



# Cold wave grips Jharkhand, Lohardaga records 3.2 degrees Celsius



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

A severe cold wave has swept across Jharkhand, with temperatures dipping to new lows as the state continues to experience bone-chilling weather. The drop in temperature is attributed to the strong flow of northwesterly winds from northern India, causing a significant dip in the minimum temperatures across various regions. The worst-hit areas include Lohardaga, which recorded a bone-chilling 3.2 degrees Celsius, and Hazaribagh, which registered a minimum temperature of 3.7 degrees Celsius.

Several other districts, including Chatra, Ramgarh, and Khunti, also faced freezing temperatures, with the mercury hovering between 4-6 degrees Celsius. The state capital, Ranchi, saw its minimum temperature fall to 7 degrees Celsius, while the Palamu region also experienced intense cold. Daltonganj, a prominent town in the region, recorded a minimum temperature of 6.2 degrees Celsius, adding to the widespread chill. In the steel city of Jamshedpur, temperatures hovered around a low 10.3

degrees Celsius, while Bokaro registered a minimum temperature of 8.1 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, Dhanbad saw a sudden drop in temperature, with the automatic weather station recording a minimum temperature of 8.8 degrees Celsius. Deoghar, the famous temple town, also saw its night reading plummet to 6.7 degrees Celsius, further intensifying the cold spell across the state. The chill is not limited to the towns and cities alone; several rural areas across Jharkhand are grappling with plunging temperatures,

making it difficult for residents to cope with the extreme weather conditions. The Meteorological Department has indicated that satellite images suggest the presence of a trough in the middle and upper tropospheric westerlies, with its axis at 5.8 km above mean sea level running roughly along Long. 93°E to the north of Lat. 26°N. The prevailing weather pattern is also linked to the ongoing cold wave, with the onset of a fresh Western Disturbance expected to affect northwest India from January 10. This new disturbance is likely to bring more cold winds to the region, further intensifying the chill in Jharkhand.

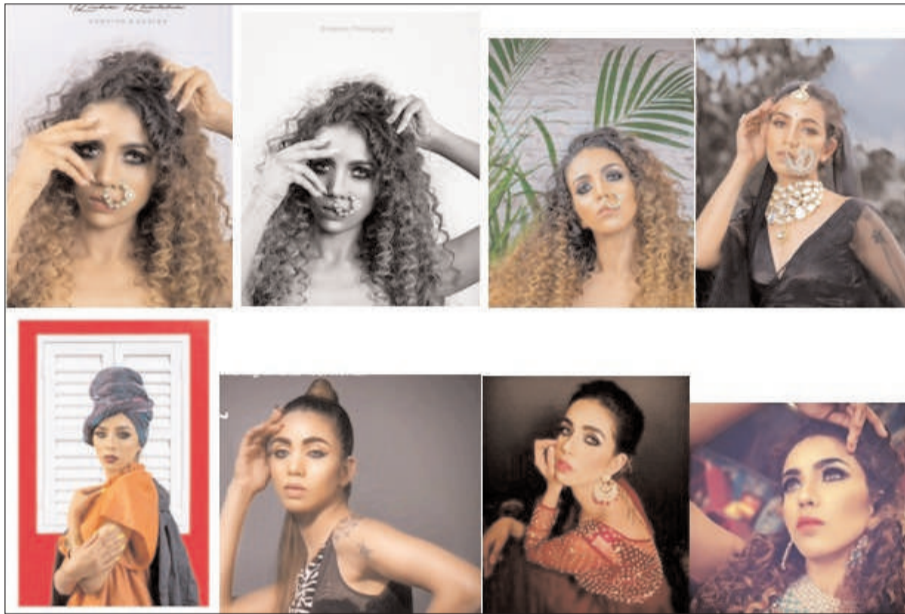
In response to the cold wave, local authorities and health officials have issued advisories, urging residents to take necessary precautions against the extreme cold. People have been advised to wear warm clothing, avoid unnecessary outdoor activities, and take extra care of vulnerable groups, especially the elderly and children, to avoid health complications like hypothermia or frostbite. Experts suggest that this

cold spell is likely to persist over the next few days, with further drops in temperature expected in several parts of Jharkhand. The combination of the northwest winds and the approaching Western Disturbance is expected to keep the state shivering in the coming days. As the cold wave continues to grip Jharkhand, residents are bracing themselves for even colder nights ahead. The ongoing chill, combined with the likely impact of the new weather system, promises to make January one of the coldest months in recent memory for the region.

## The Silent Art of Confidence: Mastering Body Language in Fashion

BY RACHNA TIWARI

Fashion isn't just about what you wear; it's about how you wear it. Body language—the unspoken art of confidence, can elevate any outfit and leave a lasting impression. Whether on the runway, at an event, or in daily life, mastering your posture, movement, and expression is essential to embodying true style. At the heart of effective body language is confidence. The way you carry yourself can transform an ordinary outfit into a statement of elegance and self-assurance. A strong posture is key. Standing tall with your shoulders back and neck elongated creates an air of grace and sophistication. Slouching or hunching, on the other hand, diminishes the impact of even the most exquisite attire. Confidence begins with how you hold yourself—it's the first thing people notice. Walking with purpose is equally important.



Place one foot directly in front of the other, as though walking along an invisible line. Keep your gaze soft but steady, and let your arms sway naturally by your sides. Every step should feel intentional, exuding a quiet power that enhances your presence. For many, wearing heels is a hallmark of fashion, but it requires practice to look

effortless. Start with lower heels and gradually progress to higher ones to build balance and confidence. Walk on various surfaces—carpet, tiles, and uneven ground—to improve adaptability. Strengthen your core with exercises like planks to maintain stability and posture. When walking in heels, keep your weight primarily on the balls of your feet,

allowing for a graceful and controlled stride. With time and practice, heels will feel like a natural extension of your body. The right outfit works in harmony with confident body language. Structured pieces such as tailored blazers and pencil skirts encourage good posture, while flowing garments like maxi dresses or wide-leg

trousers pair beautifully with an elegant stride. Bold accents—dramatic collars, statement shoulders, or accessories—draw attention to a poised upper body, enhancing the overall impact of your look. Body language isn't just about looking good; it's about conveying an attitude. When you move with confidence, you make your clothes come alive, turning them into an expression of your personality. Fashion is as much about storytelling as it is about design, and your body language is the unspoken narrator. Pairing Clothes with Poise Ultimately, mastering body language is about aligning how you look with how you feel. When you stand tall, walk with purpose, and move with intention, you elevate not just your style but your entire presence. Fashion isn't just what you wear; it's how you carry yourself. Why Body Language Matters The right body language conveys confidence, grace, and individuality, elevating even the simplest attire. Adopting the Right Body Language

\* Posture is Key:  
\* The Walk:  
\* The Look:  
\* Arm Movement:  
Heels with Style: Final Thoughts  
Body language is the unspoken accessory that completes any look. With practice, it becomes second nature, enhancing your presence and amplifying your personal style. Whether you're on the runway, at a dinner party, or simply walking down the street, remember: fashion isn't just about what you wear—it's about how you wear it. So, stand tall, stride with purpose, and let your confidence speak louder than words. Let your body language speak volumes, and you'll make every outfit unforgettable. WITH A CAREER SPANNING TEN YEARS, THE WRITER HAS SOLIDIFIED HER EXPERTISE IN HR, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT. SHE IS A PRINT AND RAMP MODEL WHO WAS ALSO FEATURED IN VOGUE AND GLADRAGS MAGAZINES.

## Push for TB-free Jamshedpur, community urged to Join TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

A high-level review meeting of the Health and Social Welfare Department, chaired by Deputy Commissioner Ananya Mittal, focused on fast-tracking welfare initiatives across East Singhbhum. Held at the Collectorate Auditorium, the meeting saw participation from key officials, including Project Director ITDA Deepak Chaudhary and Civil Surgeon Dr. Sahir Pal. District Magistrate Mittal underscored the district's second-place rank under the Anaemia Mukht Bharat Abhiyan and called for intensified efforts to eliminate anaemia entirely. He directed all stakeholders to prioritize programs targeting pregnant women, child nutrition, and institutional deliveries. Progress was reviewed for schemes like Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana, PM Matru Vandana Yojana, and Kanyadan Yojana. Specific instructions included ensuring 100% registration of pregnant women, conducting thorough ANC checkups, and increasing institutional delivery rates, particularly in underperforming areas like Potka and Musabani. Malnutrition treatment centres (MTCs) in Baharagora and Musabani were flagged for underperformance. Clear directives were issued to identify severely malnourished children through intensive campaigns and ensure no MTC beds remain vacant. In a major appeal, Mittal urged citizens to participate in the TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan by adopting tuberculosis patients as Nishchay Mitras, fostering community involvement in health improvement efforts. The meeting also discussed sickle cell anaemia, with 22 confirmed cases from 77,958 identified potential patients. Authorities were instructed to ensure continuous follow-ups and treatment. In the Social Welfare Department review, swift appointments for 36 vacant Sevika and 87 Sahayika posts were mandated through Gram Sabha by January-end. Officials were also told to ensure 100% data entry in the Poshan Tracker App for effective monitoring of children and pregnant women. The District Magistrate concluded the meeting by emphasizing proactive measures to strengthen health and welfare services in rural areas, ensuring a significant impact on community well-being.

## Dalmia Cement launches 'RCF Expert' Cement Range

PNS : BOKARO

Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Limited, a leading Indian cement company, has launched its upgraded 'Roof, Column, Foundation (RCF) Expert' brand portfolio. The flagship products, Dalmia DSP RCF Expert++ and Dalmia Cement (DC) RCF Expert, are designed with Nano Bonding Technology (NBT) to meet modern construction needs. These products offer enhanced strength, superior corrosion resistance, and long-lasting durability. With over 80 years of trusted legacy, Dalmia Cement (DC) is known for its consistent quality. Dalmia DSP RCF Expert++, the premium offering, combines NBT with High Reactive Silica and Pore Reduction Technology (PRT) for robust roofs, columns, and foundations. Supported by on-site RCF advisors, the initiative ensures precision in construction. The launch, backed by over 50,000 channel partners, witnessed participation from dealers, contractors, and masons. Interactive sessions showcased the products' advanced features, catering to demands like faster setting times and environmental resistance. Dalmia Cement's motto, "RCF Strong Toh Ghar Strong," highlights its commitment to building resilient homes. In Eastern India, Dalmia Cement leads as the largest producer, with over 20,126 channel partners in Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Its community-focused initiatives enhance its reputation as a trusted construction partner.

