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INSIDE

MONEY 10
EXPENDITURE AT MAHA KUMBH TO
PUSH GDP GROWTH IN Q4: CEA

CHANDIGARH, SATURDAY MARCH 1, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹2

www.dailypioneer.com

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

SENSEX IN A TAILSPIN



PRASANNA SINGH
GUEST REPORTER

A stock market downturn, as and when it happens, invariably catches people, and usually these are always retail investors, off guard. We are seeing this play out in India's leading indices over the past three months as well. In a sort of slow motion glide that seems to have suddenly picked up pace this week, provoking this article as well. India's leading stock exchange barometers have all hit new 'lows'. There is a need to qualify that word, because these are corrections when seen from the peaks these indices hit, all in

September. So if the Nifty Mid-cap and small cap indices both hit their peaks early in September, the broader indices comprising the BSE Sensex and the Nifty 50, comprising larger cap stocks, actually hit their highs in the final week of September, on September 27. Today, while the large caps indices are down 155 points from their peaks, the mid cap and small cap indices are down 21 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. Of course, the correction in many hyped stocks is even worse. For crores of retail investors who had piled into stocks after watching a breathless post-COVID rally that rarely stuttered, it has been agonising, watching their 'wealth' evaporate. Especially when we consider how even at the peak,

many complained that the rise has been driven by a few, select stocks disproportionately. Leaving only index fund holders uniformly happy. **SO WHY DID THE MARKETS CORRECT SO STEEPLY?** The answer lies in the previous rise itself. Like almost all sustained bull markets, the highs the market saw in September was the fag end of a period of sustained growth, a lot of it is not justified anymore by the quarterly results many key sectors and firms showcased between Q2 and Q3. Worse, when compared to global peers, India's markets were once again trading at a premium, at par with, or higher than most global markets bar the still frothy US markets. A premium, most foreign investors seem to have



decided, is not justified in a volatile global environment. And followed it with almost 2 Lakh Crores of sustained selling since. All the anecdotal and actual signals were blinking red, namely, the stamped like rush for IPOs

among firms and investors alike, and perhaps the worst of all, a quiet reducing of stakes in many firms by promoters. As always, among all the reasons trotted out to explain these warning signs, perhaps the most silly, and eventually foolish one as always, was that 'this time it's different'. It never is. India's growth prospects have become almost mythical now, in how there is a bull case for 10 per cent GDP growth, yet, we always find our economy overheating at the first signs of a sustained period of 8 per cent growth or even less. Brought down by rising inflation, corruption scandals, or yet another election or oil price spike. The recent trend towards giveaways without a funding plan has not

helped. The final trigger for the slide in 2025 has largely been the Trump administration and its actions, threatened or otherwise. If there is one thing that the market does not like, it is uncertainty. And the Trump administration has added dollops of it to global trade and markets including India with its tariff threats and actions. For many investors this is their first experience with a correction this sharp and long. And they will seek to find answers in every argument, right from the decision to raise capital gains tax on stock market gains, to the tougher rules for FII investments, or the government's apparent pause on further public sector privatisation. Perhaps all of these make a good

point, or perhaps not. After all, wasn't this the year when domestic investors had all but made foreign investors irrelevant according to many claims, including from the government? Clearly not, as we can see. Quite simply, sentiment has turned, and from a change in direction, taken a complete U-turn it would appear. That is not quite as uncommon or improbable as it seems, as stock markets are prone to going to extremes in either direction. One feels we are quite close to the point where the downturn might have gone well beyond what fundamentals justify. But readers will do well to remember that eventually, one thing that the stocks markets do best consistently is reward performance. So firms that meet their projections for three or more quarters without fail, will eventually find their efforts rewarded.

41 trapped in Uttarakhand avalanche

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN/NEW DELHI

Heavy snowfall in Uttarakhand resulting in an avalanche led to at least 41 Border Roads Organisation workers (BRO) being buried in the high altitude border village of Mana, Chamoli district on Friday. The workers were clearing snow when they were trapped. The snowslide had initially buried 57 men but 16 were pulled out safely. There was no immediate news of casualties and rescue efforts were on. Later, 32 of total 57 workers were rescued on Friday, sources said. The avalanche has buried a camp of the BRO between Mana and Badrinath and multiple teams battled



Rescue operation underway after BRO labourers got trapped under an avalanche, in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand

operations have been halted due to bad weather and the impending danger of more avalanches. It will restart when the weather improves, sources said. Himachal Pradesh and higher reaches of Jammu and Kashmir also saw snowfall and rain. Several northern states including Delhi, Punjab and Haryana received rainfall leading to a dip in temperature. As regards the mishap in Uttarakhand, the avalanche buried a camp of the BRO between Mana and Badrinath, Chamoli District Magistrate Sandeep Tiwari said as multiple teams battled tough terrain, heavy snow and rain to rescue the workers. It was also learnt rescue

HM directs Delhi Govt, Police to act tough on Bangladeshis



HM Amit Shah with Delhi CM Rekha Gupta chairs a meeting to review law and order situation in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday reviewed law and order situation in the national Capital with Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta while directing Delhi police to take action against the networks that help illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas entering India, to take measures to ensure women safety, and ensure ruthless

action against inter-state gangs. It was the first top level interaction after BJP came to power. The AAP regime did not attend such meetings in its 10-year rule. A key decision taken in the meeting was regarding the expeditious disposal of the 2020 Delhi riots cases. Shah urged the Delhi government to appoint special prosecutors to ensure speedy trials, as per the MHA. Another policy shift was announced regarding construction-related matters, where it was decided that Delhi police permission would no longer be required. The Union Home Minister said strict action should also be taken against police stations and sub-divisions that consistently perform poorly. On traffic congestion, Shah said the Delhi Police should identify the places witnessing traffic jams daily and the Delhi police commissioner and chief secretary should meet and find a quick solution to this.



Bureaucrat back at SEBI, after stormy Buch era

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tuhin Kanta Pandey, the government's divestment man who played a key role in sale of Air India as well as listing of the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), has been appointed as head of SEBI, marking return of bureaucrat at the helm of market regulator. Pandey, the top bureaucrat in the Finance Ministry, will replace Madhavi Puri Buch, whose term ends Friday as chairman of the SEBI. Buch, 60, who was the first woman and the only person from the private sector to head SEBI, had a tumultuous three-year term marked with allegations of conflict of interest as well as sweeping overhaul of regulations. Prior to her, the position was mostly held by bureaucrats. A career bureaucrat, Pandey, 59, is currently the finance secretary and is known to be stickler for rules and a clean image. He will have a three-year term. He is the second bureaucrat from the finance ministry to have been appointed to key roles in the financial sector since December. His colleague in charge of the revenue department Sanjay Malhotra was in December appointed as Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). A 1987-batch Odisha-cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, Pandey has been the longest serving divestment secretary, serving for over five years. The role of finance secretary was added to his portfolio in September last year by virtue of him being the senior most among the secretaries in the finance ministry.

Heatwave days ahead in March

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

WEATHER

AQI 121
MAX 25°C(-1)
MIN 18.4°C(+5.9)

India is likely to witness above-normal maximum temperatures in most parts between March and May. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), more heatwave days are also likely to be witnessed across most parts of the country during the months. IMD data shows India also recorded its warmest February in 124 years with an average temperature of more than 22°C. For the first time, the average minimum temperature across the country was recorded at over 15°C, which is the warmest, recorded ever. In terms of the average maximum temperature, February 2025 has been the second warmest, just behind the corresponding month in 2023. In terms of the average maximum temperature, February 2025 has been the second warmest, just behind the corresponding month in 2023. The reverse happened in 2022. April of that year in north India was the hottest on record, while temperatures in Feb were close to normal. The IMD attributed the unusual rise in temperature to a presence of strong easterly winds, which they said were blocking the cool sea breeze. The IMD declares a heatwave

when the maximum is over 40°C in the plains, and also the temperature is 4.5°C or more above normal. The IMD said during the upcoming hot weather season (March to May (MAM)), above-normal maximum temperatures are most likely over most parts of the country, except over southern parts of Peninsular India, and isolated pockets of Northeast India where normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely. The above-normal minimum temperatures are likely over most parts of the country except some isolated southernmost regions of Peninsular India where normal minimum temperatures are likely. "Monthly maximum temperatures for March are likely to be above normal over most parts of India, except over some southernmost parts of Peninsular India, where below normal maximum temperatures are likely. During this period the above normal monthly minimum temperatures are likely over

most parts of the country except some parts of Northwest India and South Peninsula, where normal minimum temperatures are most likely," the IMD said. According to IMD, above-normal heatwave days are likely over most parts of central India and adjoining northern parts of South Peninsula and some areas of northwest and east India.. Analysis of IMD's century-long temperature data shows the October-December post-monsoon season is warming at a rate of 1.01°C per century, followed by the January-February winter months at 0.73°C. Pre-monsoon (March-May) and monsoon (June-September) seasons are warming at relatively slower rates of 0.62°C and 0.45°C respectively. Delhi recorded its warmest February night in 74 years, with the minimum temperature at Safdarjung reaching 19.5°C on Thursday — the highest for the month in the period between 1951 to 2025, according to the IMD. Meanwhile, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) said, "Delhi recorded its lowest AQI in 2025, today, with average AQI clocking 121, as per the daily AQI Bulletin by CPCB. Average AQI of 121 for Delhi on Friday is the lowest during January - February in last three years since 2023."



