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INSIDE

**MONEY 10**  
SIX ENTITIES PAY ₹ 3.49 CRORE TO SETTLE FRONT-RUNNING TRADE CASE WITH SEBI

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY DECEMBER 21, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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



Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra greets Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan during INDIA bloc MPs' protest against Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks related to Dr BR Ambedkar, at Vijay Chowk Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## 11 killed in LPG tanker-truck collision on Jaipur-Ajmer highway

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAIPUR

At least 11 people were killed and about 35 injured after an LPG tanker collided with a truck on Friday here sparking a massive fireball. It turned a stretch of the Jaipur-Ajmer highway into an inferno and nearly 40 vehicles were gutted. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagade, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma and his predecessor Ashok Gehlot expressed grief over the loss of lives in the crash.



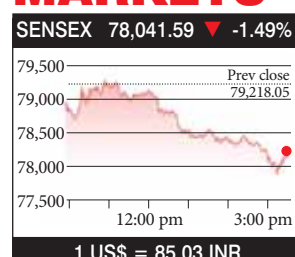
Firefighters at the site of the accident after a truck loaded with a chemical collided with some other vehicles and caught fire on the Jaipur-Ajmer Highway PTI

President Murmu said the news of the loss of lives in the Jaipur gas tanker accident was very painful and offered her condolences to the families of the deceased. "The news of the death of many people due to a road accident in Jaipur is very painful. I pray to God for peace to the departed souls. My deepest condolences to their families! I pray that the injured get well soon," she said in a social media post in Hindi.

The Rajasthan government announced financial assistance of Rs five lakh to the next of kin of the deceased and Rs one lakh for the injured. In a social media post, Modi announced an ex gratia of Rs two lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund to the next of kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 to the injured.

Expressing grief over the loss of lives, Prime Minister Modi spoke to the Chief Minister to enquire about the incident and assured him of all possible support. **Continued on page 8**

## MARKETS



## DND flyway will remain toll-free: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday ruled that the Delhi-Noida-Direct (DND) flyway will be toll-free as it dismissed a plea by a private firm challenging the 2016 decision of the Allahabad High Court order asking it to stop collecting toll from commuters. The decision will benefit lakhs of people who commute daily on the flyway. A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan held that awarding a contract to private firm Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd (NTBCL) to collect toll from commuters plying on the DND flyway was unjust, unfair and arbitrary. "There is no reason for the collection of user or toll fee to continue. We hold that the agreement (for toll collection) is invalid," the bench said. It pulled up the NOIDA authority for delegating toll collection to private firm NTBCL, which did not have any prior experience and said it has resulted in unjust enrichment. **Continued on page 8**

## Bitter Winter Session comes to a stormy end

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Winter Session of the Parliament came to an end on Friday as it was adjourned sine die, but not before an unprecedented verbal spat, bitterness between the Ruling and Opposition members, and less productivity of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. However the Session also saw the gamechanger simultaneous polls Bill being tabled. The Parliament this session witnessed a low point of alleged pushing and shoving amidst rival parties' Members

of Parliament (MPs) that left two Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members hospitalised, and leading to an FIR against Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. The acrimony forced the Opposition parties to move a motion of no-confidence against the Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar, which was, however, dismissed by the Upper House Deputy Chairman Harivansh. Unrelenting protests peaked and ranged from the Adani controversy to Sambhal and then to the demand of sacking of Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks on Dr BR

Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution. The Parliament also saw a four-day debate on the constitutional journey of India, which began on a high pitched note of talks on Ambedkar's legacy pertaining to the Constitution, which saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation. However, the debate ended with a speech by Home Minister Amit Shah in Rajya Sabha, creating flutters and sparking protests across the country for his remarks on Baba Saheb which both the ruling parties and Opposition parties have made attempts to capitalise on. **Continued on page 8**

Delhi continued to be the most polluted place in India - for the fifth consecutive day - with the overall air quality of the national capital continuing to be in the "severe" category. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data, Delhi's overall 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 429 (severe) at 4 pm. on Friday. The air pollution in Delhi was over 17 times the limit prescribed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), in the morning which rose to 43 times in the evening, according to official data. The overall level of PM2.5 (a chief pollutant) in Delhi was 255.3 micrograms per cubic meter.

## WEATHER

LUCKNOW  
MAX 25.3°C(+2.3)  
MIN 9.0°C(+0.9)

## Delhi pollution is 43 times over WHO limit



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## PM Modi leaves for Kuwait today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Kuwait beginning Saturday will help in opening a new chapter in bilateral ties, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday. The visit would help develop a more dynamic partnership between the two countries, it said. The MEA said India was looking at boosting ties in a range of areas including defence and trade. Modi is paying the visit at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, it said. During the visit, Modi will hold discussions with the leadership of Kuwait and also interact with the Indian community. The last Indian PM to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981.



The Indian community is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait. India is among its top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at USD 10.47 billion in the financial year 2023-24. Kuwait is India's sixth largest crude supplier, meeting 3 per cent of the country's energy needs. Indian exports to Kuwait reached USD 2 Billion for the first time, while investments by the Kuwait Investment Authority in India exceed USD 10 Billion. India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, with links dating back to pre-oil Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy. Kuwait's economy revolved around its fine harbour and maritime activities which included ship building, pearl diving, fishing and voyages to India on wooden dhows carrying dates, Arabian horses and pearls that were traded for wood, cereals, clothes and spices, according to people tracking the ties between the two nations. **Continued on page 8**



## NIA raids multiple locations, in five States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday searched multiple locations in five States in connection with a case relating to attempts at revival of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit, according to an official statement. Extensive searches were conducted at the premises of suspects at two locations in Patiala and Sri Muktsar Sahib districts of Punjab, four locations in Manesar and Gurgaon districts of Haryana, two locations in New Delhi, and one location each in Patna district of Bihar and Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, it said. The suspects whose premises were searched were believed to be involved in propagating the ideology of CPI (Maoist) and the revival of its northern regional bureau wing through various frontal organisations. The searches led to the seizure

of digital devices, including mobile phones, pen drives/hard disks, laptops and memory cards, SIM cards and other incriminating documents related to naxalism, said the statement issued by the NIA. The searches were conducted in a case that relates to attempts by CPI (Maoist) leaders, cadres, sympathisers and over-ground workers (OGWs) to reorganise the outfit's decrepit influence in the NRB region, comprising Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. The NIA's investigations have revealed that long-time associates and other OGWs of the outfit were being provided funds from the eastern regional bureau, especially from Jharkhand, to recruit cadres and raise the front organisation in the northern states, the statement said. **Continued on page 8**