## Tata Zoo gets Blackbuck and Nilgai enclosure

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Tata Steel Zoological Park marked a momentous occasion today with the inauguration of a newly constructed enclosure for Blackbucks and Nilgais. The event was attended by Chanakya Chaudhary, Vice President of Corporate Services at Tata Steel and President of the Tata Steel Zoological Society, who officially opened the habitat. The enclosure, designed to replicate the natural environment of these antelopes, is part of the zoo's mission to enhance the quality of life for its animal residents while

promoting wildlife conservation and education. Spread over a significant area, the habitat features grassy meadows, shaded zones, and a secure yet open structure, allowing the animals to roam freely while ensuring safe and engaging observation for visitors. Addressing attendees, Chaudhary emphasized Tata Steel Zoological Park's commitment to wildlife conservation and environmental sustainability. "This enclosure is a testament to our dedication to creating awareness about wildlife protection. It reflects our ongoing efforts to provide naturalistic habitats for the



animals under our care while educating visitors about the importance of conservation," he stated. The event saw participation from members of the

Tata Steel Zoological Society, zoo personnel, and media representatives. The newly inaugurated enclosure is expected to serve as both a sanctuary for Blackbucks and Nilgais and an educational platform for visitors, fostering a deeper connection with nature. The initiative aligns with Tata Steel Zoological Park's broader vision of promoting harmony between humans and wildlife. As a leader in wildlife conservation, the park continues to introduce innovative projects aimed at safeguarding biodiversity and inspiring collective action toward protecting the planet's natural heritage.



## Addl CS, Health inspects Medinirai Medical College and Hospital

Warns construction agency of 2 percent penalty for delay

PNS : DALTONGANJ

The visit of the additional chief secretary health Ajoy Kumar Singh has put the entire health mechanism here today on the live wire. He got on the job right away, arriving here in the forenoon. The ACS, Health has warned the construction agency of the 500 bedded hospital in the campus of the Medinirai medical college at Pokhraha, 7 kms away from Daltonganj, to hand over the building 'full and complete' by July 31st of this year 2025 or face a 2 percent penalty per month from August, 2025 for dragging on the construction. The ACS further warned "This penalty will multiply by 2 per cent every succeeding month like 2 per cent penalty in August but 4 per cent in September and so on and so forth." The ACS reminded that the state government can extract penalty upto the maximum of 8 percent for construction lingering and lingering like this 500 bedded hospital which is dragging on for around six years and still far from the completion. The construction agency in a bid to buy more time without being penalised, offered and assured the ACS health of handing over some portions of the under construction building in May this year to start with the OPD (outpatient department)



Additional chief secretary health Ajoy Kumar Singh (looking into the map) in the Medinirai medical college at Pokhraha 7 kms away from Daltonganj on Thursday. PNS

which the ACS outright rejected saying "This is not worth any consideration. Such a piecemeal health facility is never acceptable." This 500 bedded hospital must take off in its fullness and just not in any piecemeal type facility ACS reiterated. The principal of the MMCH Dr P N Mahto was asked to provide 200 beds in this building on its completion, for super speciality cases of treatment while 300 beds in the general categories. The ACS directed the medical college hospital management to set up one Cath lab in this 500 bedded hospital. A Cath lab under cardiology unit is an eight crore worth project he told the team of the doctors and the construction engineers there. The ACS in the same vein asked to set up neurology and oncology units. The Sadar hospital Ranchi is providing

treatment in neurology and oncology and there is a rush of patients there. The ACS told the principal about how the government is roped in private specialist doctors to give their medical in the government hospitals. He alluded once again to Sadar hospital Ranchi where private specialist doctors are giving their services. It's 400 rupees per patient in the OPD which the government pays to the private specialist doctors for their services in the OPD. He said their payment is arranged with the 25 percent fund of the Ayushman Yojna. The ACS had sent in a team of around a dozen specialist doctors of the RIMS Ranchi here to Sadar hospital today also to explore the avenues for advanced and specialised medical treatment. He tried his hands on the

health information kiosk installed in the new women and children hospital which didn't work. The ACS inspected the SNCU wards. He expressed his displeasure over the non setting up of the ICU for general patients in the hospital. The ACS directed the deputy commissioner Shashi Ranjan to 'demolish such walls in the Sadar hospital campus here in Daltonganj which are time worn and now act as a blockade of the passage of the patients and others. He directed the medical superintendent to ease the process of registration as 5 rupees registration fee per OPD patient is such where the man on the counter may ask the patient or the attendant to bring in "khudra (read smaller coins) and when the man or woman goes out of the queue for khudra, he or she loses his her number or position from the counter.

## Trudeau Is A Disaster



BY BANSHIDHAR RUKHAIYAR

The Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has met a political fate, which is almost a disaster for any political leader and it would be a lesson for all politicians to think before they speak or act. No one should put his foot in his mouth as Trudeau did. He made wild allegations in India regarding the murder of the so-called Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjer without any proof to substantiate his allegation. He could not produce any evidence in support of his accusation before the foreign affairs inquiry committee of Canada and admitted that he had no tangible evidence. It is an irony that a Prime Minister doesn't understand the diplomatic subtleties and nuances. His political party realised what a blunder he had done and to what a diplomatic mess he brought Indo-Canadian relationship. Trudeau had this poetic justice because he carried out

the command of General Biden like a foot soldier of his army and not like the Prime Minister of Canada. Trudeau is a victim of Biden's failed foreign policy. He had to resign before the elections just like Biden, who was changed as the Democratic Party Presidential candidate midway even though he had won the party nomination in a democratic way. Unfortunately, there is nothing democratic about the Democratic Party of America which is run like a corporation by the likes of Barack Hussain Obama, Michelle Obama, Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton. Trump humiliated him in a lighter vein by calling him as the Governor Trudeau and Canada as the fifty first state of America and not once but so many times massaging that it was more than a joke. Trudeau took this humiliation lying down and he was thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the upright leaders and self respecting voters of Canada. His rating as a leader started falling and he had to resign from the Prime Ministership. Biden, too, ate more than he could chew. He and the Deep State led by George Soros tried to meddle in the affairs of India and influence the election results of 2024 to oust the iron fist leadership of Narendra Modi and his astute foreign minister S. Jaishankar who swims in the dirty whirlpool of international politics like the Austrian Chancellor Metternich who dickered European politics in the first

half of the nineteenth century. He learnt the hard way that India is not a banana republic like Bangladesh where he and the Deep State had managed to overthrow the democratically elected government of Sheikh Hasina and had popped up a puppet and political non entity like Muhammad Yunus. The new dispensation in Bangladesh is neither democratic nor legal. The way the minorities in Bangladesh and particularly the Hindus have been targeted, their dignity and honour have been violated and their property vandalised is a shame on America. The so-called Deep State of America is like any other terrorist organisation operating in the Middle East and in our vicinity. It is a non-state actor of America and it is indirectly funded by different agencies of the federal government of America. Biden, too, is a casualty of this Deep State. He was dumped the moment he failed, lost popularity and was of no use. Xi Jinping, too, was humbled by India and he had to agree to disengagement on the Ladakh border. His political graph has started falling since 2020 because of his misadventure with India and the Coronavirus. I apprehend that Xi would have an ignominious exit like Trudeau and Biden. The lesson is, don't play foul with India unwarranted and uncalled for. THE WRITER IS A NOTED ACADEMICIAN AND POLITICAL COMMENTATOR. VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE ARTICLE ARE PERSONAL.





# PM Modi to global community: India's heritage shows future lies in peace, not war

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
BHUBANESWAR

Asserting that the world today listens to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that due to the country's heritage, it is able to tell the international community that the future does not lie in 'yudh' (war) but in 'Budh' (Buddha). Addressing the diaspora at the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Bhubaneswar, Modi said India is not only the mother of democracy, but democracy is a part of people's lives here. He said the world today listens to India, which not only presents its own views strongly but also those of the Global South.

Noting that at the time when the world was witnessing the expansion of empires by the power of the sword, Emperor Ashoka chose the path of peace, he said this was the strength of India's heritage. "Due to this heritage, India is able to tell the world -- 'bhavishya yudh mein nahi hai, Budh mein hai' (the future does not lie in war but



in Buddha)," he said. Modi said he has always considered the diaspora as India's ambassador to the countries they live in. "We are not just the mother of democracy, but democracy is part of our lives, our lifestyle. We don't

have to be taught diversity, rather, our life runs on diversity. That's why wherever Indians go, they become part of the society of that particular place. We respect the rules and traditions of that country and also honestly serve that

country and its society, contributing to its growth and prosperity. At the same time, our hearts continue to beat for India," he said. The PM said it was because of the diaspora, that he keeps his head high wherever he goes.

"I do not forget the love, affection and prestige I receive across the world. I would like to say thank you. This is because of you, I keep my head high across the world. During the last 10 years, I have met several leaders across the world. The

world leaders praise the Indian diaspora. It's because of the social values you add to their society," he said. "Your safety and welfare are our top priority. We consider it our responsibility to help our diaspora during crisis situations no matter where they are. This is one of the guiding principles of India's foreign policy today. Over the last decade, our embassies and offices have been sensitive and proactive," he said.

Modi said that earlier in many countries, people had to travel long distances to access consular facilities and wait for days for help. "Now, these problems are being solved. In the last two years, 14 embassies and consulates have been opened. The scope of the OCI card is also being expanded," he said.

The PM said the diaspora played a major role in Independence in 1947, and sought their help to make India a developed country by 2047. He said India is not only a young country but also a country of skilled youths.

## Uttarakhand to implement UCC this month says CM Pushkar Singh Dhami



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
BAREILLY/UP

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Thursday highlighted the various initiatives undertaken in the state, reaffirming the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the "Devbhoomi" this month. Uttarakhand is the first state in the country to have UCC Act, which seeks to establish a uniform and an equal set of rules on marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance for all citizens in the state, except the Scheduled Tribes (STs), irrespective of religion. It makes registration of all marriages and live-in relationships mandatory. "We have formulated the Uniform Civil Code law in Devbhoomi Uttarakhand. This is the state's first honour and will be implemented within this month," Dhami said during the inauguration of the 29th Uttarayani Mela in Bareilly.