(Left to right): LoP Atishi interacts with police personnel after allegedly being stopped from entering the state Vidhan Sabha premises on Friday and Delhi Assembly speaker, Vijendra Gupta



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Delhi Speaker, Atishi engage in letter war

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A letter war erupted between the Delhi Assembly speaker, Vijendra Gupta and the Leader of Opposition (LoP), Atishi on Friday, following the suspension of 21 MLAs from the Vidhan Sabha, with Atishi calling it an "insult to the people's mandate" while Speaker Vijender Gupta defended the move, citing parliamentary rules and past disruptions. The controversy deepened when the suspended MLAs including former chief minister Atishi were prevented from entering the Assembly premises the next day while attempting to hold a protest at the Mahatma Gandhi statue. The LoP termed the move "unprecedented" and accused the BJP government of "crossing all limits of dictatorship" by stifling the Opposition's voice.

"The Opposition was expelled from the House for chanting 'Jai Bhim' slogans, while BJP MLAs continued raising 'Modi-Modi' slogans without any repercussions. Preventing Opposition MLAs from entering the Assembly premises is a blatant insult to democracy," Atishi asserted. "This is an insult not only to the MLAs but also to the mandate given by the people," she said. Responding to Atishi's claims, the Speaker rejected the allegations of bias and accused the Opposition of disrupting the proceedings of the House. He defended the decision to bar the suspended MLAs from the premises, citing Assembly Rule 277, which states that "A member who has been suspended from the service of the House shall be barred from entering the premises of the House and from taking part in the proceedings of the House

and Committees". Gupta also criticised the Opposition's conduct, stating that disruptions had begun even before the LG's address. Referring to the Speaker's election on February 24, he wrote, "It should have been a dignified process. Unfortunately, the process was marred by sloganeering and disruption by the opposition members. Despite this unbecoming conduct, I exercised restraint and did not take any disciplinary action." Regarding the LG's address on February 25, Gupta pointed to the fifth schedule (code of conduct rules), which mandates that interruptions during the LG's speech be treated as "disrespect towards the Lt Governor and contempt of the House". He said suspending the MLAs was not an arbitrary decision but based on clear parliamentary rules.

A home preserved to keep identity alive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ITANAGAR

In a fast-changing world, where traditions are often forgotten, a young woman is ensuring her community's heritage lives on-not in books or behind glass, but within the very walls of her home. Leike Chomu, a 24-year-old from the Monpa community in western Arunachal Pradesh, has turned her 200-year-old ancestral house into a living museum. More than just a collection of artefacts, the museum itself is a piece of history-built using ancient Monpa techniques with mud and stone. "It's about keeping our cultural identity alive," Chomu said. The idea was mooted by WWF India as part of its efforts to safeguard the unique heritage of the Monpa community. However, the transformation of the house into a museum was something she took on personally.

From restoring the structure, conserving artefacts and setting up the space to make it accessible to visitors, Chomu has been actively involved in every step. "For me, this is more than just a project. It is my family's legacy," she added. With modernisation rapidly changing traditional lifestyles, she wanted to safeguard Monpa knowledge and everyday practices before they faded away. Instead of creating a conventional museum with only artefacts, this initiative preserves the house itself, showcasing Monpa architecture, lifestyle, and traditions, Chomu said. Visitors don't just see historical objects. They can experience how the Monpa people lived centuries ago, she added. After months of dedication, the museum was formally launched on October 5 last year. Since then, many tourists and culture enthusiasts have



Artifacts displayed inside the museum that Leike Chomu, a 24-year-old woman from the Monpa community, created after transforming her 200-year-old ancestral home, at Chug Valley in the Dirang area of West Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh

Chess colossus, Boris Spassky dies at 88

PTI ■ MOSCOW

Boris Spassky, a Soviet-era world chess champion who lost his title to American Bobby Fischer in a legendary 1972 match that became a proxy for Cold War rivalries, died Thursday in Moscow. He was 88. The death of the one-time chess prodigy was announced by the International Chess Federation, the game's governing body. No cause was given. Spassky was "one of the greatest players of all time," the group said on the social platform X. He "left an indelible mark on the game." The televised 1972 match with Fischer, at the height of the Cold War, became an

international sensation and was known as the "Match of the Century." When Fischer won the international chess crown in Reykjavik, Iceland, the then-29-year-old chess genius from Brooklyn, New York, brought the US its first world chess title. Fischer, known to be testy and difficult, died in 2008. After his victory of Spassky, he later forfeited the title by refusing to defend it. Former world champion Garry Kasparov wrote on X that Spassky "was never above befriending and mentoring the next generation, especially those of us who, like him, didn't fit comfortably into the Soviet machine."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Lawbreakers as lawmakers

Eradication of the influence of criminality in politics must be taken up on priority

In recent years, the issue of criminalisation in politics has increasingly come under scrutiny. With more politicians facing criminal charges and convictions, questions have arisen about whether the legal framework governing their disqualification from contesting elections is adequate. The ongoing debate, highlighted by a recent Supreme Court case challenging the constitutional validity of limiting disqualification periods, brings to the fore not only legal interpretations but also the broader menace of criminal influences in our political system. A petition filed before the Supreme Court has argued for a lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting elections. The petitioner contends that limiting disqualification to a fixed period—currently six years after release for offenses under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951—undermines constitutional provisions designed to keep criminals away from power. In response, the Centre has defended the existing provisions, arguing that a lifetime ban is “unduly harsh” and that it would amount to directing Parliament to frame a law in a particular manner—an overreach of judicial power. The government’s counter-affidavit emphasises that there are numerous penal laws that operate within a time-bound framework, ensuring that deterrence is balanced against the need to avoid undue severity.



This legal tussle highlights a crucial policy debate: should convicted politicians face an indefinite prohibition from electoral participation, or is a fixed term of disqualification both constitutional and proportionate? The government argues that the current system, which temporarily excludes convicted individuals,

respects the principles of proportionality and reasonability. In its view, the legislative choice to limit the disqualification period is designed to offer both a punitive and rehabilitative measure while preserving democratic participation. Beyond legal debates, the deeper issue remains the rising tide of criminality within political circles. Criminal elements entering politics not only threaten the integrity of democratic institutions but also erode public trust. Politicians with a history of criminal behaviour may be more likely to engage in corrupt practices, undermining the rule of law. As criminalisation in politics becomes more pronounced, the call for stringent measures intensifies. Addressing the criminalisation of politics requires a multi-pronged approach that extends beyond the question of lifetime bans. Parliament could consider revisiting and potentially tightening the eligibility criteria for political candidates. Whether through a longer ban or additional restrictions for those convicted of certain serious crimes, legislative reforms should aim to disincentivise criminal conduct. There may be strong arguments for and against the life ban of convicted persons becoming lawmakers but one thing all can agree upon is that we do not need them in our parliament or state assemblies. How to do it is not difficult but who will bell the cat?

PICTALK



Tourists at the Taj Mahal, in Agra

PTI

Rupee depreciation calls for structural reforms

Despite notable gains such as a reduced trade deficit, emerging challenges including global tariff tensions highlight the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms

Over the past decade (2014-2024), the compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of India’s exports of goods and services in USD terms has fallen sharply to about 5 per cent, compared to 17.9 per cent during 2004-2014 and 12.7 per cent in the period 1994-2004. This decline in export growth has coincided with a significant depreciation of the Rupee, which now trades at roughly Rs 86/87 per USD, a stark contrast to the Rs 60.50 per USD seen in 2013-14. In contrast, between 2000 and 2012, the Rupee remained relatively stable with occasional appreciation driven by robust export growth at an impressive 19.5 per cent CAGR in USD terms.

This historical perspective demonstrates that a strong, stable Rupee is not an inherent barrier to export performance. In fact, the key to sustained export growth lies in enhancing overall economic efficiency. This efficiency is shaped by a broad range of policies and regulations that affect factors such as capital, energy, logistics and raw materials. By improving these inputs, India can propel



exports forward while maintaining Rupee stability. A weak Rupee, however, tends to deter global investors. Given that domestic savings alone cannot fulfill India’s vast investment requirements, a steady inflow of global funds remains essential until the country transitions into a “Trade-Surplus Nation.” Recent changes in US leadership have sparked a tariff war, adding another layer of complexity to India’s export environment.