## Be mindful of public comments, MEA tells Bangladesh officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has lodged a strong protest with Dhaka over certain controversial comments by a key aide of Bangladesh's interim government Mahfuz Alam. In a now-deleted Facebook post, Alam said India should recognise the uprising that forced the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign. In a related issue, Lok Sabha was informed that a total of 2,200 cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities have been reported in Bangladesh this year till December 8, and India's expectation is Dhaka will take necessary measures to ensure their safety, the government said on Friday. As regards controversial comments, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said "We have registered our strong protest on this issue with the Bangladesh side. We understand that the post being referred to has reportedly been taken down. We would like to remind all concerned to be mindful of their public comments." He said "While India has repeatedly signalled interest in fostering relations with the



File photo: PTI

people and the interim government of Bangladesh, such comments underline the need for responsibility in public articulation." New Delhi on Thursday expressed concern at incidents of violence targeting Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh and said the interim government in Dhaka has the primary responsibility of protecting their life and liberty. Minister of state for external affairs, Kirti Vardhan Singh, made the comments in Rajya Sabha less than a fortnight after foreign secretary Vikram Misri visited Bangladesh and conveyed India's concerns on the issue to members of the caretaker administration against minorities, Singh said. "India's concerns regarding the need to ensure the safety and protection of Hindus and

all other minority communities in Bangladesh have been conveyed and reiterated to the authorities of the interim government of Bangladesh on various occasions, including at the highest level," he added. In a related issue, Rajya Sabha was informed that a total of 2,200 cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities have been reported in Bangladesh this year till December 8, and India's expectation is Dhaka will take necessary measures to ensure their safety, the government said on Friday. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh gave the information in a written response to a query in Rajya Sabha, citing data from minority and human rights organisations. **Continued on page 8**

## Three-day state mourning for Om Prakash Chautala

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/ NEW DELHI

Om Prakash Chautala, a prominent Jat leader and former Haryana Chief minister whose career was marked by dizzying highs and rock bottoms, including stints in jail, died on Friday. He was 89. A party spokesperson said Chautala had hiccups in the morning and collapsed in his house. He was rushed to a hospital, where he died. The eldest son of former deputy prime minister Devi Lal, the five-time chief minister headed the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), a party founded by his father. Tributes for Chautala poured in from across the political spectrum, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing anguish at his passing and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Sukhbir Singh Badal describing it as a "huge personal loss". The Haryana government declared a three-day state mourning from Friday. It has also declared Saturday, when his funeral will be held, as a public holiday. "He (Chautala) was active in the state politics for many years and strove constantly to advance the work of Devi Lal," Modi said. Although Chautala, born into an influential political family on January 1, 1935, in Chautala



village, could never match the stature of his father who was known as a messiah of farmers, he was known for his sharp political acumen and wit despite not being well-educated. While serving his 10-year prison term, Chautala was released from Delhi's Tihar jail in July 2021. He was already out on parole at the time. He was sent to Tihar jail again in May 2022 after being awarded a four-year sentence in a disproportionate assets case. At 87, he became the oldest inmate. In August 2002, Delhi High Court suspended the sentence. **Continued on page 8**

## Heavy snowfall, shabdeg, and kangris... 'Chillai Kalan', begins in J and K

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the persistent dry and cold weather, the Jammu and Kashmir region is ready to face the 40-day-long harshest winter period of 'Chillai Kalan', beginning from the intervening night of December 20 and December 21. This period of Chillai Kalan, which begins with Winter Solstice spans from December 21 to January 31, marks the apex of Kashmir's severe winter. Chillai Kalan is also known as "Shahenshah-e-zamistan." Chilla-i Kalan is a Persian term which means "major cold" while the intense cold conditions are known as 'Jaada' in North and East India. During Chillai Kalan, the chilling cold increases further, while heavy snowfall and temperatures well below freezing point cause water

bodies and even water taps in homes to freeze. In this 40-day period, nights are chilly and day temperatures are in single digits. The winter games at the skiing resort of Gulmarg are held during this period. During Chillai Kalan, many Kashmiri families prepare 'Shabdeg' on the first day of 'Chillai Kalan'. Meat is slow cooked with turnips and spices in an earthen vessel during the night intervening December 20-21, to mark the onset of the coldest phase of the season. During its 40 days, the Chillai Kalan leaves no chance to put people through the most difficult of hardships. Generally, however, due to the icy winds in Chillai Kalan, the entire valley is gripped by severe cold. The ongoing cold wave is said to reach its peak with



Kashmir's mountains covered in snow for weeks, and the famous Dal Lake also reaching freezing point until the end of January. Kashmir's winter pans out in three stages starting with a 40-day intense period from December 21 (locally called Chillai Kalan)

followed by 20 more days which are less intense (Chillai Khurd) and then 10 days of mild cold (Chillai Bache). Chillai-Kalan is the 40-day period of harsh winter in Kashmir that begins December 21 and ends on January 31. According to meteorological reports, this year's Chillai Kalan will begin with a cold wave, and temperatures are expected to dip significantly across the Kashmir Valley. The Meteorological Department has also predicted that there could be light to moderate snowfall in the coming days, especially in the higher reaches of the valley. The plains are likely to experience a drop in temperature, which may cause frost. Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6.2 degrees Celsius, slightly down

from minus 6 degrees Celsius the previous night. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), in South Kashmir, Pahalgam, which also serves as one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra, registered a low of minus 8.2 degrees Celsius, down from the previous night's minus 6.8 degrees Celsius. It said Gulmarg, a tourist spot popular for skiing, logged a minimum of minus six degrees Celsius, a degree down from the previous night. A hamlet on the outskirts of Pampore town, Konibal, was the coldest weather station in the valley as the minimum settled at the low of minus 9.2 degrees Celsius, the office said. **Continued on page 8**



'Sanatan Dharma national religion of India'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Calling Sanatan Dharma the national religion of India, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Friday that it is the collective responsibility of the citizens to protect it. Reflecting on the historical attacks on sacred temples by invaders, he said that the clans of those who desecrated these holy sites vanished into oblivion. The chief minister made these remarks while participating in the grand Ashtottarshat 108 Shrimad Bhagwat Paath and Panch Narayan Mahayagya held at Asharfi Bhawan Ashram in Shri Ayodhya Dham.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath takes part in the grand Ashtottarshat 108 Shrimad Bhagwat Paath and Panch Narayan Mahayagya held at Asharfi Bhawan Ashram in Shri Ayodhya Dham on Friday

As part of the Mahayagya, he offered oblations amidst Vedic chants, praying for the happiness, peace, and prosperity of the people of Uttar Pradesh. In his address, Yogi remarked, "Today, the descendants of Aurangzeb are driving rickshaws. Their plight is the result of their destructive actions. Had they upheld righteousness and refrained from demolishing temples, would they be in such a state?"