He compared the UCC to India's sacred rivers such as Sharda, Ganga, Saraswati and Kaveri, stating that just as they sustain life across the country, the UCC will work similarly. Regarding the state's tourism and infrastructure initiatives, Dhami said, "In Haridwar and Rishikesh, we are planning to develop the Ganga Corridor. Work on a corridor along the Sharda River has also begun." He added that Uttarakhand continues to see an increasing influx of devotees and tourists which would be bolstered by the reconstruction efforts in Kedarnath and the master plan underway at Badrinath

Dhami. Dhami also announced beautification and restoration efforts for temples in the Kumaon region and development at Purnagiri. "It gives me immense joy that more devotees from Uttar Pradesh visit Purnagiri. We are creating the Sharda Corridor, which will enhance the ghats and beautify the area," he said. The chief minister expressed hope for Uttarakhand becoming a hub for destination weddings and tourism, emphasising the state's growing reputation. "Handicraft products from Uttarakhand are gaining recognition among multinational companies and women in the state are doing excellent work. Over one lakh women in Uttarakhand are now earning a substantial income. We will provide them with interest-free loans," he said. On governance and security, Dhami shared progress on several legal reforms, including the anti-conversion law, the introduction of anti-riot legislation and measures to counter exam malpractice. "We have taken strong steps by enacting an anti-riot law. Any damages caused during riots will be recovered from the perpetrators. Similarly, with our anti-cheating law, over 100 individuals involved in exam malpractice have been jailed. This ensures fair opportunities for deserving candidates," he added. Dhami mentioned initiatives to combat "land jihad", stating that 5,000 acres of encroached land have been freed.

## First case of HMPV detected in Lucknow, health department on alert

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■**  
LUCKNOW

Lucknow has reported its first case of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) after a 60-year-old woman tested positive. A private laboratory confirmed the diagnosis, and her sample has been sent to King George's Medical University (KGMU) for further testing. The woman, a resident of the Cantt area, was initially admitted to Charak Hospital before being transferred to Balrampur Hospital late Wednesday night. She is currently in isolation in Ward 11, where her condition is being monitored.

The detection of HMPV has put the health department on alert as 11 cases have been reported nationwide so far. Experts assure that there is no need for panic, as HMPV is a seasonal virus that causes symptoms like cold, fever, cough, and chest tightness. Dr. Shailendra Kumar, a senior health official, said that the infection is manageable with proper care and precautions. Human Metapneumovirus belongs to the Pneumoviridae family and has been present in the environment for decades, although it was officially identified in 2001. The virus is typically associated with winter seasons and flu-like symptoms. It was first confirmed in India in 2003 in children, as per studies conducted by BJ Medical College and the National Institute of Virology, Pune. While the virus is not new, health experts recommend staying vigilant.

## India, Bangladesh border forces hold informal meeting at Petrapole to strengthen border coordination

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
KOLKATA

Amidst recent objections by the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) over the Border Security Force's (BSF) attempts to erect fences in certain areas along the India-Bangladesh border, the two forces held an informal meeting at the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Petrapole in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district on Thursday. The pre-scheduled meeting, aimed at fostering mutual cooperation and enhancing coordination along the border,



was attended by BSF South Bengal Frontier inspector-general Maninder PS Pawar and BGB brigadier-general Mohammad Humayun Kabir.

The discussions between the two forces focused on effective border management, measures to prevent illegal crossings, combating cross-

border crimes, and fostering a secure and peaceful environment in the region, a statement by the BSF South Bengal Frontier said. The meeting assumes significance in the wake of recent instances of BGB raising objections to BSF's efforts to build border fences in certain areas along the Indo-Bangladesh border. Pawar emphasised the importance of mutual cooperation in ensuring the stability and prosperity of border regions, while Kabir expressed the BGB's readiness to work closely with their Indian counterparts to resolve

issues amicably, the statement added. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and pledged to enhance joint efforts to address border challenges, it added.

The fencing work in Sukdevpur area of Malda's Kaliachak III block was briefly paused on Monday after the BGB claimed it was being conducted on Bangladeshi territory. However, the issue was resolved through discussions, and construction resumed without further disruptions on Tuesday.

## Union Minister Chirag Paswan confident of alliance's victory in Bihar assembly polls

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
PATNA

Union minister Chirag Paswan on Thursday asserted that all constituents of the NDA in Bihar will "together" contest the assembly elections, due in less than a year. The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) president was replying to queries from journalists on RJD president Lalu Prasad holding out an olive branch to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. "There are some people who may be dreaming of causing a rift in the NDA. But, that is not going to happen. No NDA partner is going to align with the opposition coalition," Paswan said.

"I would also like to add that all five NDA partners in Bihar will fight the assembly elections together and win more than 225 seats (in the 243-member House)," the Hajipur MP said. The NDA in Bihar comprises the chief minister's JD(U), BJP, LJP(RV), Union Minister Jitan



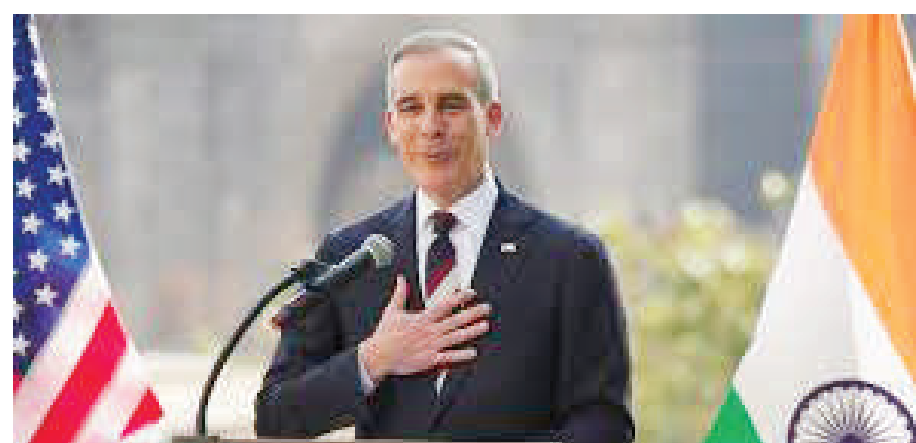
Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha and Rajya Sabha MP Upendra Kushwah's Rashtriya Lok Morcha. Last month, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had, in an interview, cryptically said that the BJP's parliamentary board would take a call on whether to go without a chief ministerial candidate in Bihar. This was viewed, in political circles as well as a section of the media, as a signal from one of the most powerful leaders in the BJP to Kumar, who is in his 70s and has been chief minister for close to two decades.

## US has independent criminal justice: Garcetti on proceedings against Adani

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
MUMBAI

US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti on Thursday declined to comment on the ongoing legal proceedings in the United States involving Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani and other executives. Talking to reporters in Mumbai, Garcetti expressed optimism about continuing collaborations between the US and India to enhance capacity-building efforts in the region.

"No, I don't have any comment on that. Obviously, we have an independent criminal justice (system that is different) from our political (system). It's different than a lot of countries," Garcetti said when asked about the Adani issue. "We have had amazing partners with the great industrialists here, with the big companies. We have sometimes been funding directly, new factories, ports



and other things," said Garcetti, who was named the 26th US Ambassador to India on March 15, 2023. "And I would hope that that vision continues no matter what, because we are seeing a great new India being built. We are seeing a capacity of Indian companies to do that outside of India, whether it is in the

region, in places like Sri Lanka or whether it is in the eastern coast of Africa," he said. "I would hope we keep our eye on the ball. That is the most important thing, of who has the capacity, how can we partner and ensure that (instead of) debt traps and state-based, you know, more autocratic visions, we have

democratic-led industrialists from across both the nations," he said. US prosecutors have charged Adani for allegedly being involved in a scheme to bribe Indian officials with USD 265 million (around Rs 2,200 crore) in exchange for favourable solar power contracts.

## Three Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter amid ongoing anti-naxal ops



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
RAIPUR

Three Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Thursday, state Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said. The security forces have achieved success in the anti-Naxal operation in Sukma, he said. So far, bodies of three Naxalites have been recovered and the search operation is still underway, Sharma, who holds the Home portfolio, told reporters in Raipur.

Referring to the IED blast triggered by Naxalites on January 6 wherein eight security personnel and a civilian driver of their vehicle were killed in Bijapur district, the deputy CM said, "There is huge anger among security forces after what Naxalites have done." "I have met them (security forces). I reiterate that with the strength and courage of our jawans, the (Naxal) menace will be eliminated within the stipulated time," he said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday vowed to eliminate Naxals from the country by March 2026 and asserted that the sacrifice of those killed by the extremists in Chhattisgarh will not go in vain.

## Ayodhya emerges as a thriving economic hub after Ram Mandir consecration

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■**  
AYODHYA

Almost a year after the consecration of Ram Lalla at the grand Ram Mandir, Ayodhya has witnessed a remarkable transformation. Once known for its tranquil religious gatherings and modest economy, the city has become a bustling hub of economic activity. While standing as a symbol of devotion, the Ram Mandir has also emerged as the cornerstone of Ayodhya's economic resurgence. "The faith of millions has brought prosperity to Ayodhya," said Anil Shukla, a shopkeeper near the temple. "Earlier, people barely had enough to survive. Now, thanks to Ram ji ki kripa, everyone is earning well. Even



small vendors are flourishing." The influx of pilgrims has been staggering. Government figures reveal that from January 22 to September 30, 2024, Ayodhya received 13.77

crore visitors, outpacing even the Taj Mahal in footfall. The numbers are expected to exceed 16 crore by the end of the year, driving a wave of unprecedented economic activity. For local residents,

this transformation has brought prosperity and optimism, changing lives across sectors. This transformation. Kamlesh Tiwari, a local shopkeeper, shared his experience: "Earlier, we earned just enough to make ends meet. Now, with so many tourists coming in, my income has tripled. It feels like Ayodhya is finally getting its due." Small businesses, from souvenir vendors to eateries, have thrived in this new environment. Vendors selling Ram Lalla photographs, puja materials, and prasads have reported record earnings. Many have expanded their operations, sourcing high-quality products to meet the growing demand. The state government's

redevelopment initiatives, worth ₹85,000 crore, have played a crucial role in facilitating this transformation. Infrastructure improvements, including better roads, public utilities, and transport facilities, are designed to handle a daily footfall of 3 lakh visitors. These developments have not only enhanced the tourist experience but also created thousands of jobs in retail, transport, construction, and food services. For residents, the economic boost is tangible. People are upgrading their lifestyles, purchasing vehicles, and investing in better homes. Mukesh Kumar, a prasad seller near the temple, said, "I used to earn ₹300 a day, but

now it's ₹2,000 on average. The number of visitors has changed everything for us." The rise in Ayodhya's profile has also attracted national and international brands. Global food chains like Domino's and Pizza Hut, along with retail giants like Reliance Trends, have set up outlets, catering to the growing number of tourists. Such developments highlight the city's evolving identity as not just a spiritual center but also a modern economic hub. Economists view Ayodhya's transformation as a blueprint for leveraging religious tourism for urban development. According to Dr. Arvind Mishra, an economic analyst, "The growth we're seeing in Ayodhya is a perfect example

of how faith and economy can work hand in hand. With increased tourism, disposable incomes are rising, and this ripple effect is boosting the local economy in ways we couldn't have predicted." The changes are visible everywhere, from the vibrant new markets near the temple to the busy streets lined with vendors. Local entrepreneurs, small-scale traders, and service providers all report significant growth in their earnings. Even roadside snack stalls, offering items like tandoori chai and sweets corn, are benefiting from the influx of tourists. Ayodhya today is a city transformed, with its faith-driven identity seamlessly merging with its newfound economic dynamism.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Breaking ice