Despite the sluggish export performance in the past decade, the country achieved a notable reduction in its trade deficit—from 4.3 per cent of nominal GDP in 2004-2014 to an average of 2.5 per cent in 2014-2024—primarily due to lower import volumes. In 2024, inward foreign remittances surged to \$129 billion, the highest globally, which

played a crucial role in reducing the current account deficit (CAD) from 1.7 per cent of GDP in 2013-14 to about 0.7 per cent. Consequently, Forex reserves swelled to 18.3 per cent of nominal GDP, underscoring the positive impact of these remittances.

Looking ahead, potential challenges loom. Aggressive deportation policies by the US could discourage migration, thereby diminishing remittance flows. Moreover, if India shifts its oil and gas import sources from Iran, Gulf nations, and Russia to the US, the resulting higher import bill may widen the trade deficit. In response, India must marshal all available policy tools to boost exports, reduce imports, and eventually become a trade-surplus nation. Facilitating legal migration remains crucial until domestic job creation can sustain remittance inflows, which are vital for curbing the CAD.

To further stimulate export growth, targeted export incentives for manufactured and agro-based goods should be implemented, while the untapped potential of service exports—ranging from

tourism and healthcare to education and professional consultancy—must be unlocked through dedicated policies. Additionally, reducing petroleum imports requires massive investments in railway infrastructure and expanded public transportation to lower fuel demand, and increased spending on petroleum exploration is the need of the hour.

Enhancing domestic production of thermal coal and adopting innovative measures to reduce gold imports, such as a revised gold deposit scheme, are also essential steps. Finally, attracting global funds through measures like reducing capital gains tax on foreign portfolio investments (FPIs) and encouraging long-term borrowing via bonds backed by sovereign guarantees will help meet India’s investment needs. Overcoming outdated colonial-era business and taxation laws remains critical. A second wave of structural reforms is needed to stabilise the Rupee, secure higher GDP growth, and elevate India’s stature on the global stage.

(The writer is an industrialist; views are personal)



R P GUPTA

Strengthening public institutions in the digital age

Digital transformation is reshaping public policy, it is imperative that we embrace it without compromising our enduring commitment to integrity



O P SINGH



I am a civil servant passionate about governance, institutional resilience and public policy, exploring how institutions can adapt to the digital age. Imagine a world where policies are debated, revised and reshaped in real time—governance moving as quickly as a trending hashtag. That world isn’t coming; it’s already here. Public institutions, once the reliable backbone of governance, are now transforming rapidly.

Social media, instant communication, and shifting public expectations have redefined how governments interact with citizens. Decision-making, once a structured process guided by expertise and long-term planning, now occurs in an environment where public sentiment can change overnight. This new landscape offers both opportunities and challenges. Increased public engagement promotes transparency and participation but also demands rapid responses. Today’s challenge isn’t just about efficient policy implementation—it’s about balancing speed with thoughtful deliberation and adaptability with established structure.

A New Era of Governance

Historically, governance followed a deliberate, structured path. Political leaders set broad directions, while institutions provided continuity, expertise, and safeguards. Decision-making

was data-driven and refined through expert consultation with a focus on long-term national interests. Then the digital revolution changed everything. Social media now plays a central role in shaping public discourse, often setting the agenda before formal institutions can respond.

A 2023 Pew Research study noted that nearly two-thirds of adults in democratic nations now rely on social media for political news. This shift has empowered citizens and made governance more transparent and participatory, but it has also heightened expectations and pressured institutions to act swiftly.

Adapting Without Losing Purpose

The solution is not to resist change but to adapt strategically. Governments worldwide are using digital platforms to improve service delivery and civic engagement. For instance, India’s Digital India initiative has streamlined public services online, while Singapore’s Smart Nation program uses data analytics to enhance urban planning and governance. These examples show that when technology is integrated thoughtfully, it can boost both effectiveness and accessibility. Adaptation goes beyond dig-



DECISION-MAKING, ONCE A STRUCTURED PROCESS GUIDED BY EXPERTISE AND LONG-TERM PLANNING, NOW OCCURS IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PUBLIC SENTIMENT CAN CHANGE OVERNIGHT

ital tools—it requires maintaining the integrity of governance. Institutions must prioritise expert-driven decision-making to ensure that policy shifts are well-considered rather than merely reactive. Preserving institutional memory through thorough documentation and continuous training ensures that experienced civil servants provide continuity, anchoring governance in expertise rather than short-term trends.

The Importance of Public Trust

At its core, governance depends on public trust. Institutions thrive when they are seen as credible, reliable, and fair. Trust is built through transparency, efficiency, and ethical practices.

Governments that openly communicate their policies and decision-making processes foster confidence among citizens. Estonia’s e-Governance model, which gives citizens real-time access to government records, is a prime example. Efficiency is equally critical. Reducing administrative delays, streamlining processes, and making governance accessible are key to maintaining public trust. When institutions deliver results fairly and efficiently, they not only function better—they strengthen democracy.

Finding the Right Balance

The digital age demands a balance between responsiveness and deliberation. Institutions must embrace innovation without becoming reactionary, listening to public sentiment while ensuring that policies are grounded in data, analysis, and long-term planning. Quick decision-making should never come at the expense of depth and foresight. This balance distinguishes effective governance from mere administration. Institutions that thoughtfully adapt are not just keeping pace with change—they are actively shaping the future of governance.

Looking Ahead

Public institutions are more than policy enforcers; they are the foundation of national stability and progress. As governance continues to evolve, these institutions must lead through innovation, efficiency, and an unwavering commitment to public trust. The digital age presents both challenges and opportunities. Institutions that adapt wisely will define the future of governance—not solely through speed or efficiency, but with foresight, trust and enduring strength.

(The writer is DGP & Head of Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP’S GOLD CARD PLAN

Madam — US President Donald Trump has announced a new visa program that will offer a ‘gold card’ with a potential pathway to US citizenship for \$5 million (approx Rs 43 crores), which could significantly benefit Indian graduates and investors. It seems like a sale of citizenship for money. He is not even asking them to start a business, create jobs, or anything. Moreover, why should one spend 5 million dollars to go to the USA? With that money, they can lead a royal life (invest 5 million in India and get 14 per cent annualised ROI compared to 5 per cent in the US) in India itself, with their own thriving business and stay close to near and dear ones, which is a much better place now than the US. This is a simple sale of citizenship. This is nothing, but this Trump statement looks a bit stupid! Because, how many students in India will have 5 million dollars to buy a gold card? And which company will be ready to pay 5 million dollars for hiring an Indian employee in the US on a gold card? Is Trump thinking logically, or is he just high on the dose of fake nationalism? This far-right politics is turning the politicians into real fools. Whatsoever, Golden Visa is very expensive.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

BRUTAL MURDERS SHOCK NATION

Madam — The nation is shocked at the brutal and spine-chilling crime of a 23-year-old man, who killed as many as five people, including his close relatives and girlfriend, within a few hours at various places in a radius of 15 kilometres in Thiruvananthapuram. By using a simple mallet, he has repeatedly hammered and finished the victims and then coolly surrendered at the police station on his own. It was by sheer luck that the sixth victim, his own mother, survived the attack, though she is still in serious condition. Even though the family was reportedly facing financial hardship, what prompted the man to commit such a heinous

CBSE clarifies language policy



Refers to Editorial ‘Simmering Linguistic Tension’ (February 28), first Tamil Nadu and now Punjab is raising unnecessary controversy over regional languages, that too owing to the CBSE draft norms (not final) for conducting the 10th class board exams. The Punjab government’s hasty decision of imposing the Punjabi language on all 10th class examinations in the state of all

boards, whether Central or State, is uncalled for. This irrational decision has been announced without taking stakeholders—students and teachers—into confidence. It is nothing else but the imposing of the state’s will and Punjabi language on innocent students.

How can a student who has never studied Punjabi suddenly take an examination of the same language in the 10th class? It is impossible and irrational. The CBSE was quick to clarify and assure that all regional languages, including Punjabi, will be included in the class 10 board exam. After this clarification and assurance, the Punjab government should immediately withdraw its decision of making Punjabi a mandatory language in all boards’ examinations in Punjab.

Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt

crime was nothing but the grave impact of drugs. In fact, Kerala has been reeling under the threat of drugs for quite some time now.

All kinds of drugs have been flowing into the state purportedly with the connivance of those in authority. It is a painful truth that a large number of youngsters, including students, are under the influence of drugs. However, the government has not taken any concrete steps to contain this serious menace. The present situation in the state is bound to ruin the young generation completely. As such, the government must take prompt and stern action against the drug mafia.