He reiterated that Sanatan Dharma is eternal and has existed since the beginning of creation, holding the key to establishing global peace. "Sanatan Dharma is the national religion of India, and it is the collective responsibility of the citizens to protect it," he added.

The chief minister stressed the importance of harmony between heritage and development.

Highlighting the ongoing transformation in Ayodhya,

he praised the "double-engine" government for restoring the city's ancient glory under the guidance of saints. He cited the construction of the grand Ram Temple and the comprehensive development of Ayodhya Dham as monumental achievements in this endeavour.

Yogi emphasised that this yagya serves as a powerful tool for self-purification and environmental purification while safeguarding Sanatan Dharma and fostering positive energy within society. He highlighted that organising this event in the sacred land of Saryu and

the birthplace of Lord Ram adds profound significance to the occasion. The chief minister stressed the need to learn from the mistakes of the past that led India into the shackles of slavery and resulted in the desecration of its sacred sites. He urged all Indians to unite in protecting and preserving Sanatan Dharma, asserting that respecting this eternal religion is essential for safeguarding humanity. Highlighting its inclusive nature, he said, "Sanatan Dharma, rooted in the principle of Vasudhaiva

Kutumbakam (the world is one family), has historically offered refuge to people of all castes, creeds, and religions during times of adversity." The chief minister underscored that India remains India only as long as Sanatan Dharma is protected. He called for a collective effort to uphold and promote this timeless tradition, which has harmonised with the universe for centuries. He stressed the importance of vigilance to shield it from distortions and anomalies in the future, resolving to correct past discrepancies through the wisdom of great men,

sages, and saints. He declared that India must move forward united, ensuring that no division or internal conflict weakens the essence of this religion or the nation. The chief minister further stressed the importance of harmony between heritage and development.

Reflecting on the destruction of cultural and religious heritage, CM Yogi pointed to the tragic events in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan as examples of the consequences of undermining Sanatan Dharma. He questioned the intentions of those who desecrated spiritual sites such as the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Shri Ram Jambhoomi, Shri Krishna Jambhoomi, Shri Krishna Avatar in Sambhal, and the sacred Goddess Saraswati Temple in Bhoj.

Their actions, he asserted, were driven by the goal of turning the earth into chaos, but their downfall was a direct result of their sins. The chief minister called for vigilance to ensure that such atrocities are never repeated, emphasising the importance of honouring and safeguarding India's religious heritage. He thanked Jagadguru Ramanujacharya Pujya Swami Shankaracharya Maharaj and his team for organising the Panch Narayan Maha Yagya, highlighting its profound spiritual and societal significance. He said, "The positive energy and virtues emanating from this yagya would benefit all Indians, spreading harmony and unity across the nation."

CM Yogi offers prayers at Lord Ram, Hanumangarhi temples

PNS ■ AYODHYA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offered prayers at the Shri Ram Lalla and Hanumangarhi temples during his day-long visit to Ayodhya on Friday. At the Saryu Guest House, he held a meeting with BJP officials, party workers, public representatives, and senior officials. The discussions focused on Ayodhya's development, the Milkpur by-election, preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025, and the Shri Ram Lalla Prana Pratishtha Mahotsav.



He engaged with officials at various levels, from Mandal in-charge to others, asking for updates and insights on the election strategies. Encouraging party members,

CM Yogi shared his formula for success, stating that, "If the elections in Kundarki and Katehari can be won, any election can be won." Yogi stressed the importance

of effective booth management and mobilising party officials. He outlined a strategic plan for securing electoral victory and emphasised that there is no substitute for hard work. He urged officials to dedicate their full efforts to the campaign. Highlighting the significance of the voter list, the chief minister directed booth officials to identify BJP supporters and ensure 100% voter turnout among them. He emphasised the need for continuous outreach and communication to strengthen voter engagement.

CM Yogi also called for organising conferences across all party fronts to promote the party's ideology and energise workers, creating a favourable environment for the election. Additionally, the chief minister reviewed the ongoing development projects in Ayodhya, seeking updates from officials to ensure progress aligns with the vision of enhancing the city's infrastructure and facilities.

CPI (ML) to observe protest week

Lucknow (PNS): CPI (ML) will observe a statewide protest week from December 21 to 26 against the alleged derogatory remarks made by Home Minister Amit Shah in Parliament about Dr BR Ambedkar.

During this week, the party will hold protests, demonstrations, and marches from district headquarters to villages, demanding Shah's resignation and an apology from the Central government.

CPI (ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav, in a statement on Friday, condemned the home minister's remarks, accusing the Modi government and BJP of insulting Dr Ambedkar's legacy and violating the Constitution. "The home minister's statement exposes the anti-constitutional mindset of the Modi government. Those who have taken an oath to uphold the Constitution and then insult Dr Ambedkar's work are hurting millions of citizens."

Rai rubbishes claims of tampering with evidence

Lucknow (PNS): UP Congress chief Ajay Rai on Friday reacted strongly to the accusations by Lucknow police that his leaders had tried to tamper with the evidence related to the death of worker Prabhat Pandey during the assembly siege attempt on Wednesday.

"It has been learnt through media reports that the police team investigating the death of Prabhat Pandey has accused the Congress of tampering with evidence, which is extremely unfortunate and shameful," Rai said on Friday.