The India-Afghanistan talks reflect India's shift from non-recognition of the Taliban to a pragmatic approach to engagement

In a significant step towards recalibrating ties, India and the Taliban-led Afghan government held a high-level meeting in Dubai. The dialogue, attended by India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, revolved around enhancing bilateral relations and addressing regional challenges. The talks, focusing on economic, humanitarian, and strategic cooperation, underscore India's pragmatic approach toward engaging with Afghanistan despite the complex political dynamics following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. India's relations with Afghanistan have been historically robust, characterised by cultural and economic collaboration. However, the Taliban's return disrupted bilateral ties, with India maintaining a cautious stance while continuing to provide humanitarian aid. The evolving geopolitical landscape, Pakistan's actions in the region, and Afghanistan's dire humanitarian crisis have necessitated a renewed engagement. The discussions also gain relevance amidst regional tensions, notably Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan, which New Delhi strongly condemned. This shared concern over Islamabad's destabilising actions further aligns Indian and Afghan interests, fostering mutual cooperation.



The Dubai meeting covered a wide range of topics. India reaffirmed its commitment to aiding Afghanistan's recovery. It pledged continued support in healthcare, food security, and disaster relief, building on its earlier contributions, such as 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat, medical supplies, and vaccines. Besides, both sides emphasised the strategic importance of Chabahar Port in Iran as a key trade and humanitarian supply route. The port offers Afghanistan access to global markets, bypassing Pakistan, and could serve as a stabilising economic lifeline for the war-torn country. India has expressed readiness to resume developmental activities, including infrastructure and capacity-building projects. This signals India's willingness to strengthen Afghanistan's socio-economic framework despite challenges posed by the Taliban's governance. The Afghan delegation addressed India's concerns about terrorism and regional stability, assuring cooperation to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for anti-India activities. The talks indicate a shift in India's approach. This may encourage other nations to adopt a similar stance, recognising the necessity of dealing with the Afghan government. But the biggest takeaway from this meeting indeed was Strengthening India-Afghanistan ties to counter Pakistan's influence in the region. Islamabad's strained relations with Kabul, exacerbated by recent airstrikes, present an opportunity for New Delhi to assert its role as a reliable partner. Reviving trade and development projects through Chabahar Port could bolster Afghanistan's economy and offer India strategic leverage in Central Asia.

### PICTALK



A commuter rides his bicycle through a mustard field on a winter morning, in Nadia

# Navigating Trump redux: India's tightrope



BHOPINDER SINGH

While Trump's focus on countering China could strengthen Indo-US strategic ties, his erratic temperament and divisive policies present challenges

In India, there is a mix of excitement, tentativeness, and even concern, with the second coming of Donald Trump as the President of the United States. While Trump's excitable temperament is well known, he ought to be served better with hindsight of experience. But he may not. While India will remain resolutely relevant and critical in his foreign policy calculus, the handling of certain issues could test Indian reaction and patience. His inevitable fixation with managing China will necessitate nurturing the strategic 'pivot' of India as a counterbalance, Delhi's deep-rooted equations with countries like Russia or Iran, could earn his ire and vitriol.

A lot will depend on 'Team Trump' who will aid and assist Trump as he attempts the shape his poll promises of MAGA i.e., Make America Great Again! However, unlike the first term when he did inherit and heed reputation and professionalism as the criteria for key jobs in the Trump administration (though subsequently, he developed a penchant for 'revolving door' ousters of many), this time the criteria only seem to be 'loyalty' to Trump, personally. There is a disconcerting and contradictory logic to many recent appointments that begs the question if it indeed will be 'business as usual' - something Delhi had got used to, irrespective of the dispensation in Washington DC. Sadly, that vital presence of 'adults in the room' from the first Trump administration who were able to navigate and manage Trump out of his outlandish and fickle ideas, will not be present anymore. If anything, in a room filled with 'loyalists' (read, obsequious staff), chances that someone will play the 'adult in the room' anymore, will be starkly lesser than before, as there could be competitive grovelling to valourise Trump's ideas, whatever be the portent. How will Trump's purported 'non-interventionist' preferences sit with Sino-wary countries like India, Japan or Australia (the other three from QUAD framework) that are in the direct line of Chinese belligerence and expansionism? Will Trump's 'non-interventionist' instinct embolden Beijing to finally bite the bullet on Taiwan and storm the same, knowing that beyond mouthing platitudes, Washington DC will not intervene militarily? The picture emerging out of a beleaguered (and potentially isolated) Ukraine does not seem reassuring from a security angle, as the possibility of America pushing its 'allies' under the bus, seems very plausible. Even disconcerting memories of the Summer of 2020 when the Chinese aggression pushed through Indian frontiers, with a seemingly disinterested Trump offering to 'negotiate a deal' instead of adopting a more assertive stance, are still raw. Indeed, the Americans had expedited the exports of weaponry to Delhi, but all that made imminent commercial sense to the die-hard businessman in Trump. Just how ramrod and unflinching will the Trump support be in meeting any such exigency in the future, is worth considering. Even in bilateral relations, there is a fresh bunch of unrestrained radicals who make up the Trump redux cabinet. They may or may not play by the traditional rulebook of diplomacy and could make comments that are unpalatable to Indian sensibilities. Delhi will be under immense pressure to moderate the bilateral



engagement and conversations, as the Indian democracy has its dynamics and imagined perceptions that will disallow unruly comments, even if they were to come from the USA. Adding to the complexity is the contradiction that many amongst this new Trump cabinet are trigger-happy interventionists (e.g., Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Elise Stefanik the Ambassador to UN etc.) a neoconservatives whom Trump rubbish repeatedly - how this contradiction will manifest will be interesting. Even on non-security issues like immigration, trade terms, or commitment towards the environmental issues, could be a very rocky ride for Delhi. India has made ambitious commitments towards the global environmental cause, whereas Trump's rhetoric has cockily been, "We're going to drill, baby, drill," and confirmed that, "I will terminate the green new scam." While India isn't on top of its target list on immigrant issues, it will only be a matter of time before the bogy "stealing your jobs" impacts India. Trump will be a mega populist who will dance to the 'redneck' wish list and this will impact relations with the world's largest democracy, a lot more gravely than other countries. Trump has demonstrated a ter-



THERE IS A DISCONCERTING AND CONTRADICTORY LOGIC TO MANY RECENT APPOINTMENTS THAT BEGS THE QUESTION IF IT INDEED WILL BE 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' - SOMETHING DELHI HAD GOT USED TO, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE DISPENSATION IN WASHINGTON DC

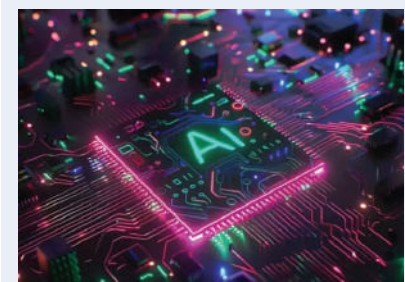
riying ability to shed responsibilities towards his allies (sovereign, coalition, and even personal) and also his moral responsibility by readily abandoning its vital geostrategic stakes (remember Afghanistan, and now Syria) with a thoughtless shrug of the shoulder and "not my problem" approach. This tests the will to invest in a transactional relationship like the one offered by Trump, as no support can be construed for sure. Owing to his polarising politics of identity and blind support for the likes of Benjamin Netanyahu, the narrative emanating from the White House could jeopardise and harm the societal fabric of a diverse country like India that needs to maintain an inclusive outlook. America itself is in for a tumultuous time with the President-designate having promised to close the border with Mexico and launch the largest deportation exercise in US history within hours (not days) of taking over. While Donald Trump's rhetoric is usually more bark than bite, India may find it difficult to accommodate his provocative talk and temperament, beyond a point. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### INDIA'S GDP GAP WITH CHINA WIDENS

Madam — An analysis of the economies done by a start-up highlights the pressing necessity to boost India's lacklustre growth. In 1980, India's Gross Domestic Product was \$186 billion, close to China's \$303 billion. But, by 2024, India's GDP had grown 21 times to \$3.93 trillion, while China's GDP had surged to \$18.5 trillion—61 times its 1980 level. To put it differently, China's GDP in 2004 was 2.82 times greater than India's. In 2014, it was 5.13 times greater and in 2024, 4.71 times greater. India's GDP surged 2.94 times from \$694 billion to \$2,043 billion between 2004 and 2014, while it grew merely 1.92 times, reaching \$3,930 billion between 2014 and 2024. Had the GDP growth in the decade starting in 2004 persisted in the decade beginning in 2014, the GDP disparity would have further decreased. The decade before 2004 was a period of consolidation after structural reforms were initiated. India has to rejig its economic strategy to achieve a consistent 9-10 per cent rate of growth. India chose a mixed economic system, which combines the features of both socialist and free-market economic systems. The recent push towards private investment in government-owned assets has served only as an easy route for crony capitalists to enrich themselves into billionaires. Democratic India can consider a new economic system aimed at fostering faster growth. However, growth in Southern India, which accounts for about 31 per cent of GDP, has thrived under the current system and can accelerate further with adequate support from the Centre. Northern India needs to explore strategies to bridge the gap with the South. And the ostrich-like attitude and constant denials hinder progress in addressing realities. The nation must embark on a rapid growth path that creates jobs, elevates the living standard of common man and reduces inequality. Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

#### India's AI gets a leg-up



A golden chapter has begun in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India. The announcement by Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella to invest \$3 billion (approximately Rs 25,000 crores) marks a historic step toward elevating India's technological capabilities to new heights. This initiative will serve as a foundation for strengthening visionary programs like Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's 'Digital India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India). The Government of India is already committed to promoting digital infrastructure, skill development, and startups. Microsoft's investment will further bolster these plans. The initiative to train 10 million Indians in AI over the next five years is a significant step to prepare the youth for global competition. This effort will create new opportunities in areas such as cloud infrastructure, data centres, and SaaS (Software as a Service). With the support of the government, Indian industries and startups will become global leaders in competition. The collaborative efforts of Microsoft and the government will not only place India in a leading position on the global AI map but also pave the way for entering a golden era of self-reliance and innovation. RK Jain | Barwani

## How India's healthcare sector is accelerating towards Viksit Bharat 2047



P N ARORA

As India embarks on its journey toward becoming a \$35 trillion economy by 2047, the healthcare sector emerges as a critical pillar in this transformation.