T T Sakaria | Delhi

AFGHANISTAN STUNS ENGLAND
Madam — Afghanistan pulled off a historic eight-run victory over England, proving once again that cricket is a game of glorious uncertainties. The hero of the night was 23-year-old Ibrahim Zadran, who played a breathtaking knock of 177 off 146 balls, the highest individual score by any Afghanistan batsman in ODIs. His

fearless stroke play propelled Afghanistan to a challenging total of 325 for 7 despite England’s experienced bowling attack. England’s chase was anchored by Joe Root, who counterattacked with a brilliant 120 off 111 balls, keeping his team in the hunt.

However, Afghanistan’s fiery fast bowler Azmatulla Omarzai turned the game on its head with a sensational 5/58. This is the second time in a row that Afghanistan has beaten England in an ICC tournament. This and Zadran’s pedigree once again advertised Afghanistan’s evolution as a rapid cricketing force. Despite a late fightback, England fell short by eight runs, handing Afghanistan one of their most significant victories in cricket history. This match will be remembered as a testament to Afghanistan’s rising stature and the sheer unpredictability that makes cricket a thrilling spectacle.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THREE LEVELS OF CONTROL

Beyond our inner self, natural and material limitations shape our behaviour and outcomes



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We, human beings, are under control at three levels. The first one is at the level of self. We have been blessed with faculties such as mind, intelligence, etc. And we have free will to decide what we would like to think, decide and do. However, thinking and deciding are in our control, but being able to do is not. Our actions are limited by circumstances, instruments we have, how much we can apply ourselves and providence of course. Then, there are constraints like limited knowledge, facilities, nature, etc. Knowledge is unlimited, but we can have very limited knowledge only. Even good knowledge of a subject is difficult, never mind of countless subjects. This restricts us greatly. Nature is another limiting factor. The three modes of material nature, which are goodness, passion and darkness, determine how we would act manner. For example, a man predominantly in the mode of goodness will generally act wisely. The same cannot be said about persons under the control of the modes of passion and darkness. They make many mistakes. And we all generate 'karmas' (deeds) by minds, words and bodies (senses). These actions of ours, both good and bad put us in the control of the Divine Authority, appointed by God; it works under the superintendence of God. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Imagine the extent of their work.



They have to be alert to record all our actions 24x7. This is nothing compared to what they have to do to decide our rewards and punishments, their timings, etc. In this, they have to correlate how these will impact others associated with us. Therefore, the Divine Authority may delay the punishment to make its effect on the family a little less harsh.

But the guilty person has no hope of reprieve even if the punishment is to be delayed to the next life. Our 'karmaphalas' (fruits of actions) are carried from life to life. If the job of the Divine Authority is mind-boggling, what God does is simply unimaginable. God has to watch the interest of all His devotees, no matter where they are. Then, He must appropriately respond to our prayers every time. He must also guide us if we sincerely seek it. Additionally, God must help if we deserve to come out of troubles we have gotten into due to our past 'karmas'. This is nothing compared to what God does for the Creation; He has to keep it going for millions of years for us souls. Imagine if there was dissolution every hundred years or so. How will we feel?

Then, God has innumerable galaxies to control. He has many planets where we can go to from the earth planet. There is heaven, where pious acts take us for limited periods. This is like going on a vacation to a dream place. There are many such planets which are higher and higher ending in the 'Vaikuntha' planet, which is the abode of God. Only those, who have been liberated reach there. They get freed from the cycle of birth and death. They remain there for good. Knowing all this, we must become wise, really wise. We must seek the shelter of God beginning now, not later. We must follow dharma to please God. God will guide and help. The divine Authority will be giving us more rewards than punishments, which we can tolerate easily. And we will be our best friends.

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

Finding money for 'freebies': BJP faces an uphill task



UTTAM GUPTA

The challenge now is not just about delivering on electoral promises but also about balancing an already precarious fiscal equation that could see deficits skyrocket



Having swept the polls in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi with a clinching 2/3rd majority, Rekha Gupta-led BJP - government faces the daunting challenge of having to find money to fulfil its poll promises. Amongst others, the BJP had promised Rs 2,500 a month to women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY); Rs 21,000 to pregnant women; LPG cylinders for Rs 500 and free cylinder on Holi and Diwali; a stipend of Rs 1000 a month to SC students pursuing technical and vocational courses; free education for needy students from KG to PG; free travel for students on Delhi Metro; Atal Canteens in Jhuggi Basti clusters providing nutritional meals for Rs 5 only; implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme and additional cover of Rs 5 lakh for senior citizens. BJP had also vowed to continue all existing schemes such as free electricity and free water (for monthly consumption up to a specified threshold) run by the erstwhile AAP - dispensation under the then Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal.

How much will these freebies cost? Let us look at the Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) under which the party has promised to give cash assistance of Rs 2500 per month to every woman. The number of women above the age of 18 years in Delhi is around 67,00,000. @ Rs 2500 per month or Rs 30,000 annually to each woman, giving cash assistance to them all will require Rs 20,100 crore per annum (0.67x30,000). The assistance to pregnant women @Rs 21,000 per woman, taking a total of about 1,500,000 pregnant women will cost around Rs 3150 crore annually. As for subsidy on LPG, take consumption of 4 cylinders (14 kg each) per household (HH) in a year. The current cost of supplying a cylinder is around Rs 1000. For two cylinders (Holi and Diwali) promised to be given free, the subsidy will be Rs 2000 whereas for the other two to be given @ Rs 500 each, the outgo will be Rs 1000. This gives an annual subsidy of Rs 3000 per HH. The current population of Delhi is 330 lakh. Taking an average of 4 members per HH,



NOW, CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF BJP PROMISES. MODI HAS GUARANTEED THAT EXISTING SCHEMES WON'T BE DISCONTINUED. SO, FREE ELECTRICITY/WATER COSTING RS 11,000 CRORE WILL STAY. ADD TO THIS, THE FRESH GUARANTEES WHICH WOULD BE AT LEAST ABOUT RS 30,000 CRORE

we get a total of over 82.5 lakh HHs. Multiplied by Rs 3000 being the subsidy per HH, the annual outgo comes to Rs 2500 crore. Look at free education for needy students from KG to PG. According to the latest data available, around 10 per cent of Delhi's population was considered below the poverty line in 2011-12. On this basis, the number of poor persons comes to 33 lakh (330x0.1). About one-third of this or 11 lakh would be persons in the studying age 4 - 25 years. Taking the average expense of educating a child in India at the bare minimum of Rs 20,000 per annum, the total annual expense on "needy students" in the city would be about Rs 2200 crore (0.11x20,000). The additional burden of these four promises alone on the Delhi government's budget is Rs 27,950 crore (20,100+3150+2500+2200). Other freebies would blot this figure by every thousand crore. Let us take the total to be around Rs 30,000 crore.

What is the current state of Delhi's finances?

For the current financial year (FY) 2024-25, the total expenditure of the Delhi government is estimated at Rs 76,000 crore. This includes revenue expenditure (RE) of Rs 61,000 crore and capital expenditure (CE) of Rs 15,000 crore. Against this, the total revenue receipts or RR (tax plus non-tax receipts including transfer from the Central government) is estimated at around Rs 58,000 crore. That leaves a revenue deficit or RD (RR - RE) of Rs 3000 crore. This is disconcerting when seen in the backdrop of Delhi's potential to generate substantial surplus given two fundamental factors working to its advantage.

First, due to its special status of being NCT, three major functions namely law and order, police and land

come under the Centre's jurisdiction hence, the latter foots the bill for expenses on those functions. Second, Delhi being a major hub of economic activity, its propensity to garner its tax revenue in terms of higher GST collection besides VAT on petrol and diesel and excise duty and VAT on alcohol (these products are outside the GST regime) is greater.

The RD will increase drastically when we consider the cost of servicing the loans taken by various departments of the Delhi government such as the Delhi Jal Board (DJB); over Rs 70,000 crore and Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC); Rs 60,000 crore (according to the CAG, these are cumulative losses of DTC as at end of FY 2021-22 and would have ballooned further during the following three FYs till end March 2025).

The liability for servicing those debts is vested entirely in the NCT government and should be reflected in its balance sheet. Look at the fiscal deficit (FD) which is the excess of total receipts over total expenditure. For FY 2024-25, it is estimated at Rs 18,000 crore which is 80 per cent higher than the FD during FY 2023-24 at Rs 10,000 crore. The surge is despite a steep reduction of over 30 per cent in CE from the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 22,000 crore for FY 2023-24 to Rs 15,000 crore for FY 2024-25.

If interest payments on loans taken by DJB and DTC (Rs 130,000 crore plus) which are merely adding to the mountain of debt on the books of those departments year after year are also included, the FD would be much higher. The situation had come to such a pass that the then CM Atishi had approached the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). The precarious

ness of the state's finances has a lot to do with the galloping freebies and irregularities and mismanagement in running various schemes and overall governance on a monumental scale. During 2024-25, the cost of free electricity and free water alone is estimated to be about Rs 11,000 crore. According to CAG, during 2015-16 and 2021-22, the losses of DTC went up by Rs 35,000 crore and that was due to both free bus rides and misgovernance.