Rai stated that Prabhat Pandey was a member of the Congress family. "We deeply regret his untimely death. I myself attended his funeral despite the obstacles created by the police. Our national general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh, Avinash Pandey, paid tribute to Pandey at the Shradhanjali Sabha organised at the UP Congress headquarters in Lucknow on Thursday," Rai said. He added that due to "police brutality" during the peaceful protest, he himself and Avinash Pandey, along with many workers, had been injured, and Prabhat Pandey had died. The Congress itself was the first to demand an inquiry into his death. The state government was called upon to provide Rs 1 crore in compensation and a government job for one member of the family. Additionally, the Congress announced financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh. Rai said that they had been

cooperating in the investigation since the first day of the incident and were accepting whatever the police said as true.

"At midnight of the incident, the police expressed their desire to see the crime scene, which we immediately accepted. The police inspected the crime scene at night and asked to seal it, we accepted that too. On the evening of the incident itself, the police had taken all the CCTV recordings in a pen drive. But even after that, they expressed their desire to take the DBR at night, and we cooperated and handed over the DBR to them," Rai pointed out, adding that they were cooperating with the police in the process of recording the statements of the office and Congress workers.

"However, the truth is that there are many people who were not present at the time of the incident. The police want to record their statements as well. We agreed to this and cooperated with them," Rai claimed. He stated that the truth behind the matter, which the police are spreading as a lie in the media, is that the mattresses brought from the tent house were laid where Prabhat was found unconscious. "After sending Pandey to the hospital, the tent house owner came and took them away as a routine procedure. Until then, there was no indication that such an incident would occur. As soon as we got the news, we left everything as it was and cooperated with the police investigation," Rai added.

Akhilesh hits out at RSS chief over temple-mosque remarks

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks on temple-mosque disputes sparked a sharp reaction from Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav. He criticised the timing of the statement from the RSS chief, citing the violence in Sambhal that claimed five lives, and called for harmony and accountability. Yadav said that days after several people faced humiliation, the RSS is now calling for harmony between the two communities. Five people were killed during the violent incident. The unrest erupted when a mob protesting a court-ordered survey of a Shahi Jama Masjid confronted the police.



they are now saying this. The BJP should at least withdraw the false cases filed in Sambhal. Lives cannot be returned, but false cases can be taken back," Yadav said in a post on X. "We have been living in harmony for a long time. If we want to provide this harmony to the world, we need to create a model of it. After the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, some people think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places. This is not acceptable." RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had said. Yadav also criticised Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks on Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha, claiming that a ruling party is trying to weaken the constitution and democracy. "Parliament session might be concluding today, but issues don't conclude. The insult to

Babasaheb Ambedkar and the attitude of the BJP towards him—the opposition demands that he should admit his mistake and apologise. If we have to take the country forward, Babasaheb's Constitution shows the way. BJP attempts to weaken the Constitution and democracy from time to time," Yadav said. He also slammed the FIR filed against Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and termed it a "false case."

"We will have to understand the tactics of the BJP. They first do unconstitutional things and commit injustice. When you stand with those who have faced injustice, they slap false cases. This is not happening for the first time. This is BJP's strategy," Yadav said. "Only the BJP MPs are responsible for the standoff we saw yesterday at Makar Dwar. We had never seen such a standoff," he added. Demanding an apology from BJP MPs, Yadav said, "We want the BJP MPs to apologise because they have insulted Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, who is an idol for every citizen of the country. BJP goes ahead with just one side. It never goes ahead with India's Constitution, democracy, and its people. I think the BJP should apologise for yesterday's face-off because only the BJP government and BJP MPs were responsible for it," the SP chief said.

Indian Bank POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immovable Property) [Under Rule-8 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002] Details as under: Table with columns for S. No., Name & Address of the Borrower (s)/ Guarantor (s)/ Proprietor / Mortgagors, Description of the Immovable Property, and Dt. of Demand Notice / Dt. of Possession / Outstanding Amount.

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) Registered Office: KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chelpet, Chennai- 600031. Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

APPENDIX IV [Rule 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property) Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 16.02.2024 calling upon the borrower, co-borrowers and guarantors 1.SHIV JEE KUMAR, 2. SANTOSH KUMAR, 3. NANDLAL BHAGAT, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.6,59,640.47/- (Rupees Six Lac Fifty Nine Thousand Six Hundred Forty And Forty Seven Paise Only) as on 14.02.2024 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Demand notice.

Baroda U.P Bank Regional Office: 2A Gautam Nagar (2nd Floor), Fatehpur Mob.9554969117, 9554969118, E-Mail:Fatehpur@barodauprb.co.in POSSESSION NOTICE [Rule 8(1)](For Immovable Property) Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Baroda U.P. Bank under The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (54 for 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated 30-03-2024, calling upon the Borrower to repay the amount mentioned in 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice. The Borrower/Guarantors/Mortgagors having failed to repay the amount, Notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantors/Mortgagors and the Public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on below mentioned date. The Borrower/Guarantors/Mortgagors in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property (ies) will be subject to the charge of the Baroda U.P. Bank. The Borrower/Guarantors/ attention is invited to provisions of Section 13(8) of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Table with 4 columns: Sl. No, Name of The Borrowers / Legal Heirs Demand Notice Date / Possession Date / Branch, Detail of Property / Name of The Owner / Type of Possession and Name, Outstanding Amount (Rs.), and Date: 21.12.2024 Place: Fatehpur (Authorised Officer- Baroda UP Bank)

# Mohanty: Research only way to know about effective disease management

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and Secretary of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) Dr AK Mohanty inaugurated a modern research lab at Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya Cancer Centre and Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital (MPPMCC) here on Friday. This Dr Sumati V Bhide Analytical Basic and Clinical Research lab built in the hospital will promote research and prove to be a milestone for the both units of MPPMCC and Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital (HBCH), run as a unit by Tata Memorial Centre (DAE, Government of India). The lab will not only promote modern research in the field of cancer but will also help in knowing what kind of treatment should be given to the cancer patient. "Along with medicine, research plays an important role in the treatment



AEC Chairman Dr AK Mohanty inaugurating a modern research lab at MPPMCC in Varanasi on Friday.

of any disease", said Dr Mohanty, adding that research is the only way to know about effective management of a disease. "When it comes to cancer, the role of research increases even more. Keeping this in mind, a modern lab has been started in MPPMCC and HBCH in which facilities like biorepository and tissue bank, cell culture facility, gene editing etc are available. Here the sample can be kept safe at a temperature of -196 degrees Celsius," he said. Scientific officer of the hospital Dr Rohit Kumar said this lab is impor-

tant in the field of cancer biology, molecular biology and cellular research. "It also has an important role in translational research. The start of this dedicated lab will also promote the research being done by the institute in the field of basic research. Along with the field of treatment, it will also help in early detection of the disease", he said. Director Dr Satyajit Pradhan said the three main objectives of the Tata Memorial Centre are service, education and research. "In MPPMCC and HBCH, these three objectives are being pursued. The opening of this lab will not only give more impetus to our institutional research but will also promote research in the field of new medicines and technology", said Dr Pradhan, adding that this lab has been set up at a cost of approximately ₹3 crore with funds from the DAE and hospital as well as CSR contribution from Aditya Vision.