As India aims to achieve its ambitious goal of becoming a \$35 trillion economy by 2047, the healthcare sector stands as the cornerstone of this transformation. With aspirations to increase the average life expectancy from 71 to over 85, India's vision of Viksit Bharat aligns closely with the sentiment of "Swasth Bharat, Viksit Bharat, and Niramaya Bharat." It considers a robust healthcare system not just as a necessity but as the foundation for a healthier, more productive nation. A Visionary Healthcare System



Viksit Bharat 2047 journey builds upon substantial achievements in the healthcare sector. Since independence, the nation has witnessed notable reductions in neonatal, infant, under-five, and maternal mortality rates, reflecting improved healthcare outcomes. Flagship initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres, the establishment of new AIIMS, and a growing network of medical colleges have bolstered healthcare delivery. Moreover, digital advancements through initiatives like CoWIN, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, and e-Sanjeevani have revolutionized healthcare accessibility, particularly in rural areas. Role of the Pharmaceutical Sector

India's pharmaceutical leadership has further solidified the country's position as a global healthcare contributor. As a leading producer of vaccines and generic medicines, the nation plays a pivotal role in ensuring global healthcare equity. Coupled with its steadily increasing medical tourism industry, India continues to attract patients worldwide, offering advanced care at affordable costs. The private sector continues to play a crucial role in complementing public healthcare efforts. Innovation, R&D, and cost-effective healthcare models spearheaded by private players have extended quality healthcare to remote and underserved regions. Technological advancements, from AI and robotics to telemedicine and wearables, are shaping the future of healthcare delivery, making it more accessible. Roadmap of Viksit Bharat 2047: Looking ahead, the roadmap to Viksit Bharat 2047 includes priorities such as workforce development through the expansion of medical and nursing colleges, further integration of cutting-edge technologies, and an

emphasis on preventive care, mental health, and holistic wellness. The transition from mass-produced to biotech-based personalized medicine, supported by advancements in CRISPR and nano-technology, is set to redefine pharmaceutical practices. India's healthcare system is also poised to transform its business models, shifting from predominantly out-of-pocket expenses to public and insurance-funded frameworks. This evolution will not only strengthen the healthcare sector but also ensure equity and affordability for all. As India strives toward its 2047 goals, public-private partnerships and an unwavering commitment to equitable healthcare are vital. India's healthcare providers remain dedicated to contributing to this transformative journey. By fostering innovation, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring quality care for all, the sector aims to play an integral role in building a healthier, stronger, and more prosperous India. (The writer is CMD, Yashoda Super Speciality Hospitals, Kaushambi, Ghaziabad; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### TRUMP 2.0: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASEAN

With Trump's return, Southeast Asia finds itself bracing for another era of US ambiguity



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

With the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, Southeast Asia braces for another era of unpredictability in American foreign policy. Southeast Asian nations, while expressing formal congratulations following Trump's victory, are now focusing on how his administration will impact their economies and strategic interests. As the region's governments gear up for a distinctly different governance style than the one under President Joe Biden, the potential for dramatic shifts in trade relations, diplomatic ties and regional stability is palpable. The ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—spanning from Indonesia to Myanmar—are acutely aware that Southeast Asia may not be at the top of the new administration's priority list.

Trump is a known figure for his transactional and often unpredictable style of diplomacy. ASEAN countries, while understanding the volatility that a Trump administration can bring, remain cautiously optimistic that his return might lead to a return to serious trade talks. Many regional leaders believe that Trump's preference for direct, bilateral negotiations could lead to more favourable deals for specific countries, particularly those that are not bound by multilateral negotiations, like those seen under Biden's tenure. Yet, for many in Southeast Asia, the most pressing concern remains the US-China relationship. Since Trump's first term, ASEAN nations have had to balance their relationships with both China and the US, seeking to maintain economic growth and regional security without angering either side. The dynamic has changed considerably in the



post-pandemic era, as China and ASEAN emerged as each other's largest trade partners. The direction of US-China relations will have profound consequences for Southeast Asia's economic stability and security. Under Trump, this relationship was tense, marked by the trade war and military posturing, and the nomination of hardline China critics, such as Marco Rubio for Secretary of State and Mike Waltz as National Security Advisor, signals that the US will continue to confront China head-on in ways that could disrupt regional dynamics. While many ASEAN leaders are concerned about the economic impact of a hard-line US-China policy, there is also hope that Trump's presidency could bring much-needed attention back to Southeast Asia's trade and strategic importance. This could be particularly appealing to resource-rich nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, which are in high demand for critical minerals used in electronics and green technologies. On the other hand, a significant worry for ASEAN countries is that they may become collateral damage in the US's efforts to reduce its trade deficit.

Despite these uncertainties, ASEAN's primary goal will remain stability and balance. ASEAN countries will push for steady relationships with both global powers, aiming to shield themselves from the worst effects of US-China tensions while seeking to expand their own economic and diplomatic space. To avoid being left behind, India is watching the space closely, as it is well aware that Trump will target Delhi soon.

Delhi is trying to rebuild bilateral relationships with several ASEAN groups of countries, even as it participates with full vigour on the multilateral platform. The chief guest for 2025 Republic Day would be the President of Indonesia, a key country in ASEAN. India's exports to the US could be hit due to Trump's overtures and it needs to find new markets for its products, while gently easing out domestic compliances and trade barriers. The region's future relationship with the US will depend not only on Trump's domestic agenda but also on how ASEAN and India navigate the delicate balance between American and Chinese influence in the years to come.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

# The courage to tell untold stories on the celluloid



SANTANU GANGULY

Despite the challenges, a new wave of filmmakers continues to illuminate untold stories, challenging entrenched narratives and bringing forgotten truths to light



Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised the film *The Sabarmati Report* produced by Ekta Kapoor and her Balaji Motion Pictures. Before this also PM has been praised films - *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story*. It took almost seventy years after the independence of India, for a few courageous filmmakers like Vivek Agnihotri to make *Buddha in a Traffic Jam*, *The Tashkent Files*, *The Kashmir Files*, and *Vaccine War*; Sanjay Puri Singh make *72 Hoorain* and Sudipto Sen to make *The Kerala Story* and *Bastar: The Naxal Story* both produced by Vipul Shah. Fortunately, most of these films have been celebrated among the audiences overwhelmingly. The group of pseudo-secular, those who still control the fake narratives to spread one-sided, false propaganda throughout the world, have also been super active in dismissing these films.

But not all filmmakers are lucky enough; forget about PM's praise to release their films, get proper distribution channels or theatres, or the cooperation from the local authorities, governments and positive reviews by film critics. It is almost swimming against the tide. After the success of those films, some independent filmmakers got the courage to tell the true stories, incidents which were unfortunately never been part of our history syllabus. The incidents were not discussed, or debated much by the elite of the society or the so-called liberal, secular, intellectual groups. Very few filmmakers dare to make films on those subjects, because, in most cases, the victims are the majority Hindu community while the oppressors are from other communities. Since the last many years there has been a tendency among the liberals, that whenever the Hindus are the victim, the stories have been buried with all extra efforts so that the so-called peace should be maintained in society.

Even if there has been immense loss of human lives, property, rape of women, and permanent displacement from the homeland, nothing is much more impor-



SINCE THE LAST MANY YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A TENDENCY AMONG THE LIBERALS, THAT WHENEVER THE HINDUS ARE THE VICTIM, THE STORIES HAVE BEEN BURIED WITH ALL EXTRA EFFORTS SO THAT THE SO-CALLED PEACE SHOULD BE MAINTAINED IN SOCIETY

tant than the pseudo ideology of keeping peace in the society to just appease the particular community.

That is why so far whatever films have been made on the partition of India very few films portrayed the true stories. Most of the films are sugar-coated to portray that the victims belong to both communities and it was a loss for everyone. No doubt the partition of India was a great loss for all the communities but why do we feel ashamed to point out the faults and the responsible people? Neither our history books nor the literature or cinema have been ever so brave as to tell the actual stories of our society.

Filmmaker M K Shivaaksh made the film *Accident or Conspiracy: Godhra* which is based on the infamous case of Godhra in Gujarat, where fifty-six Ram devotees were burnt alive in a train coach of the Sabarmati Express by one particular community. Again the film became the victim of the ecosystem and got a very limited release so the film can't be seen by many people in the country. While *The Sabarmati Report* not only got praise from the PM but also Yogi Adityanath, Pushkar Singh Dhami and Naib Singh Saini took time to watch the film along with the crew and casts and made the film tax-free in their respective states UP, Uttarakhand and Haryana because of Ekta Kapoor - Smriti Irani connection. But Shivaaksh was not that lucky at all.

He had planned to release his film *Accident or Conspiracy: Godhra* in February but the censor board delayed the process for seven months. They have asked for literally all the evidence and the makers have provided all the related evidence based on the

Nanavati - Mehta Commission Report, Court Verdicts, eyewitness records as well as all the supporting documents.

To study the material the censor board took seven months and even after that they gave the certificate where they chopped about fifty per cent of the content, informed Shivaaksh. Unfortunately, some renowned actors also took advantage of the situation from these novice young independent filmmakers to bully them, those who have good connections with the government agencies as well as some strong political backing. Initially, they talk big to bag the role and comparatively good remuneration, but after the film is completed, instead of helping the film for smooth sailing, they even discourage the other co-actors from not promoting their film just pretending to be secular. Forget to help with the censor process, they don't even come forward to promote the film, nor even post on social media.

