

Mandhana, the only Indian in the top 10, had blasted 135 in the third ODI, besides scoring 41 and 73 in the opening and second game.

The 28-year-old currently has 738 points to her name, while South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt (773 points) is at the top, followed by Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu (733) in the third place.

Jemimah Rodrigues, who scored her maiden hundred in the second ODI against Ireland, jumped two places at the 17th spot, while skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who missed the series, is at the 15th spot.

Deepthi Sharma, with 344 points, is placed at the sixth spot in the all-rounders' list which is headed by Australia's Ashleigh Gardner, who claimed four wickets and scored 146 runs in the Ashes to claim the top spot from South Africa veteran Marizanne Kapp.

In the bowling rankings, headed by Sophie Ecclestone, Deepthi also improved a spot to fourth with 680 rating points.

Gardner was productive with both bat and ball, as the Aussies claimed all three ODIs against England down under.

## India defeats Malaysia in U19 Women's T20 World Cup

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Debutant left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma recorded astonishing figures of 5/5, including a hat-trick, as India demolished Malaysia by 10 wickets in an utterly one-sided U19 Women's T20 World Cup match that was done and dusted in less than 18 overs here on Tuesday.

Vaishnavi's figures are the best ever in the tournament's history as Malaysia were bundled out for a paltry 31 in 14.3 overs. Fellow left-arm spinner Ayushi Shukla (3/8) also chipped in as India bowlers ran through Malaysia's batting line-up without much ado.

India barley batted an eyelid while chasing down the target in 2.5 overs, reaching 32 for no loss. G Trisha made an unbeaten 27 off 12 balls with five fours.



The lowest total in a women's T20I, however, is 6 -- shared by Maldives and Mali.

In the men's game, Ivory Coast has held the record since being bowled out for just seven runs in a 264-run defeat by Nigeria in Lagos last year.

Now, India are on top of their group with four points, same as Sri Lanka but the former

has better Net Run Rate — +9.1 to Lanka's +5.5.

But that easy chase was the fruit borne out of Vaishnavi's impeccable spell.

There was appreciable turn and bounce on offer in the pitch here, and she used it to the hilt as the home side batters had no answers to her guile.

Nur Ain Binti Roslan, Nur

Isma Dania and Siti Nazwah were her hat-trick victims, and she achieved the feat in the 14th over, that saw Malaysia further stumbling from 24 for six to 30 for nine.

"This was a dream debut to get a hat-trick and five-wicket haul. My journey has had its ups and downs.

"I look up to Radha Yadav (India senior left-arm spinner) and Ravindra Jadeja. I had visualised how to get wickets here last night," said Vaishnavi after the match.

Earlier, she had the wickets of Malaysia skipper Nur Syuhada and Nuriman as none of the home side batters were able to reach double digits.

In fact, India had bowled 10 wides and Malaysia's scoreboard would have been even more anaemic if those runs were not there.

# Shubman Gill as vice-captain is a forward-thinking move: Ashwin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ravichandran Ashwin has backed the Indian team management's decision to appoint Shubman Gill as vice-captain for the Champions Trophy as a "forward-thinking move", saying the top-order batter's place in the side is more or less settled and he can be groomed as a future leader.

Off-spinner Ashwin, who retired during the recent Australia tour, seemed to suggest that there were no plenty of options available for the job.

"Think about who else in the current squad could be considered for the vice-captain role. I'm not saying whether the decision to make Shubman Gill vice-captain was right or wrong, but the point raised is valid, especially since he was the vice-captain in the last series as well," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel on Sunday.

"I could be mistaken, but I believe he's also had some vice-captaincy experience in Test cricket. This could be a forward-

thinking move, as the management might be considering who could take on the leadership role in the future."

While Gill is the ODI vice-captain, Axar Patel has been handed the role in T20Is.

"While both (Rishabh) Pant and (KL) Rahul could play together, they've handed the vice-captaincy to the player whose spot in the XI is already secure. If Shubman Gill is groomed to lead in the future, he can rely on the guidance of senior players like Virat Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah," he said.

The prestigious ICC event is scheduled to start from February 19 in Pakistan and the UAE, and Ashwin raised concerns about the paucity of left-handers in the top seven apart from the absence of a reliable No. 8 in India's batting order.

"This squad mirrors the 2023 ODI World Cup," Ashwin said.

"Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill open, both right-handed. Then there's Virat Kohli. Shreyas Iyer likely bats at 4, given his strong performance in the World Cup.



KL Rahul follows.

"At No. 6, it's a choice between Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel. Hardik occupies No. 7. We lack

left-handed batters in the top seven. Outside the XI, we have Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant."

Left-handed batter Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was one of the bright spots in the Australia Test series, was also included in the

squad.

Weighing the permutations and combinations in which Jaiswal may get his ODI debut, Ashwin said: "Jaiswal might only play if someone gets injured. He could have a chance against England. But what if he scores consecutive centuries?"

"One option is to open with Jaiswal and Rohit, pushing Shubman to 3, followed by Virat at 4. This would place either Rishabh Pant or KL Rahul at 5. If Jaiswal plays, Shreyas Iyer would likely be dropped. While unlikely, India must capitalise on Jaiswal's current form," he said.

All-rounder Washington Sundar is another player who could have an impact if he finds a place in the playing XI.

Reflecting on the scenario, Ashwin said: "Another scenario involves Washington Sundar. Gautam Gambhir highly values Washington due to his batting. He can also be used as a floater."

"If you follow the World Cup format, you play either Jaddu or Axar at No. 6, Hardik at 7, and Washington at 8. This allows for

three fast bowlers or Kuldeep and two pacers, maintaining balance with Hardik's all-round skills," he added.

India will play all their matches in Dubai, and Ashwin feels dew could be a factor there, affecting the team combination.

"Ideally, Washington should bat at 8. Does it make sense to have a player like Nitish Reddy in the scheme of things? If Kuldeep plays at 9, it's two pacers and three spinners.

"With Nitish, he could bat at 8, allowing Kuldeep at 9 and two fast bowlers. This would provide the luxury of four fast bowlers and two spinners. I don't know if he was considered.

"Washington Sundar at 8 might not be feasible if dew is a major factor. In that case, Kuldeep Yadav would bat at 8, and the team would likely go with all seamers - Arshdeep, Bumrah, and Shami.

"In the 2023 World Cup, we lacked batting depth from No. 8 onwards. These are the crucial questions that need to be addressed."