# Illegal construction bulldozed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In view of the tragic killing of a minor girl after falling into Sisamau nullah a few days ago, Mayor Pramila Pandey on Friday reached the spot with the Nagar Nigam team and six backhoe loaders. She directed to demolish the illegal construction carried out around the nullah which damaged the slab and led to death of the minor girl. The residents made a futile attempt to lodge the protest against the move but were soon pacified due to presence of police force.



Mayor Pramila Pandey inspecting the demolition of illegal construction around Sisamau nullah on Friday.

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party MLA Naseem Solanki also reached the spot and urged mayor to give one week's time to the residents which was refused by the latter. Thereafter, MLA Naseem Solanki returned from there. The squad bulldozed the illegal construction from Bajaria to VIP road on Friday and the remaining will be demolished on Saturday. The mayor directed the officials to construct a four feet high wall on both sides of the nullah and then install a 10 feet high grill so that no one falls into it in future. During the drive, incharge of Zone 4 Rajesh Singh and Executive Engineer RK Tewari were also present. It may be recalled that a few days ago a minor girl fell into the nullah through the damaged slab. Mayor Pramila Pandey had visited the spot on Thursday to take stock of the situation and expressed displeasure over the open nullah. She had immediately directed the chief engineer to ensure construction of 14 feet high wall (four feet wall and 10 feet grill) on both the sides of the nullah after removing the illegal construction on Friday. She also met the kin of the deceased girl. She directed the officials to construct a room on the vacant land of Nagar Nigam near the nullah for the kin of the deceased.

INSPECTION: Chief Development Officer Diksha Jain directed to stop one-day salary of the accountant Devendra Kumar Sharma following his absence during inspection of the office of development block, Chaubepr, on Thursday. The CDO also visited the development block Shivrajpur and asked officials to update all records and submit all account books to her office for review. On finding the office premises dirty and unkempt, she directed for its immediate cleaning. At the Community Health Centre, Bilhaur, she issued directives to maintain the cold chain and arrange back up generators for power outages. The CDO sought clarification from the pharmacist on failing to present the stock register and instructed the staff to publicise Ayushman Gold Card scheme through banners, pamphlets and posters to maximise the patient benefits. On finding the incomplete account books and documents, she instructed the block officer to get these all updated soon. She also examined the under-construction CHC Jamalpur and noticed the absence of building and site plans. CDO directed the additional district panchayatraj officer to seek clarification from the consultant engineer and suspend the salary disbursement of the assistant development officer.

# V-C dedicates extension building of Central Library

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Making another significant stride towards fulfilling the commitment of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) to providing enhanced student facilities, Sayaji Rao Gaekwad Central Library now boasts 700 additional student seats, increasing its total capacity to three times what it was in 2021. Vice-Chancellor Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain on Friday dedicated the newly constructed extension building of the Central Library. The G+5 block will offer seating space for over 700 students. Additionally, more space is now available to keep over 50,000 books. These facilities are being developed as a result of V-C's strong focus on



creating state-of-the-art student amenities and strengthening the teaching-learning infrastructure. The V-C visited the newly-constructed building and inspected the arrangements made for student seating and book stacks. He instructed the library administration to optimise the use of space and facilities to ensure that as many students as possible benefit. The university has implemented a comprehensive plan to expand and upgrade its library system to accommodate more students. Librarian Dr DK Singh informed that the limited seating capacity of the library has been a challenge for many years, but under the visionary leadership of VC Prof Jain, the library has seen a major uplift in the past three years. The library can now accommodate nearly 2,500 students in comparison to 850 students in the year 2021.

# BLW GM's emphasis on integrating modern technologies & processes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A significant meeting on the topic 'Maintenance and Policy Formulation of High Horsepower (HHP) Diesel Locomotives' was organised under the aegis of the Railway Board at the Kirti Sabhagar (Hall of Fame), Administrative Building, Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW), here on Friday. The meeting was presided over by Additional Member (Traction) of the Railway Board VP Singh and attended by General Manager NP Singh and others. The primary objective of this meeting was to deliberate on comprehensive policy formulation regarding the maintenance and operation of HHP diesel locomotives.



Additional Member of Railway Board (Traction) VP Singh addressing a meeting on HHP diesel locos at BLW in Varanasi on Friday.

Senior officials from the Railway Board, RDSO, 11 zonal railways, PDSO/HW, GOC Workshop, Jamalpur Workshop and BLW participated in this meeting. In intense discussions among experts and officials focused on strategies to adopt advanced technologies and improved maintenance processes. BLW GM highlighted that locomotive maintenance plays a pivotal role in the operations of Indian Railways. He emphasised that integrating modern technologies and processes would

enhance the efficiency and reliability of the railways. He appreciated the active contributions of all participants. Additional Member (Traction) of Railway Board termed the meeting a significant step in the efforts of the Railway Board. He noted that such interactive sessions would accelerate the implementation of new technologies and procedures. The meeting also included discussions on environmental conservation in railway operations, with a special emphasis on incorporating energy efficiency and green technologies in locomotive maintenance. This meeting was convened at BLW with the objective of setting a new direction for Indian Railways' future and enhancing its operational efficiency. Prominent attendees included Principal Chief Electrical Engineer (PCEE) SK Srivastava, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer (PCME) Subroto Nath, Principal Chief Materials Manager (PCMM) Rajneesh Gupta, Chief Mechanical Service Engineer (CMSE) Neeraj Jain, Chief Materials Manager (CMM)-I Ashish Kumar Agarwal, CMM (Engineering) Atul Saxena, CMM (Loco) Amit Verma, Chief Design Engineer (CDE/Mechanical) Praveen Kumar, Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME/Production & Marketing) Sunil Kumar, EDM RDSO Nitin Mehrotra, and Chief Quality Assurance Manager Ram Janm Choubey, among other senior officials.