Pushpendra Singh director of *Ajmer 92*, Kamal Chandra director of *Humare Baraah* and *Shivaaksh*, all of them have the same terrible experiences with some of their actors. Akashaditya Lama's *Bengal 1947* described the hardships faced by the displaced Hindu refugees from the then East Pakistan now Bangladesh to the completely unknown, unfamiliar terrain of present days Chhatisgarh.

A few political leaders' high ambitions divided the country into three different territories and created devastating for the crores of innocent people in the country. The film was released in very limited theatres. Akashaditya said that when he made the film in Chhatisgarh, the then Congress government helped him a lot

without imposing many terms and conditions, then Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, told him only not to show Pundit Nehru in a bad light.

Even a cabinet minister came to receive the shooting team at the airport, and arranged the full-proof security for the entire team, with overwhelming hospitality. By the time the film got ready to release BJP government came to power in Chhatisgarh, but unfortunately, the film never got any special attention or tax rebate from the local government. However, the films have been screened at various film festivals. In the same manner, another film *The Diary of West Bengal* directed by Sanoj Mishra has suffered massively at the hands of the government and political elements of West Bengal.

Finally, the film was released, which too a very limited release by the order of the court. All of these films are not only talking of the great human rights violations by one particular religious community towards the majority Hindu community but also these films are unbiased, true documentation of time a political era as well as the impact on society. Unfortunately, none of these films got any recognition, big awards or even tax rebates from the government. In this situation, a special section "The untold stories" could have been curated in the just concluded International Film Festival of India (IFFI) which would have been very much appropriate to showcase the film to the larger audiences, as well as the screening at IFFI would have certainly boosted the morale of the filmmakers.

(The writer is a Delhi based Film Festival curator. The views expressed are personal)

# What gaming regulation can learn from SEBI'S F&O regulations

India's gaming sector stands at a critical juncture. Thoughtful regulation can help it realise its immense potential while safeguarding consumers

Two seemingly disparate sectors—India's gaming industry and capital markets—are drawing significant attention in public policy discourse. Both sectors hold immense promise: gaming contributes to job creation, while capital markets foster capital formation. However, both also pose substantial challenges. Gaming can lead to habit formation and addiction, while the Futures and Options (F&O) segment of capital markets carries risks of speculative losses. Policymakers have tackled these challenges differently, with contrasting approaches in gaming and F&O regulation.



MANDAR KAGADE

around 568 million players—and employing 15,000 developers. The sector's revenue is projected to grow from \$3 billion in 2023 to \$6 billion by 2028, potentially creating 250,000 new jobs over the next decade. With development costs in India nearly 50 per cent lower than the global average, gaming has the potential to generate significant export revenues. However, this growth depends

on balanced regulation, particularly concerning gaming's habit-forming nature. Unfortunately, current proposals by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), and other stakeholders lean toward rigid, prescriptive measures, drawing inspiration from China's heavy-handed regulatory framework.

### Flaws in Current Gaming Regulation

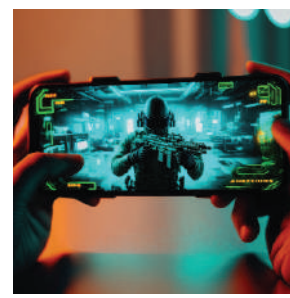
**1. Time and Age Restrictions** Proposals to impose strict time limits and age restrictions on gaming apps are touted as innovative but raise significant concerns. Forcing intermediaries to monitor minors' activities infringes on privacy and contravenes the data minimi-

sation principle of India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA). Such policies may inadvertently lead to surveillance overreach, compromising minors' online privacy.

Parents, who have a far greater vested interest in their children's wellbeing, are better positioned to manage their gaming habits. Handing this responsibility to unelected bureaucrats not only undermines parental discretion but also risks creating intrusive and overly broad policies.

### 2. Blanket Warnings and Advertising Restrictions

The Ministry of Education's 2021 advisory linking online gaming to "gaming disorder" is an overgeneralisation. Such broad statements, without clinical substantiation, stigmatise



gaming and equate it with gambling. Similarly, ASCI's restrictions on advertisements portraying gaming as a viable career path stifle creativity. These measures lump educational and cerebral games with gambling-like activities, disincentivising developers from creating "good habit-forming" games. This could slow innovation and limit the gaming sector's growth potential.

### Learning from SEBI'S Approach to F&O Regulation

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) faced a similar challenge with F&O trading, where explosive volumes exposed retail investors to speculative risks. Instead of resorting to outright bans,

### Key Steps by SEBI:

**Increased Contract Sizes:** Raising the minimum investment size by 50 per cent reduced speculative trading by retail investors.

**Disclosure Requirements:** Brokers were mandated to display potential downsides prominently, promoting informed decision-making.

**Structural Adjustments:** Limiting weekly expiries to one per exchange curbed excessive speculative activity. These steps exemplify a bal-

anced approach—relying on nudges and incentives rather than bans. SEBI recognised that heavy-handed policies could undermine broader goals, such as increasing equity market participation.

India's gaming sector can benefit from SEBI's measured approach to F&O regulation. Policymakers must embrace strategies that balance innovation, consumer protection, and industry growth. Here are three actionable recommendations:

### 1. Nudges and Incentives Over Mandates:

Rather than micromanaging user behavior, regulators can incentivise responsible gaming through voluntary measures. For instance, gaming platforms could offer rewards for adhering to healthy gaming limits.

### 2. Transparent Education Over Stigma

Policymakers should prioritise honest disclosures about gaming's potential downsides instead of messaging that fosters shame. Clear and factual communication can empower gamers to make informed choices without demonising the industry.

### 3. Consideration of Unintended Consequences:

A tunnel-vision approach risks stifling innovation and creating barriers to growth. Policymakers must evaluate how restrictive measures might deter investment, hinder creativity, or drive users to unregulated platforms.

(The writer is Founder & Principal, Black Dot Public Policy Advisors; views are personal)











# A GLIMPSE INTO WANCHO CULTURE

JANUARY READS



**Myth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh explores the cultural heritage, myths and challenges of the Wancho community, says SAKSHI PRIYA**

**M**yth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh by Tara Douglas and Jatwang Wangsa is a remarkable work that provides readers with a rich and insightful exploration of the Wancho tribe, a prominent indigenous community from the hilly regions of Arunachal Pradesh, India. This book serves as a vital document of the tribe's deep-rooted cultural heritage, values and social dynamics. The authors combine thorough research with a nuanced narrative, bringing to life the tribe's traditions, worldview and their historical context in a way that resonates with readers from various backgrounds.

A standout feature of the book is the authors' deep dive into the animistic belief system of the Wancho tribe. The book illustrates how the Wanchos view nature not simply as a physical environment, but as an interconnected and spiritual entity. In the tribe's worldview, animals, plants and natural features like rivers and mountains possess spirits that are integral to the tribe's existence. This perspective is explored through a variety of captivating myths, such as the story of Ganghan, the sun and his younger brother Katgong. These stories embody the tribe's philosophy of balance between humans and nature. The authors succeed in conveying the depth of this belief, which challenges the modern

tendency to view nature as a resource to be exploited, making it especially relevant in today's environmentally conscious world. The authors also offer a historical perspective that highlights the tribe's warrior culture, especially the practice of headhunting and its role in the tribe's defense against external threats. One of the most compelling historical accounts in the book is the detailed retelling of the Nyinu massacre of 1875, where the Wanchos ambushed British surveyors and killed 80 of them. The authors provide a balanced view of the event, contextualising it within the tribe's broader resistance to colonial forces. Rather than painting the tribe as "savage" or "violent," the book reframes the incident as an act of self-defense and an effort to protect their land and way of life. This nuanced portrayal is an important contribution, as it challenges reductive and one-sided portrayals of indigenous people in history.

In addition to the grand myths and historical narratives, the book also provides intimate stories that offer a glimpse into the everyday lives of the Wancho people. These personal tales of love, sacrifice and family serve to humanise the tribe, making their culture more relatable and accessible. For instance, the stories of tribal elders, who hold deep connections to the land and community, underscore the importance of kinship and collective memory within the

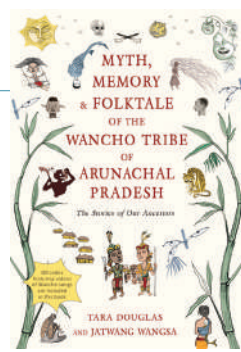
Wancho society. These stories are not only culturally enriching but emotionally engaging, as they capture universal themes that resonate with readers on a personal level. Moreover, the book does not shy away from addressing the challenges the Wancho tribe faces in the modern world. One of the more poignant aspects of the book is its examination of the tensions between traditional practices and the pressures of

modernisation. As younger generations drift away from their ancestral ways, the tribe's rich oral traditions and cultural practices are at risk of being lost. The authors acknowledge this tension and highlight efforts within the community to preserve its heritage. This theme of cultural preservation is one of the book's most powerful messages, as it calls attention to the fragility of indigenous cultures in the face of rapid societal changes. The book emphasises the importance of safeguarding these cultural traditions, which offer valuable lessons for the contemporary world.

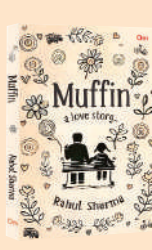
A key strength of the book is how it bridges the gap between academic research and cultural preservation. The authors not only provide anthropological study but also offer a platform for the voices of the Wancho people themselves. The book does not present the tribe through the lens of an outsider, but rather allows the Wanchos to tell their own stories in their own words. This respectful and inclusive approach ensures that the cultural heritage of the Wancho tribe is portrayed authentically, giving readers an opportunity to engage directly with the community's worldview. This is a refreshing departure from many studies that tend to objectify indigenous communities as subjects to be studied rather than active participants in their own representation.

In terms of writing style, the authors strike a delicate balance between scholarly rigor and engaging storytelling. The book is accessible and enjoyable to read, making it suitable for both academic audiences and casual readers with an interest in indigenous cultures. The authors work the myths, histories and personal stories together in a way that is both informative and captivating, ensuring that readers stay engaged while gaining valuable insights into the Wancho culture. Myth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe stands as a comprehensive and insightful portrayal of the Wancho people, their beliefs, traditions and struggles. Through meticulous research and a compassionate understanding of the tribe's way of life, Tara Douglas and Jatwang Wangsa have created a significant contribution to the documentation of indigenous cultures in India.