Now, consider the impact of BJP promises. Modi has guaranteed that existing schemes won't be discontinued. So, free electricity/water costing Rs 11,000 crore will stay. Add to this, the fresh guarantees which would be at least about Rs 30,000 crore. This takes the RE from Rs 61,000 crore during FY 2024-25 to Rs 91,000 crore during FY 2025-26 (assuming all other things remain unchanged). The RR is Rs 58,000 crore, we get RD of Rs 33,000 crore - up from Rs 3000 crore budgeted for FY 2024-25.

The incumbent government has also promised to clean Yamuna River, clean the air, renovate/build roads, cleanse the drainage systems, build and renovate hospitals and schools in fact, take up and complete a host of physical and social infrastructure projects needed for ensuring a good quality life for Delhiites. That means even if CE is restored to 2023-24 level Rs 22,000 crore, that won't be enough. Even with this insufficient level, the total expenditure will be Rs 113,000 crore. Minus RR of Rs 58,000 crore, we get FD of Rs 55,000 crore. Put simply, the Centre will have to arrange for at least Rs 55,000 crore to enable the BJP to live up to its promises for Delhi.

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

India's solar surge: Powering the journey to net zero 2070

India is charting an ambitious course toward Net Zero 2070, with solar energy emerging as the mainstay of its renewable revolution

India's steadfast commitment to achieving Net Zero by 2070 is catalysing a dramatic shift in its energy sector, with solar power emerging as the principal driver of this transformation. Abundant sunlight, rapidly decreasing technology costs, strong government support, and an expanding skilled workforce have combined to place solar energy at the heart of India's renewable strategy. While the country has celebrated significant milestones in solar adoption, it also faces multifaceted challenges that require innovative policy interventions and strategic foresight to sustain its momentum.

Over the past decade, India has achieved remarkable progress in solar energy. The nation not only met its ambitious renew-

able targets but exceeded them, with solar power now accounting for over 60 per cent of its renewable energy mix. By 2024, India surpassed the 100 GW milestone, establishing itself as a global leader in solar energy. For example, Rajasthan's solar capacity exceeds 24 GW. Rapid expansion is evident in a 19 per cent increase in solar generation from 2023 to 2024, with solar installations making up over two-thirds of new renewable capacity.

India's role in the International Solar Alliance underscores its commitment to global solar collaboration, as the initiative seeks to mobilise over \$1 trillion in investments for developing countries. National agencies, particularly the Solar Energy Corporation of India,



DISHHA SHARMA

have been vital in driving the development and implementation of solar projects under the National Solar Mission. Despite these impressive achievements, significant obstacles remain on the path to full solar integration. One major challenge is the limited connection of solar installations to the national grid, with only 16 per cent of capacity currently integrated. This gap

restricts the country's ability to fully exploit its vast solar potential. Moreover, there are stark regional disparities in solar development. While states like Rajasthan and Gujarat lead the charge, many eastern and northeastern regions lag behind, resulting in an uneven distribution of renewable resources.

Financial hurdles also pose serious challenges. Although government subsidies help reduce costs, the high initial capital required for large-scale installations, coupled with elevated interest rates and delayed payments, discourages private investment. Manufacturers struggle with a shortage of competitively priced solar cells, a problem compounded by strict Domestic Content Requirements that strain pro-



duction capabilities. These financial constraints not only hinder current project deployment but also threaten future expansion in the sector. Another critical issue is India's heavy reliance on imported components. Despite having a domestic module production capacity of around 11 GW, India still depends on global supply chains for essential items such as polysilicon,

wafers, and solar cells. This dependency leaves the country vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, particularly amid geopolitical tensions and trade imbalances, as China continues to dominate global solar manufacturing. Furthermore, the scarcity of critical minerals like cobalt, nickel, and lithium—vital for solar panel production—further complicates efforts to build a self-sufficient solar industry.

Local challenges add another layer of complexity. Land acquisition for solar projects often faces resistance from local communities and farmers, leading to protests, legal disputes, and, in some cases, violent confrontations. In Rajasthan, disputes over land rights have led to project cancellations, highlighting the

need for transparent and inclusive processes that respect local interests and ensure fair compensation. Addressing these local concerns is essential for fostering community support and facilitating smoother project implementation.

To overcome these challenges, India must adopt a multifaceted strategy. Strengthening policy frameworks to provide long-term stability is crucial, as is enhancing inter-state cooperation and ensuring reliable access to energy data for effective monitoring. Public-private partnerships can expand solar adoption in underserved regions by providing risk mitigation instruments to attract investment. Promoting domestic manufacturing of solar panels and key compo-

ments will reduce import dependency and bolster energy security. Additionally, investing in workforce development to build a skilled labor pool for solar installation, maintenance, and manufacturing will be vital for sustaining industry growth. By focusing on robust policy support, financial innovation, domestic manufacturing, and community engagement, India can significantly unlock the full potential of its solar resources. With sustained government backing and strategic collaboration between public and private sectors, the nation is well-positioned to lead the global solar revolution.

(The writer is assistant professor IIM Mumbai; views are personal. Inputs from Supriya Kaushik and Asmita Tewari)



PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

Amit Singh's Rhythmic of Marble explores nature's essence through intricately carved sculptures with deep symbolism, writes SAKSHI PRIYA

Chromalogue: Art in Every Shade



BY TEAM VIVA

Colours hold memories, emotions and unspoken stories. At *Chromalogue - Colours & Conversations*, they take centre stage, shaping a dialogue beyond words. The group exhibition presented by *The Art Exchange Project* and curated by *Aarti Uppal Singla*, brings together 15 artists who use colour as their language, creating an immersive experience where shades and textures communicate in their own quiet yet powerful way. The gallery becomes a world of shifting moods and narratives. *Neelesh's Echoes of Dawn 1* fills the space with deep blues, evoking the quiet beauty of early mornings. *Aarti Uppal Singla's Lotus Pond 1* captures resilience in soft yet striking tones. *Silence Speaks in Colour* by *Madhav Bhardwaj* invites viewers to listen beyond the visible, while *Portal of Peace* by *Himani Pasricha* offers a sense of stillness. *Nikita Gambhir's Smell the Coffee* warms the senses, drawing on the simple joys of everyday life. These works do not just exist on the wall, they engage, they invite and they stay with those who witness them. Beyond paint, mixed media adds depth and dimension. *Priya Bery's Poppies: The Intoxicators* bursts with life on Waterford paper, while *Winnie Singh's Meditative Reveries 9* softens the senses, creating a quiet space within. *Babita Varma's Aswan*, sculpted in clay on wood, and *Kripal Mathur's Spring Dance*, work with hand-dyed goat's wool, show that colour is not just seen, it is felt. The exhibition stretches further into digital and graphic precision. *Khushroo Kalyanwala's The Blues That Bring Cheer* across fine paper, while *Sushil Basin's Trance Dance* moves with an almost hypnotic rhythm. *Pragati Gupta's Paws-1*, a pen drawing on textured paper, proves that even in black and white, colour is imagined. *Chromalogue* is a celebration of this language, a space where colours speak and those who listen will hear.

Patience in Every Cut

THE EXHIBITION CAPTURES THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, OUR CONNECTION WITH NATURE, THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND THE PATIENCE REQUIRED TO SHAPE BEAUTY FROM RESISTANCE, MUCH LIKE LIFE ITSELF

Marble has a way of holding stories within its veins, waiting for the right hands to bring them to life. *Rhythmic of Marble*, the solo exhibition by *Amit Singh* at *Triveni Kala Sangam*, was a breathtaking display of patience, devotion and an artist's relentless pursuit of expression.

Amit Singh's work is about preserving the delicate balance between nature and human intervention. When asked about the concept behind his exhibition, he spoke with a quiet intensity. "Nature has always been my priority," he said. "My work is about our connection with it."

Each sculpture told a different story, some reflecting the tranquillity of nature, others capturing its raw beauty. His intricate carvings on marble ranged from smooth, flowing forms that mimicked water's grace to bold, angular pieces that seemed to resist time itself. The detailing was mesmerising, delicate veins running through stone, each mark a reminder of the patience and precision it took to create. His *Nature Series* was particularly striking, with sculptures inspired by the elements, wind, water, and earth, translated into marble with astonishing delicacy.