# Energy conservation exhibition inaugurated



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

National energy conservation exhibition was organised by the Electrical department at North Central Railway (NCR) headquarters, Subedarganj here on Friday. NCR General Manager Uppendra Chandra Joshi inaugurated the energy conservation exhibition by lighting the ceremonial lamp and cutting the ribbon and visited the stalls set up on the occasion. All principal department heads of the headquarters office including Additional General Manager (AGM) Joginder Singh Lakra and other officers of the division were present. Various energy conservation measures and products were showcased in this exhibition. In which LED bulbs, solar panels, cables, prepaid meters etc. were presented by various companies. A street play was also presented which highlighted the

measures of energy conservation. The GM congratulated everyone on NCR getting the first position in the "Uttar Pradesh State Energy Conservation Award-2024" and Subedarganj Railway Station getting the "Certificate of Merit" in the "National Energy Conservation Award-2024" organised by BEE (Bureau of Energy Efficiency). In his speech, the GM emphasised every railway employee to adopt habits related to energy conservation measures in their lives. Indian Railways has run many programmes for energy conservation in the last few years. Important works have been done continuously by NCR, he added. He said through all these measures like the installation and maximum use of solar electrical plant, use of electric engine, reduction in diesel consumption of electrical car by using HOG, use of energy saving process/ technology, use of energy-efficient coaches, use of energy saving LED system at railway stations etc. the operating cost has reduced significantly and we have also reduced carbon emission, which has helped in protecting the environment. On the occasion, Principal Chief Electrical Engineer (PCEE) Anoop Kumar Agarwal presented the data related to the reduction in energy consumption from the year 2023-24 to the year 2024-25, which includes solar energy generation, regenerative braking etc. The PCEE encouraged everyone to work in the same way in the future as well. **THREE ARRESTED:** A joint team of Naini Kotwali Police and SOG Yamunanagar claimed to have worked out three cases of theft by arresting three accused. Theft case. Apart from a torch, gold and silver ornaments and Rs 2,21,770 cash, two motorcycles used in the theft were recovered from them. ACP Karchana Varun Kumar said the accused arrested near Naini railway station were identified as Bablu alias Naseer (49) of 539 Shahganj police station Shahganj Prayagraj present address Kashiram Colony ADA Naini, Firoz Ahmed (33) of 222 Ratanganj under Kotwali Katta police station, Mirzapur and Ramji alias Guddu (26) of Pureshpana Bagwana under Ghurpura police station.

# Stress on holistic approach to winter care

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

As winter settles in, it brings with it unique health challenges, especially for senior citizens. Cold weather can have serious consequences for older adults, who are more vulnerable to conditions like hypothermia, cardiovascular strain and seasonal illnesses such as the flu. Their bodies face difficulties in maintaining normal body temperature due to slower metabolism, reduced muscle mass and decreased blood circulation, making them more susceptible to the effects of chilly weather. Addressing mediapersons, Associate Director, Cardiology Interventional Cardiology at Regency Health Dr Abhinav Gupta while highlighting the importance of proactive care during winter, said, "Winter can be a tough season for senior citizens, but with the right measures, we can protect them from its harsh effects. Simple practices like ensuring warm clothing, providing nutritious meals and encouraging physical activity can make a significant difference. Vaccinations are equally vital, as they shield against serious illnesses like the flu. Above all, we must cultivate an environment where seniors feel supported, cared for and empowered to enjoy this season without fear." He said the risk of heart attacks is notably higher during winter for older adults, particularly those with existing cardiovascular conditions.

Cold air causes blood vessels to constrict, raising blood pressure and putting extra strain on the heart. Even moderate outdoor activity in such conditions can lead to overexertion. Additionally, the drop in temperature can lead to hypothermia, a dangerous condition where the body's core temperature falls below 35°C. Symptoms like shivering, fatigue and slurred speech must be addressed immediately to prevent severe complications. He said the winter season also coincides with the peak of flu activity, which poses significant risks to seniors due to their weaker immune defences. Statistics indicate that a large percentage of flu-related hospitalisations and deaths occur in people aged 65 and older. Vaccination remains one of the most effective measures to protect against the flu, yet awareness about its importance needs to increase. A holistic approach to winter care is essential. Families and caregivers should ensure that homes are warm and draft-free while encouraging seniors to stay active, even if it's light indoor exercise or yoga. Balanced diets rich in vitamins and nutrients play a vital role in boosting immunity and maintaining overall health. Seniors should also drink plenty of water to stay hydrated, even if they don't feel thirsty in the colder months. Lastly, proper skincare is often overlooked but crucial, as dry winter air can cause irritation

and discomfort. He said with thoughtful care and attention, winter can be a time of comfort and warmth for senior citizens, allowing them to enjoy the season while staying safe and healthy. "It's a reminder for all of us to prioritise their well-being and ensure they receive the love and support they deserve", he said. **BIKE LIFTERS HELD :** The Ghatampur Kotwali police arrested two bike lifters and recovered two stolen motorcycles from them on Friday. According to police, both the lifters were identified in the CCTV footages examined after the incident. They were residents of Fatehpur. Police have started to collect their crime record. Anil of Kalpi, Jalaun, had lodged complaint about his bike being missing. He had come to his aunt's place in Badle Simnapur village. On December 16 while seeing the Bhairam Baba Mela he had parked his bike there in a compound. After some time, his bike was found missing. He had lodged complaint with the police which, after a lodging first information report (FIR) had also launched raids in search of the accused. Sajeti Station Officer (SO) Kamlesh Rai said with the help of CCTV footages, police identified the bike lifters and arrested them. They were identified as Deepak Nishad (19) of Mahuwapur, Bibipur outpost area, and Rashid (20) of Koragoan, Jahanabad, Fatehpur. Both the stolen bikes had been recovered from them, he said.