The book provides not only a deeper understanding of the Wanchos but also a broader perspective on the importance of preserving cultural diversity in a rapidly changing world. This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in anthropology, folklore, indigenous studies or the preservation of cultural heritage. It is a valuable resource that offers both academic insight and emotional resonance, making it an important read for those who seek to understand the depth and richness of indigenous cultures.



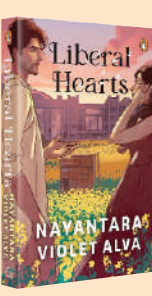
**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
**Book:** Myth, Memory & Folktale of the Wancho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh by Tara Douglas and Jatwang Wangsa  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books  
**Price:** ₹599




**Book:** Muffin: A Love Story  
**Author:** Rahul Sharma  
**Publisher:** OM International Books  
**Price:** ₹295




**Book:** Ex Object: The art of Holding on, Letting go  
**Publisher:** OM International Books  
**Price:** ₹695



**Book:** Liberal Hearts  
**Author:** Nayantara Violet Alva  
**Publisher:** Ebury Press  
**Price:** ₹350



**Book:** The Drowning  
**Author:** Nidhi Upadhyay  
**Publisher:** Ebury Press  
**Price:** ₹299

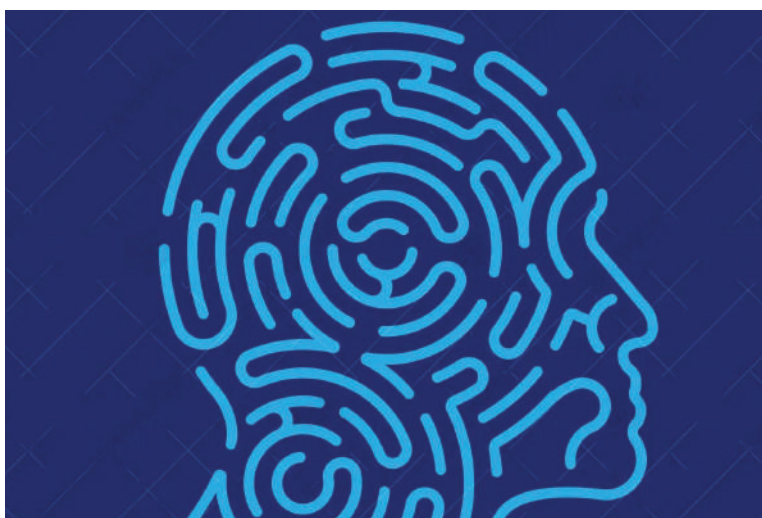


**Book:** Maupassant and a Cigar  
**Author:** Th. M. Raguathan  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books  
**Price:** ₹620

## LOVE, LOSS AND PSYCHE

BY TEAM VIVA

**R**ithwik Aryan's *Out of Madness* is a riveting debut that masterfully intertwines themes of mental health, love, loss and the fragility of human sanity. It is a novel born from an extraordinary journey of self-discovery, research and lived experience, offering readers an unfiltered glimpse into the complexities of the human psyche. Aryan's path to writing *Out of Madness* is as unconventional as the book itself. A dropout from Harvard Extension School, Aryan chose the



unpredictable path of storytelling over academia, immersing himself for over a year in the raw and unsettling environment of India's most notorious mental asylums. This decision infuses the novel with an authenticity that is rare and striking. The narrative follows Mason Moron, a psychology professor at Nalanda University who stages his death after discovering his wife's infidelity. He and Bahubali, an eccentric politician who is bent on shooting a cult adult film, get sucked into the tornado of insanity that compels their trip to a mental hospital, alongside a man blighted by normalisation, Mr. Staci, who is also trying to face her inner demons. Critiques of Aryan are equally accompanied by Aryan's own ability to navigate through and critique

Aryan's anguish, the same sheds light on how men are coerced into hiding their feelings. Using Aryan's masculinity and its portrayal through the character of Mason and Barbrugio, Aryan contemplates on how masculinity comes with grief and vulnerability, wherein, Aryan poses those males do not have to stoically conform to societal gender norms. Aryan in a more sensitive manner showcases the effect of societal pressures and expectations in suppressing feelings in men. What can be termed as one of Aryan's strongest suit shines in this very novel, the other novels that Aryan has penned encapsulate emotion through an extremely fact-based and observational lens. Aryan unlike many others who idealistically view and comment on other's pain, stayed in a

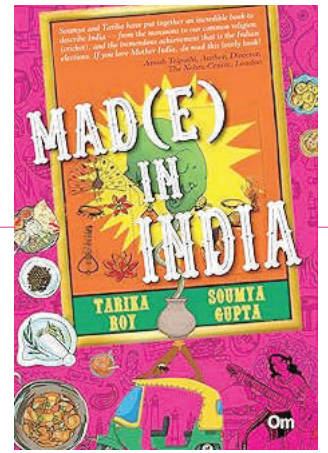
mental asylum while conducting empirical research, the combination of these two polarising views helped him stably sit in the middle. Aryan's characters are multifaceted, each grappling with their own struggles. Mason's existential crisis, Bahubali's delusional ambition and Staci's haunting past create a web of intersecting narratives that challenge readers to reflect on the nature of obsession, love, and redemption. The book's philosophical undertones deepen its impact, as Aryan delves into profound questions about freedom, identity and the human condition. The interplay of grief and desire, sanity and insanity, creates a narrative that is as thought-provoking as it is emotionally charged. The novel is not without its quirks. Its wild plot twists, dark humor and sometimes surreal narrative might alienate readers seeking a more conventional storyline. However, these elements make *Out of Madness* stand out as a fearless work that refuses to conform. *Out of Madness* is a bold debut that challenges societal norms and delves deep into the human psyche. Aryan's unflinching honesty, coupled with his evocative prose, makes this a must-read for those interested in mental health, emotional complexity, and the chaos of human existence. Rithwik Aryan has crafted a tale that is as much a reflection of his own journey as it is a story of his characters. With its raw emotion, intricate storytelling, and philosophical depth, *Out of Madness* cements Aryan's place as a writer to watch.

## The Essence of Indian Life

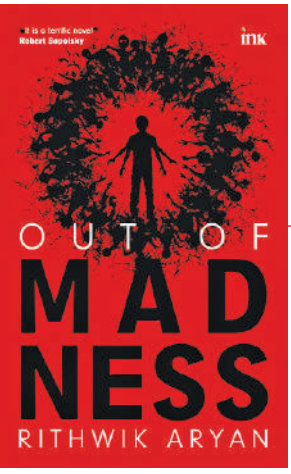
BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL

**M**ad(e) In India penetrates the rich and amusing psyche of Indianness and Indian people. More than the politics of the nation, it presents the very essence of a nation - its people, its peculiarities, its multitude of caste systems, languages, superstitions, and an even bigger multitude of Gods and Goddesses worshipped. It provides a vivid illustration of the chaotic nature of the Indian metropolitan areas, the obsession inherited by its people with movie stars and their characteristics, and the Indian concept of optimistically doing whatever it takes to solve or fix a problem, termed 'jugaad'. It also underlines Indian culinary art, the diversity of the cultural and traditional practices of society, and the various forms of art present in the nation, showcasing how the integration of such diversity unifies the country, even in terms of conflicted domains. Out of a combination of satirical humour, perceptive and nuanced observations, and a repository of Indian expressions, the authors have come up with an engaging and illuminating account of the intricate web that is India. This, in turn, makes the book very interesting and highly recommended for someone who wants to discover the informatic and spiritual side of

India. *Mad(e) In India* humorously and cleverly depicts what it is to be Indian and how it is to live in this country. The authors of the book discuss Indian life and its various aspects, such as the panoply of languages spoken, the various cultures and religions, and even the everyday life and the unique approaches to solving problems, also known as jugaad, as per Indian traditions. The book takes note of the idiosyncratic lifestyles of people living in different metropolises of the nation, their compulsive fandom for movie stars, and the motley of food, customs, and ethnic handicrafts within the country. The authors demonstrate how one thread generalises the millions of complexities that exist in the Indian fabric - the ability of India to hold within itself so many differences. One can sense that the authors are writing in a conversational yet humorous way, which in many places comes laced with Indian expressions, making *Mad(e) In India* an interesting read even for those who merely seek entertainment. In case you have ever wondered how the Hindi film industry has always had a glamorised image of this country, *Mad(e) In India* is fun and informative, providing a comprehensive look at how such misconceptions arise and helping to clear them.



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
**Book:** Mad(e) In India by Tarika Roy and Soumya Gupta  
**Publisher:** Om Publishers  
**Price:** ₹499



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
**Book:** Out of Madness by Rithwik Aryan  
**Publisher:** Ocam (an imprint of BluOne Ink)  
**Price:** ₹499

# Tottenham beats Liverpool 1-0 in English League Cup semifinals

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
Lucas Bergvall's first goal for Tottenham secured a 1-0 win over Liverpool in the on Wednesday in a first-leg match notable for a serious-looking injury to Rodrigo Bentancur and the first stadium announcement by a referee in the English game. The 18-year-old Bergvall slotted home the winner in the 86th minute following a pass from Dominic Solanke, who thought 10 minutes earlier that he had given Tottenham the lead. That goal was ruled out after a VAR check for offside and referee Stuart Attwell communicated the decision via a wireless microphone to spectators inside Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and to TV viewers. In the sixth minute, Bentancur — the Uruguay midfielder who plays for Tottenham — fell to the ground and lay prone after landing awkwardly when attempting a header from a corner. He was carried off on a stretcher, to applause from around the ground, after receiving treatment during a 10-minute delay and Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou confirmed after the game that Bentancur was "conscious" and talking. The second leg is at Anfield on Feb. 6. Newcastle leads Arsenal 2-0 after the first leg of the other semifinal match. Liverpool, the defending League Cup champion, saw its 24-match unbeaten run in all competitions come to an end and there was a hint of controversy about only the team's second loss of the season. Visiting players and manager Arne Slot were unhappy that Bergvall was on the field to score what proved to be the winning goal after he escaped collecting a second yellow card for a foul on Kostas Tsimikas moments earlier. Indeed, Tsimikas was off the field, waiting to come



back on having received treatment following Bergvall's tackle, when the Sweden midfielder tucked home his finish. Slot earned a yellow card himself for his protests, though he shook Attwell's hand after the final whistle. "The decision he made had a lot of impact on the result tonight," Slot said. Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk said it was "quite obvious" that Bergvall deserved a second yellow card. "And a minute later he scores the winner," Van Dijk said. "He (Attwell) made a mistake, in my opinion. And I told him that." It was a busy end to the match for Attwell, who took center stage after there was a video review following Solanke's strike in the 76th minute. After being notified that Solanke was offside, Attwell used the public address system to declare the goal had been ruled out, in an NFL-style announcement. The League Cup semifinals were chosen to pilot a process in England that has been widely used in other sports, and in soccer at the Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in 2023 and other FIFA events. **Kinsky's dream debut** Three days after signing from Sparta Prague, Antonin Kinsky — a 21-year-old goalkeeper from the Czech Republic — was handed his debut by Tottenham and he kept a clean sheet after producing a string of great saves, notably from Liverpool substitute Darwin Nunez. His parents and sister were in the crowd to watch him play his first match in English soccer and he was emotional after the game. "I have never dreamed this," Kinsky said. Tottenham signed the highly rated Kinsky with first-choice goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario currently out injured.