The dedication behind the exhibition was staggering. *Singh* revealed that it took him five years to complete the entire body of work. "Some pieces were done in minutes," he admitted. "A simple idea, a quick execution. But others, some marble works

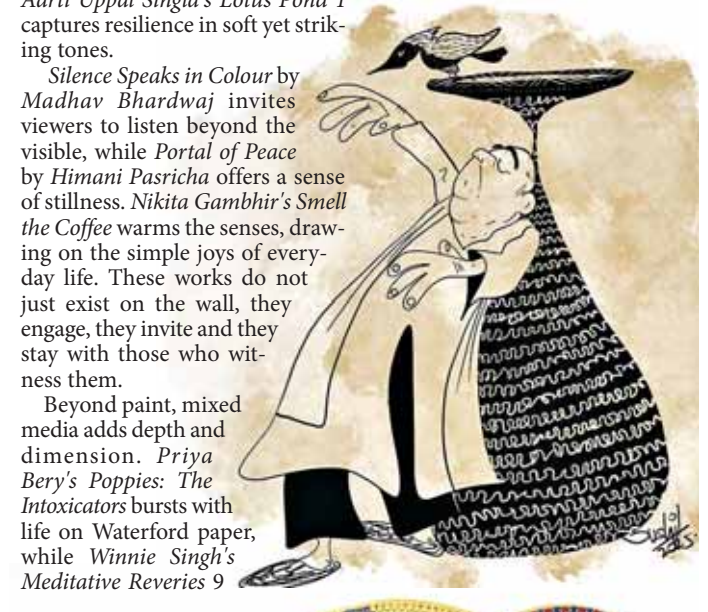
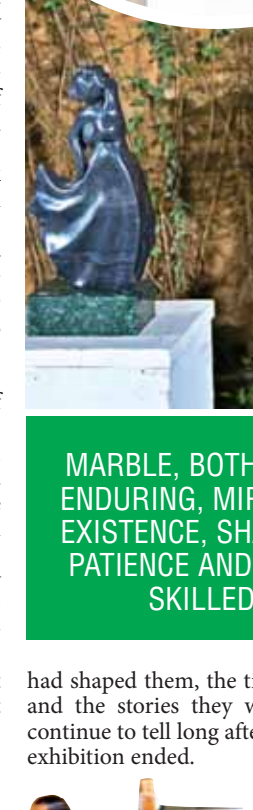
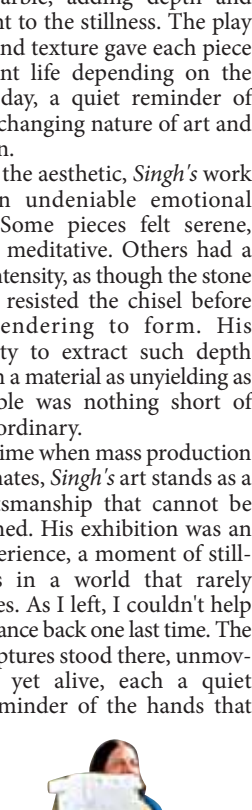
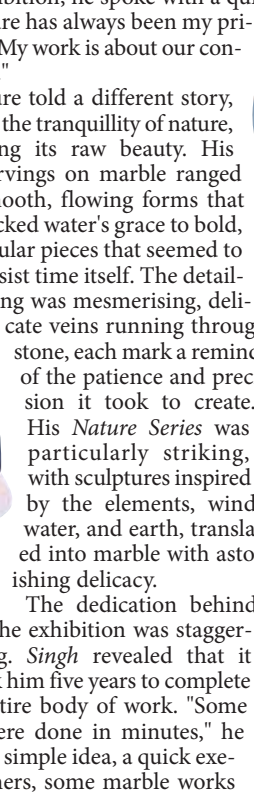
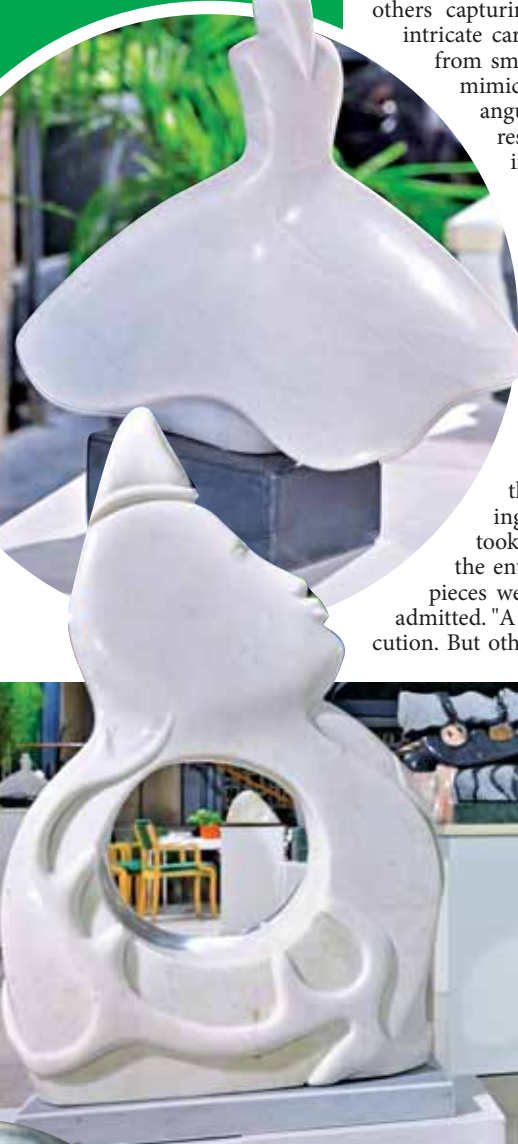
demanding days, even weeks. Patience is the key." His favourite piece? He smiled at the question. "That's like asking a parent to choose their favourite child," he said. "Every sculpture is a part of me." The sculptures seemed to hold an unspoken dialogue with their surroundings. Natural light filtered through, casting shifting shadows on the marble, adding depth and movement to the stillness. The play of light and texture gave each piece a different life depending on the time of day, a quiet reminder of the ever-changing nature of art and perception.

Beyond the aesthetic, *Singh's* work carried an undeniable emotional weight. Some pieces felt serene, almost meditative. Others had a raw intensity, as though the stone itself resisted the chisel before surrendering to form. His ability to extract such depth from a material as unyielding as marble was nothing short of extraordinary.

At a time when mass production dominates, *Singh's* art stands as a craftsmanship that cannot be rushed. His exhibition was an experience, a moment of stillness in a world that rarely pauses. As I left, I couldn't help but glance back one last time. The sculptures stood there, unmoving yet alive, each a quiet reminder of the hands that

had shaped them, the time they had endured and the stories they would continue to tell long after the exhibition ended.

MARBLE, BOTH FRAGILE AND ENDURING, MIRRORS HUMAN EXISTENCE, SHAPED BY TIME, PATIENCE AND THE ARTIST'S SKILLED HANDS



Experience the evolution of art

At *India Design 2025* in New Delhi, *Masha Art* reinterprets artistic heritage through bold experimentation, transforming tradition into a dynamic, sensorial experience, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Art has always been a reflection of time, culture and identity. At *India Design 2025*, an exhibition brings this idea to life in a way that feels both rooted in tradition and open to reinvention. Walking through the space, the artworks create a sense of connection between past and present, between intricate craftsmanship and bold contemporary expression. It is a meeting point of heritage and innovation, where stories unfold through colour, form and texture.

The collection, curated with a thoughtful eye, features works by 21 artists including *Seema Kohli*, *Chandrashekar Morkondo* and *Sanjay Chakraborty*. Every piece feels like a conversation, one that speaks of history, personal narratives and the evolving artistic language of the sub-continent. Some paintings draw from mythology, their golds and deep blue's reminiscent of temple murals, while others break away from convention with striking abstraction. The sculptures add another dimension, their forms shifting between realism and imagination, inviting the viewer to explore beyond the surface. There is an undeniable energy in the way these works come together.

A painting depicting a celestial dance, its intricate lines almost breathing on canvas, sits beside an abstract piece where colour dominates form, challenging perception. A sculptural installation nearby, crafted from repurposed materials, transforms discarded objects into something unexpected and powerful. The juxtaposition of mediums and styles creates a dynamic interplay, one that encourages curiosity and dialogue.

Some pieces invite stillness, their subtle shade and delicate strokes evoking a quiet reverence for nature and tradition. Others disrupt

this calm with bold, unrestrained strokes of pigment, where movement and emotion take precedence over precision. The diversity in expression makes the exhibition feels alive, constantly shifting in meaning depending on who is viewing it.