# HRANI to hold its 10th conclave today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Northern India (HRANI) will organise its 10th conclave here on Saturday. Addressing mediapersons on Friday, President Surendra Kumar Jaiswal said with the theme 'Hospitality and Tourism: A Catalyst for Economic Growth', this significant event will bring together a wide range of industry professionals, policy makers and business leaders to engage in critical discussions and share valuable insights on the future of hospitality and tourism in India. He said the key focus of the conclave will be a presentation on Maha Kumbh 2025 by title sponsor, the Uttar Pradesh Tourism department. The presentation will explore the enormous potential of this prestigious event in driving tourism and creating significant opportunities for the hospitality sector. The Maha Kumbh, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, attracts millions of pilgrims and tourists, offering a unique opportunity to showcase India's cultural richness and hospitality prowess. It will be a prime example of how large-scale events can act as catalysts for tourism development and economic growth. He said the conclave will also explore integration of technology in the hospitality industry, from AI-driven customer service solutions to the use of virtual and augmented reality in marketing and operations. Through engaging sessions, the event will highlight sustainable sourcing, the use of local produce and farm-to-table initiatives that strengthen the local economy. One of the key sessions aims to build a bridge between food producers and FBOs (hotels and restaurants), facilitating deeper collaboration and fostering sustainable partnerships that benefit both industries. Secretary General Renu Thapliyal, treasurer Garish Oberoi and Managing Committee member Vikas Malhotra were also present.

# Appeal to pvt hospitals to strengthen FP services

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With the aim of strengthening family planning (FP) programmes in the private sector, the Health department held a meeting with 34 private hospitals here on Thursday. This sensitisation meeting was organised in collaboration with the voluntary organisation 'The Challenge Initiative-Population Services International India (PSI India)'. Chairing the meeting, Deputy Chief Medical Officer (DCMO) and Nodal Officer of National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) Dr Amit Singh said that private sector hospitals can play an important role in connecting the community with the family planning programme. Along with giving information about all the means of 'Basket of Choice' to the eligible couple of the families, he said its report must also be shared with the Health department. He appealed to private hospitals to strengthen family planning services and ensure reporting of each service so that its actual status

in the district can be assessed and the index of the district can be improved. "Getting correct data from private and government sectors also helps policy makers to take necessary steps and family planning services can be strengthened further", Dr Singh said, adding that IEC material (posters- banners) related to family planning should be displayed at the prescribed level in private hospitals and they should be used during counseling. "It should be ensured that family welfare services are uploaded on the Health Management Information System (HMIS) portal every month. The record register of family planning services should be kept updated", he instructed. In the meeting, PSI India organisation representative Kriti Pathak told about the objective of the meeting and welcomed the people present. Shubhra Trivedi of PSI India told about three high effective interventions promoting family planning - postpartum family planning, capacity building, data-based decision making etc. The data manager

displayed the data of private doctors from the Health Management and Information System (HMIS) portal. The Varanasi Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society appealed to adopt three high interventions of family planning and appealed about the quality of the report and not giving zero report. In the meeting, an appeal was made to provide better family planning services, give timely reports, keep the record register complete, provide postpartum family planning counselling and service and give the report of delivery and vaccination of children from the district. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) assured full cooperation to the Varanasi Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society in all national health programmes. The district health education and information officer explained about the CRS portal along with reporting of births and deaths. The district level team of the Health department including gynaecologists and obstetricians of 34 private hospitals were present in the meeting.

# Annual day celebrated



Children of Bal Niketan presenting cultural programme on their Annual Day at BLW in Varanasi on Friday.

**Varanasi (PNS):** The Annual Day celebration of Bal Niketan School, run by the BLW Women's Welfare Organisation (WVO), was held with great enthusiasm here on Friday. The event began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by BLW GM NP Singh, marking the formal inauguration of the programme. The event commenced with Ganesh Vandana, creating an auspicious and positive atmosphere. The children showcased their talent through various captivating performances. The highlights of the programme included a welcome dance by nursery students, a fusion dance by LKG students, a thought-provoking dance drama on 'Save the Girl Child', a fashion show by UKG students and a skit titled 'Andher Nagri Chaupat Raja'. The first-grade students presented a comparative act on 'Old Generation vs New Generation', followed by mesmerising performances.

# Training programme of legal service unit for disabled kids concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As per instructions of National and state legal services authorities, the two-day training programme of a legal service unit constituted for disabled children under District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), which concluded on Friday was inaugurated by District Judge Sanjeev Pandey by lighting a lamp. District Judge said the committee constituted for disabled children related to Varanasi district will do the work of monitoring for the protection of the interests of the children and legal aid. In the training programme, Additional District Judge (Retd) Rajendra Ram, Chairman of Permanent Lok Adalat Santram, Additional District Judge (Public Act) Ravindra Kumar Srivastava,

Additional District Judge-I and Nodal Officer of National Lok Adalat Anil Kumar-V and officers of Legal Aid Defence Council and members of LSUM District Judge (Retd) Brahmadev Mishra, Panel Advocate, PLV were present as members. Additional Commissioner of Police, in charge of Women Related Branch Commissionerate Anil Sharma as representative of Women Crimes, Akhilesh Kumar (Prisoner) as representative of Superintendent District Jail, District Probation Officer Sudhakar Sharan Pandey, Akhilesh Kumar (member of CWC), Social Welfare Officer Girishchandra Dubey and Dr Ajay Kumar Singh from Mental Hospital provided information about various provisions related to children. This information was given by LSUM member and Secretary/Additional District Judge Vijay Kumar Vishwakarma. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh State Women Commission is running a programme of review/women public hearing/inspection of incidents of women harassment in different districts are bring held in the government guest houses of various districts of the state with the senior administrative officers nominated by the district magistrates of the districts concerned, senior superintendents of police (SSPs) or senior police officers nominated by them, Mahila police station heads and the area officers of the police stations concerned. In continuation of this, UP State Women Commission member Neelam Prabhat will conduct women public hearing in the Circuit House auditorium here on Saturday at 11 am.

# States demand higher allocations, special packages, and borrowing flexibility in pre-Budget meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance ministers of states demanded an increase in allocation of 50-year interest free loan, while fiscally stressed states like Punjab and Kerala pitched for a special package and borrowing flexibility, sources said. In a pre-budget meeting with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, states have also urged for higher borrowing limits to support fiscal activities, besides additional funds for Jal Jeevan Mission to arrange for tanks and storage to enhance water supplies. Sources said in the meeting, Maharashtra wanted funds for Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana and demanded that a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) be launched with the Centre and state sharing 50 per cent of the cost each.