## Aiming for hat-trick of SA20 titles: Markram

**PTI ■ CAPE TOWN**  
Sunrisers Eastern Cape skipper Aiden Markram says his side is pumped up to make it a hat-trick of titles at the SA20 as it faces MI Cape Town in its opening game. Markram's team has won both the editions of the competition so far. The tournament begins days after South Africa blanked Pakistan in a Test series at home. "Definitely still really pumped to try and get a third one this year. Obviously, (there are) no guarantees and it's a hugely competitive tournament, so hopefully in a month's time something cool can happen," Markram said during the Captains' Day press conference here. Former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said his side Joburg Super Kings haven't got the ideal weather to finalise its preparations as it has rained for the last few days in Johannesburg, but his players are surely up for a fight. "From my side, the weather has been a bit of a downer down in Joburg, it's been pretty wet. But from a squad perspective, some great signings in Joburg too, and you know the likes of Jonny Bairstow, Devon Conway, (Matheesha) Pathirana," du Plessis said. "Those three guys and

## I think he will be the next captain: Gavaskar on Jasprit Bumrah

**PTI ■ SYDNEY**  
The legendary Sunil Gavaskar is in awe of Jasprit Bumrah's leadership qualities and reckons the peerless fast bowler will succeed Rohit Sharma as the next captain of the Indian team following his extraordinary display in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Bumrah recently produced one of the best-ever bowling performances by an overseas pacer in Australia and picked 32 wickets over five Tests. He was also captain during India's only victory in the series, helping the visitors to a convincing win at the Optus Stadium in Perth in the opener. "He could be the next man. I think he will be the next man. Because he leads from the front, he has got a very good air about him, the air of a leader but not somebody who is going to pressure on you," Gavaskar



midway through Australia's first innings at the SCG in the final Test. In Bumrah's absence, the home team chased down 162 on the third day to win the series 3-1. The lead pacer was handed the captaincy in the final Test after the out-of-form Rohit Sharma "opted out" but a back spasm prevented Bumrah from bowling on the crucial third day. Bumrah destroyed Australia in Perth with eight wickets, grabbed six wickets in the first innings at the Gabba, and nearly turned the Boxing Day Test on its head with his exploits on the fourth afternoon at MCG. In the series decider at SCG, Bumrah sent back Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne early in Australia's first innings but could only bowl one over after lunch on the second day when the game was evenly poised.



## McSweeney returns to Australia squad for Sri Lanka tour

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Nathan McSweeney was recalled to Australia's test squad on Thursday to tour Sri Lanka, less than three weeks after being dropped from the top order. Australia's selectors announced their squad Thursday for the two-test tour, with several fresh faces added to the group that played India in Sydney last week. Australia won the five-test series 3-1 and clinched a spot in the World Test Championship against South Africa at Lord's in June. Steve Smith will lead the squad to Sri Lanka while regular skipper Pat Cummins is on leave as his wife awaits the birth of the couple's second child. Australia's selectors concentrated on spin for the two Sri Lanka tests, with uncapped 21-year-old Cooper Connolly among the seven full or part-time slow bowling options in the 16-man squad. Connolly, a left-arm allrounder, has represented Australia in limited-overs cricket and has been called up for his maiden test campaign along with specialist spinners Todd Murphy and Matthew Kuhnemann. McSweeney scored 72 runs at an average of 14.4 in his first three tests against India, before being replaced by Sam Konstas for the Melbourne Cricket Ground test starting Dec. 26. The 25-year-old McSweeney has batted at No. 3 for South Australia state this season — averaging 97 — but has previously batted further down the order. Cricket Australia also said Cummins was "focusing on an ankle issue which was managed through the test summer" and fellow paceman Josh Hazlewood was continuing his recovery from a calf injury. Mitchell Marsh was omitted for the tour, joining Hazlewood in focusing on the 50-overs Champion's Trophy in Pakistan which immediately follows the test tour. The first test begins Jan. 29 and the second Feb. 6, both at spin-friendly Galle International Stadium. A one-off one-day international is scheduled for Feb. 13, also at Galle. "Sri Lanka is a challenging and exciting place to tour given the different conditions players may be presented with," selector George Bailey said. "This squad provides several ways to structure the XI depending on what type of wickets we may encounter in each match." Australia squad: Steve Smith (captain), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cooper Connolly, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Matt Kuhnemann, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Nathan McSweeney, Todd Murphy, Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster.

## Mandhana-led India eye dominant show in first-ever bilateral series against Ireland

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**  
Riding high on a dominant performance against the West Indies, India under Smriti Mandhana will look to carry forward their winning momentum when they take on Ireland in the first-ever women's bilateral series, with the opening ODI scheduled here on Friday. India had swept the West Indies 3-0 in the ODI series, following a 2-1 triumph in the T20 series. Mandhana emerged as the top run-scorer across formats, scoring 148 runs in the ODI series, including two half-centuries, and 193 runs in the T20s, with three successive fifties. Notably, she scored five consecutive half-centuries, only missing out in the final ODI and Mandhana will look to bring the same form as she leads the team in the absence of regular captain Harmanpreet



outings, scoring 134 and 112 runs, respectively, with a fifty each in the ODIs. In the bowling department, Renuka's absence will be felt as she was the leading wicket-taker with 10 wickets in the ODI series against the West Indies. The onus will now fall on newcomers Titas Sadhu and Saima Thakor to make their mark. Sadhu, 20, who has three wickets in ODIs and 13 wickets in T20Is, will be expected to provide early breakthroughs, having impressed with her pace and swing in domestic and recent international cricket. Saima, 28, will also look to continue her good form after taking seven wickets in eight ODIs so far. Vice-captain and off-spinner Deepti Sharma will be crucial, especially after her career-best bowling performance of 6 for 31 in the third ODI against the West Indies. Priya Mishra and Tanuja Kanwar will play key roles in supporting Deepti.

# Australian Open 2025: Cases involving Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek make doping a top topic

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
It is a topic that shadowed tennis in 2024 and is still a talking point as the 2025 Grand Slam season opens at the Australian Open on Sunday (Saturday EST): doping and the cases involving Jannik Sinner — which actually is still not fully resolved — and Iga Swiatek. Both spent much of last year at No. 1, and Sinner still will hold that spot in the ATP rankings when he steps on court at Melbourne Park to begin the defense of his championship, one of two major trophies he won over the past 12 months. Swiatek, a five-time Slam champ and the woman leading the WTA rankings most of the past three seasons, is currently No. 2 behind Aryna Sabalenka, who will be chasing her third consecutive title in Australia. "Obviously, there are going to be some negative comments," Swiatek said. "You're not going to avoid that." Most current players prefer to remain silent when asked about the cases. But there are those who have been happy to weigh in, including 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic, raising questions about whether Sinner and Swiatek were treated the same as other players facing similar circumstances and why their situations were kept under wraps for months. "I sit and wonder, Why such a big difference in treatment and judgment?" was two-time major champion Simona Halep's reaction to Swiatek's punishment. "I can't find, and I don't think there can be, a logical answer."

Halep initially was banned for four years after testing positive for the banned drug Roxadustat at the 2022 U.S. Open, then had that penalty reduced to nine months on appeal — although she already had been off the tour longer than that. She was supposed to compete at Melbourne Park for the first time in three years, but withdrew from qualifying because of knee and shoulder pain. No one has been louder about the subject lately than Nick Kyrgios, the 2022 Wimbledon runner-up who missed nearly all of the past two seasons because of injuries. He has been commenting regularly, in real life and online, even taking a job (that he said was in jest) at Cruz Hewitt after the 16-year-old son of Australian Davis Cup captain Lleyton posted a photo with



Open, and led Italy to the Davis Cup. He heads into the Australian Open on a 14-match winning streak. Hanging over it all is this: Two positive tests for a trace amount of an anabolic steroid in March were made public in August; the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) determined he shouldn't be suspended because the exposure to Clostebol was considered accidental — the result of a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger. The World Anti-Doping Agency was not entirely convinced about the exoneration and thinks a ban of one to two years would be appropriate. Its appeal, lodged in September, is still pending, and a final determination is expected after the Australian

Open ends. "It's in (my) head a little bit," Sinner said, adding that he is confident everything will go his way. What happened with Iga Swiatek's failed doping test? Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in late November after testing positive for a banned heart medication known as TMZ. She failed an out-of-competition test in August, and the ITIA accepted her explanation that it was caused by the contamination of a nonprescription medication, melatonin, that Swiatek was taking for jet lag and sleeping issues. She missed three tournaments — although the real reason wasn't revealed at the time — and finished serving her punishment after the season was done. "This whole process was pretty abstract sometimes and hard to understand," Swiatek said, surely speaking for many observers. Which is why, perhaps, Dutch captain Paul Haarhuis said what he did after his team lost to Sinner's Italy in the Davis Cup finals. "Jannik, in my personal opinion, is an unbelievably nice guy (and) great player," Haarhuis said, "but we (might) never know what happened." Are there other noteworthy cases in tennis? While Sinner and Swiatek will compete in Melbourne, another player involved in a recent ITIA case won't: Max Purcell, who won men's doubles titles at the U.S. Open in September and Wimbledon in 2022 and was a two-time runner-up at the Australian Open.