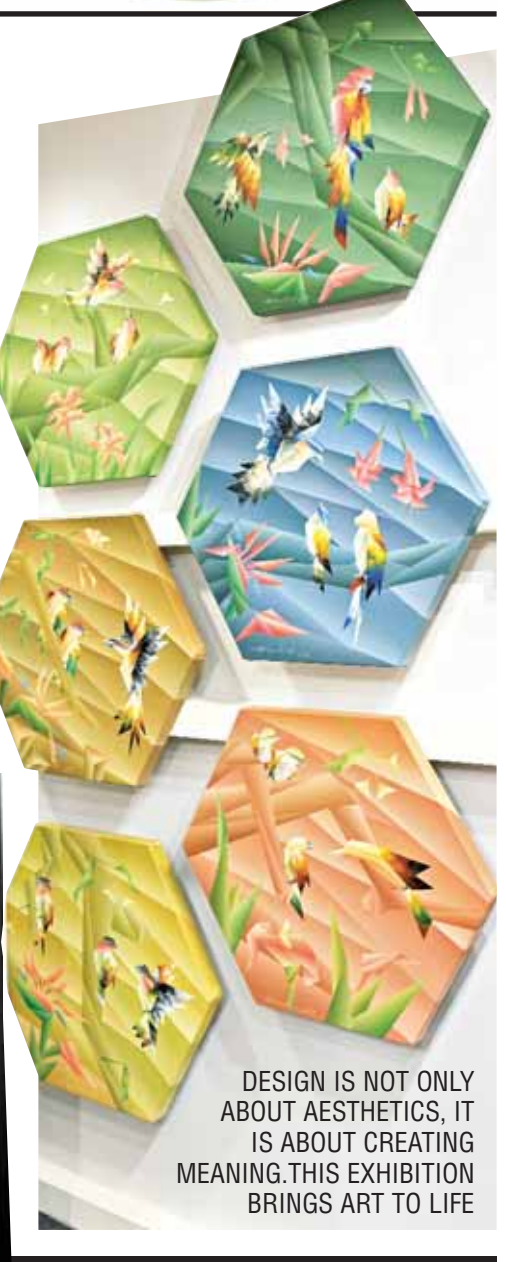
Samarth Mathur, the mind behind this showcase, describes art as an investment in culture and creativity. His approach moves beyond traditional curation, treating each

piece as part of a larger dialogue. This is not art placed on walls to be admired from a distance, it is art meant to be lived with, engaged with and understood.

The exhibition respects artistic heritage but does not hesitate to push boundaries. It does not try to define what Indian art should be, instead offering a glimpse into what it can become.



A DYNAMIC INTERPLAY OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION, WHERE 21 ARTISTS REDEFINE ARTISTIC BOUNDARIES THROUGH COLOR, FORM AND TEXTURE



DESIGN IS NOT ONLY ABOUT AESTHETICS, IT IS ABOUT CREATING MEANING. THIS EXHIBITION BRINGS ART TO LIFE

Hockey India unveils performance-based system for national championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India on Friday unveiled a new format with a promotion and relegation system for the Senior Women's National Championship to be held in Panchkula from March 1 to 12.

The competition will feature 28 teams divided into three divisions titled 'A', 'B' and 'C'. The new format aims to enhance competition but also provides intends to provide a pathway for teams to ascend to higher divisions or risk relegation based on their performances.

"The introduction of the promotion and relegation system is a significant step in raising the standard of hockey across the country," Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey said.

"It ensures that every match in the Championship holds importance, whether it's a battle for the title or to avoid relegation. We look forward to an exciting tournament where teams can showcase their skills and aim for the top."

The top 12 teams will compete in Division A which will be further split into four



teams will play in a league format within their respective pools. The top two teams from each pool will advance to the quarterfinals, scheduled for March 9, followed by the semifinals on March 10 and the final and 3rd/4th place play-off on March 12.

The bottom two teams will be

relegated to Division B for the next edition. Nine teams will compete in Division B, with the goal of earning promotion to Division A. Here, five teams are in Pool A and four are in Pool B.

"The top two teams will earn promotion to Division A for the next season, while the

bottom two will be relegated to Division C. No knockout rounds will be held in Division B; the league standings will determine promotions and relegations," HI said.

Seven teams in Division C will vie for promotion to Division B which will have three teams in Pool A and

four in Pool B. Division C will also only play league matches, with the top two teams securing promotion to Division B.

During the league stage, teams in all three divisions will earn points based on their performance. Each team will be awarded three points for a win, one point for a draw, and

no points for a loss. In Division A, the league stage will culminate with the knockout rounds, while Divisions B and C will conclude with final standings determined solely by league matches.

Division A
Pool A: Hockey Haryana, Hockey Association of Odisha, Hockey Karnataka
Pool B: Hockey Maharashtra, Manipur Hockey, Hockey Punjab
Pool C: Hockey Jharkhand, Hockey Mizoram, Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu
Pool D: Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Bengal, Uttar Pradesh Hockey

Division B
Pool A: Telangana Hockey, Hockey Uttarakhand, Assam Hockey, Hockey Rajasthan, Hockey Association of Bihar
Pool B: Delhi Hockey, Chhattisgarh Hockey, Hockey Chandigarh, Hockey Himachal
Pool A: Kerala Hockey, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu Hockey, Hockey Gujarat
Pool B: Hockey Andhra Pradesh, Le Puducherry Hockey, Hockey Arunachal, Hockey Jammu and Kashmir.



Praggnanandhaa draws against Gurel Ediz

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa played out a second straight draw against Turkey's Gurel Ediz while Aravindh Chithambaram crashed through the defences of Germany's Vincent Keymer in the second round of the Prague Masters here.

Chithambaram, who has been knocking hard on the doors of elite circles, scored his first victory with black pieces after squeezing himself out of danger zone in his first-round game against Czech Grandmaster Nguyen Thai Dai Van.

The Indian was involved in the sole decisive game of the day in the 10-players round-robin format, while the other matches ended in draws.

Dai Van drew his second game on the trot with Sam Shankland of the United States, top seeded Wei Yi from China opened his account after splitting the point with Dutchman Anish Giri, and Quang Leim Le of Vietnam achieved the same result against Navara David from Czech Republic.

With seven rounds to go, Chithambaram joined Shankland in lead on 1.5 points out of two games. They are followed by Giri, Le, Dai Van, David, Keymer and Praggnanandhaa.

Ediz and Wei Yi share the last spot on a half point apiece

from their two games. On a day when world champion Boris Spassky breathed his last, Chithambaram's victory had traits of the Russian's style of play to go for the kill at the first opportunity and not let it slip.

The Queen's gambit accepted may have a solid reputation with black pieces but the young Indian cavalry is all out to breakout of that stereotype. How else could one explain Chithambaram's choice of move order that gave white the luxury of a dynamic centre?

It was an inch-by-inch invasion that won Chithambaram a pawn in the middle game and the trade of queens was later forced by the Indian to harp on the better possibilities for his troupe.

Chithambaram was quite unstoppable as he kept increasing the pressure till Keymer walked in to a lost rook and pawns endgame — it took 45 moves in all.

Praggnanandhaa has shown his ability to play all openings with either colour and his choice of French defence turned out to be a good one guaranteeing an equal game.

The lone problem was to make something out of an equal position and the 16-year old Turk proved why he is hailed as one of the brightest among young Europeans, as he gave a little away.



WPL: RCB looks for victory against DC

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Defending champions Royal Challengers (RCB) Bengaluru will be determined to give their home fans a parting victory over a fatigued Delhi Capitals (DC) outfit here on Saturday, before the Women's Premier League (WPL) moves to Lucknow for its third leg.

RCB had begun the third season of WPL with two wins in Vadodara, but their fortunes have nosedived since the tournament caravan shifted to their home ground M Chinnaswamy here. Three consecutive defeats, including a heartbreaking loss in the Super Over to UP Warriorz, have left them reeling.

Placed third on the table and winless at home so far, RCB will be desperate to bounce back against a Delhi Capitals side facing the challenge of playing back-to-back games before the WPL heads to Lucknow.

The Meg Lanning-led Capitals will have little recovery time as they take on Mumbai Indians in a top-of-the-table clash on Friday before locking horns with RCB the very next day.

RCB's struggles have been glaring in both batting and bowling. Their batting unit collapsed in the defeat against Gujarat Giants on Thursday, with skipper Smriti Mandhana's form being a major concern. Her 81 against DC remains her only notable

knock in five innings, as spin continues to be her Achilles' heel.

Her opening partner, England's Danni Wyatt-Hodge too has been inconsistent, while Australian veteran Ellyse Perry, despite being in sensational touch, suffered a rare failure with a maiden WPL duck against Gujarat Giants.

The bowling department has been equally underwhelming. Frontline pacers Renuka Singh and Kim Garth have lacked consistency, often erring in line and length. Spinners Georgia Wareham, Ekta Bishit, and Kanika Ahuja have struggled to exert control in the crucial middle overs, compounding RCB's woes further.

Delhi Capitals, too, have endured an inconsistent campaign, with two losses sandwiched between three wins. Their batting lineup has finally started firing with Shafali Verma and Jess Jonassen finding form.

However, skipper Lanning continues to struggle at the top. Jemimah Rodrigues and Annabel Sutherland have provided occasional fireworks in the middle order, but DC will seek more consistency from their batting unit.

In Shikha Pandey, Marizanne Kapp, young Titus Sadhu, Sutherland, and Minnu Mani, DC boast a formidable bowling attack, making them a dangerous opponent despite their inconsistencies.

New Zealand excited to play in different conditions: Bracewell



PTI ■ DUBAI

New Zealand off-spinner Michael Bracewell on Friday brushed aside any talks about India getting an unfair advantage in the ongoing Champions Trophy by playing all their games in Dubai, simply saying that his team was "excited to try and play in different conditions".

Rohit Sharma's team is playing all its matches in Dubai, and even the final will be held here if India goes the distance.

New Zealand will be playing their first match of the tournament here — against India on Sunday — after their last two games were held in Pakistan.

Some cricketers, including South African top-order batter Rassie van der Dussen and former Australia skipper Pat Cummins, have said India are in an advantageous position as they have played all their games at one venue while other teams have had to travel to different venues in Pakistan.

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the tournament citing security reasons.

"Look, it is what it is. It's been decided, and that's the way it is, and there's no point

dwelling on that," said Bracewell, when asked if India have unfair advantage in Dubai.

"It's part of what makes it exciting. I personally think it's coming to a different ground and trying to figure out those different conditions. Yeah, not much more to say on that other than we're excited to try and learn and play in different conditions," added the 34-year-old off-spinner.

The New Zealander opined that the pitches here would aid spin and it would be a good idea to train hard before the game against India.

"The wickets here have looked like they've taken a bit of a spin. So, it'll be good to try and get used to the wickets as quickly as we can. We've obviously enjoyed the pitches in Pakistan.

"And I think we've got a pretty well-balanced side to play in any condition. So hopefully, we can continue to do that and adjust to what's in front of us. I think that's been the strength of our side, adjusting to the surface. So, hopefully, we continue to do that as a side," he added.

He said New Zealand doing consistently well against India in ICC tournaments was because of his players not

putting themselves under pressure. New Zealand recently inflicted a humiliating 3-0 Test defeat on India, becoming the first touring side to seal a series win in India in 13 years.

He said the Test series win would give the Black Caps confidence going into Sunday's game.

"I think we don't like to put too much pressure on ourselves. Obviously, coming off a great Test series win, it gives us a lot of confidence that we can, and we've got a really good record against India in ICC events.

"So, I think we like to take the game, just game by game, and not try and let the moment get to us. It's worked well for us in the past. We just try and play our style of cricket and our brand of cricket, and it seems to be a good match-up so far," he said.

He added that contrary to perception that it was an inconsequential match, New Zealand would take the game against India seriously. Both India and New Zealand have qualified for the semifinals.

West Ham beats Leicester in Premier League

PTI ■ LONDON

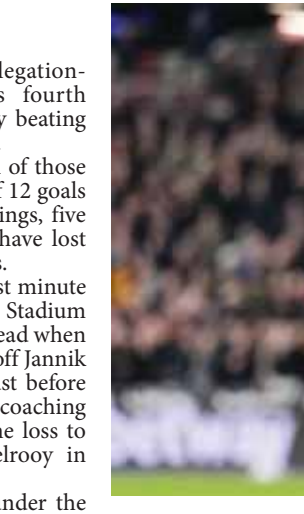
West Ham handed relegation-threatened Leicester its fourth straight Premier League loss by beating Ruud van Nistelrooy's team 2-0.

Leicester failed to score in each of those defeats — and allowed a total of 12 goals — to remain 19th in the standings, five points from safety. The Foxes have lost 11 of their past 12 league games.

Tomas Soucek scored in the 21st minute for the home team at London Stadium and the Hammers doubled the lead when Jarrod Bowen's strike deflected off Jannik Vestergaard for an own goal just before halftime. Leicester shook up its coaching staff after last Friday's 4-0 home loss to Brentford but kept Van Nistelrooy in charge.

In 14 Premier League games under the Dutch manager, Leicester has two wins, one draw and 11 losses.

"We were way too passive," Van Nistelrooy told TNT Sports. "Of course we're in a situation where we're not winning games and we're in a situation where we are in the bottom three, and the pressure's on. But I think the way to



get out of it is to literally move forward — on the pitch as well. We have to take initiative."

West Ham moved past Everton into 15th place and has recorded back-to-back Premier League wins for the first time this season.

Graham Potter, who replaced the fired

Julen Lopetegui as manager seven weeks ago, said Thursday's victory was a "professional performance," following up from a 1-0 victory at Arsenal last Saturday.

"For us, we're just delighted with two wins, two clean sheets and six points," he said of the mini-run.

UNNAYAN BHARAT FINANCE CORPORATION PRIVATE LIMITED
2nd Floor, B1/639A, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058, Tel No: 0120-5150016, Email ID: info@ubfc.in, Website: https://ubfc.in/

PUBLIC NOTICE

We hereby inform all our valued customers and stakeholders that Unnayan Bharat Finance Corporation Private Limited (UBFC) in accordance with internal operational requirements, had closed the following branches:

Branch Location: Tosham (Haryana).
Branch Address: W no 5, Near Patwar ghar, Near Bus Stand, Tosham, District Bhiwani, Haryana Pin-127040.
Closure Date: 31st December 2024.

Branch Location: Bhatinda (Punjab)
Branch Address: SCF no 17, Second floor, hundred feet road, Bhatinda, Punjab Pin-151001
Closure Date: 31st December 2024.

The closure of these branches will be effective from the above date. We encourage customers to visit our alternative branches.

For any queries or assistance, please contact our Customer Care Helpline at 0120-5150016 or visit our website at https://ubfc.in/.

We regret any inconvenience caused and assure you of our commitment to serving you through our remaining branches.

For UNNAYAN BHARAT FINANCE CORPORATION PRIVATE LIMITED
SD/-
Avneesh Trivedi
Place: New Delhi Director
Date: 27/02/2025 Din: 09326252

F.No. 38-01/2018-CC PI)
Government of India
Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
5th Floor, Pt. Deendayal Antyociaya Bhawan, CCO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-03

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD). Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India invites applications from eligible candidates for appointment to the post of Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (Unreserved) in Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (O/o CCPD) under this Department. The post carries pay scale and allowances as admissible to the Additional Secretary to the Government of India. The present pay scale is Rs. 1,82,2002,24,100 as per the 7th Central Pay Commission dispensation.

2. Please visit the website of this Department - <https://depwd.gov.in/> for the detailed advertisement. Applications must be submitted **within 45 days of publication of this advertisement in the 'Employment News'**.

(Debala Bhattacharjee)
Under Secretary to the Govt, of India

CBC - 38117/11/0045/2425

Government of India **Annexure-I**
Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change
Indira Paryayaran Bhawan, Jor Bagh Road
New Delhi-110003
ADVERTISEMENT NO 01/01/2025-PIII

ADVERTISEMENT FOR FILLING UP OF THIRTY-THREE (33) POSTS OF SCIENTISTS IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE INCLUDING ITS SUBORDINATE OFFICES ON DIRECT RECRUITMENT BASIS AS DETAILED BELOW:

1. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

- Post No. 1-2/B/MOEF&CC (02 posts of Scientist 'B' in Level 10)
- Post No. 3/C/MOEF&CC (01 post of Scientist 'C' in Level 11)
- Post No. 4/D/MOEF&CC (01 post of Scientist 'D' in Level 12)

2. BOTANICAL SURVEY OF INDIA (BSI):

- Post No. 5-6/C/BSI (02 posts of Scientist 'C' in Level 11)
- Post No. 7/C/BSI (01 post of Scientist 'C' in Level 11)
- Post No. 8-25/D/BSI (18 posts of Scientist 'D' in Level 12)
- Post No. 26/G/BSI (01 post of Scientist G (Director) in Level 14)

3. ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA (ZSI):

- Post No. 27-28/C/ZSI (02 posts of Scientist 'C' in Level 11)
- Post No. 29-31/C/ZSI (03 posts of Scientist 'C' in Level 11)

4. NATIONAL BUREAU OF NATURAL HISTORY (NBNH):

- Post No. 32-33/B/NBNH (02 posts of Scientist 'B' in Level 10)

AGE LIMIT

- 50 years for the post of Scientist 'G'
- 40 years for the post of Scientist 'D'
- 35 years for the post of Scientist 'C' and Scientist 'B'

● Age limit is relaxable for SC/ST and other categories as per the extant Government Rules on the subject.

● Detailed Advertisement containing the eligibility criteria for the above posts, important dates, terms and conditions etc. is available on the link i.e. moefccrecruitment.nic.in. The interested candidates are advised to go through the detailed Advertisement and apply online only through the link.

● Applicants need to submit their online applications within 30 days of publication of this Advertisement 30.03.2025

● The crucial date for determining the Age, Essential Qualifications, Experience etc. is 30.03.2025

CBC - 13101/11/0023/2425 **Under Secretary to the Government of India**