The Budget for 2025-26 is slated to be presented in Parliament on February 1, 2025. Finance ministers of all states attended Friday's meeting with Sitharaman here. Several states demanded increase in allocations for the 50 years interest-free loan scheme, sources said, adding

they also requested for more flexibility in the Special Assistance for Capital Investment (SASCI) scheme under this category. In the Budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman had hiked the allocations for interest-free loans to states for capital expenditure, enabling states to spend more on

infrastructure and specified reforms. The allocation was increased to Rs 1.5 lakh crore from Rs 1.10 lakh crore disbursed in 2023-24. With regard to road and rail infrastructure, sources said, states highlighted the need for state-specific road development projects and railway projects. They also

sought an increase in the honorarium being paid to Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers. Some states asked the central government to bear a larger share of land acquisition costs for projects, the sources added. Fiscally stressed states like Punjab and Kerala sought special financial packages.

Their demands included more loans, grants, and borrowing flexibility. Sources said states emphasised the need for additional funding for disaster relief and pressed for more allocation for the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal in his speech said the Centre has to recognise that fiscal consolidation achieved through restrictions in government expenditure may not necessarily be a desirable outcome. "We reiterate that fiscal consolidation targets should not compromise sustainable growth. Instead, state governments should be empowered to fulfil their expenditure commitments and implement macroeconomic policies that drive faster national economic growth," Balagopal said.

# Center raises MSP for copra by ₹420

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday announced an increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for copra by up to Rs 420 to Rs 12,100 per quintal for 2025 with a budget outlay of Rs 855 crore. A decision in this regard was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The MSP for 'milling copra' has been increased by Rs 420 to Rs 11,582 per quintal, while for 'ball copra' by Rs 100 to Rs 12,100 per quintal for 2025, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said. The total financial implication would be Rs 855 crore. The minister said the MSP has been fixed 50 per cent higher than the cost of production. A higher MSP will not only ensure better remunerative returns to the coconut growers but also incentivize

farmers to expand copra production to meet the growing demand for coconut products both domestically and internationally. In order to provide remunerative prices to the cultivators, Government had announced in the Union Budget of 2018-19, that MSP of all the mandated crops will be fixed at levels of at least 1.5 times of all India weighted average cost of production. National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) and National Cooperative Consumers' Federation (NCCF) will continue to act as Central Nodal Agencies (CNAs) for procurement of copra and de-husked coconut under Price Support Scheme (PSS). Copra production remains the highest in Karnataka with 32.7 per cent share in overall country's production, followed by Tamil Nadu 25.7 per cent.

# India boosts self-reliance in weapon production with ₹7,628.70 Crore contract



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to self-reliance in weapon production, Ministry of Defence on Friday here signed a contract with Larsen & Toubro Limited for procurement of 155 mm/52 calibre K9 VAJRA-T Self-Propelled Tracked Artillery

Guns for the Indian Army under Buy (Indian) category at a total cost of Rs 7,628.70 crore. The contract was signed by senior officials of the Ministry and representatives of L&T in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. The procurement of K9 VAJRA-T will catalyse the artillery modernisation and enhance overall operational readiness of the Indian Army. This versatile artillery gun, with its cross-country mobility, will play a pivotal role in enhancing the firepower of the Indian Army, enabling deeper strike with precision and its lethal firepower will bolster the

capability of artillery in all terrains. The gun being equipped with cutting-edge technology is capable of delivering long-range lethal fires with high accuracy and higher rate of fire and will be able to operate in sub-zero temperature in high-altitude areas to its full potential. The project will generate an employment of more than nine lakh man-days over a period of four years and encourage active participation of various Indian industries including MSMEs. The project will be a proud flag-bearer of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' in consonance with the 'Make-in-India' initiative.

# Delhi youth Congress protests over FIR against Rahul Gandhi, demands Amit Shah's resignation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Youth Congress held a protest here on Friday over the FIR against Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and detention of Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib in Assam. According to a statement, several Youth Congress workers joined this protest under the leadership of Delhi Youth Congress president Akshay Lakra. They burnt Union Home Minister Amit Shah's effigy and demanded his resignation over his remarks on Baba Saheb Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha. They also raised slogans against the Central government. The protest took place outside the Youth



Congress office, where the Delhi Police stopped everyone by barricading, it

said. Delhi Police on Thursday registered an FIR against

Gandhi accusing him of "physical assault and incitement" during a scuffle in Parliament premises. A face-off between the opposition and the ruling NDA MPs in Parliament premises over the alleged insult to Ambedkar left former minister Pratap Chandra Sarangi and BJP MP Mukesh Rajput injured. Lakra said they oppose the dictatorship being done by the Central government. The BJP is filing baseless FIR against Rahul Gandhi because the truth of the BJP has come in front of the country, he added. Lakra said they are doing such things to divert the country's attention. The Constitution is the gift of Ambedkar. India will not tolerate his insult and hence

Shah will have to resign from the post of Home Minister, he demanded. Lakra further said the BJP government in Assam has taken Chib into preventive custody since Friday morning and demanded that he should be released as soon as possible otherwise they will continue to raise their voice in this manner. Chib was put in "preventive detention" by the Assam Police since Friday morning ahead of a protest over the death of a party worker two days ago. Earlier on Wednesday, Congress activist Mridul Islam died during a 'Raj Bhawan Chalo' programme against a host of issues, including unrest in Manipur and bribery charges against the Adani Group.

# SC leaves decision on hospitalisation of hunger-striking farmer leader to Punjab government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday left it to the Punjab Government officials and doctors to decide on the hospitalisation of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite hunger strike. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said it was the responsibility of the Punjab government to look after the health of Dallewal, who has been holding the fast for over 24 days. The Bench sought reports from Punjab chief secretary and health officials on the medical conditions of Dallewal by January 2 and said the state government could



approach the court, if a need arose. The bench said 70-year-old Dallewal could be moved to the makeshift hospital setup

within 700 metre of the protest site at Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana. Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh

gave an undertaking of the chief secretary on the medical condition of the farmer leader and said forcefully moving him from where he was stationed could cause him trauma and aggravate the situation. The bench said the authorities could continue with their efforts to persuade him to move to the hospital. The bench during the hearing earlier asked the Punjab government to give an undertaking on Dallewal's health condition and on moving him to the nearby facility for a round-the-clock monitoring. Singh informed the bench on December 19 the Dallewal cooperated and

underwent several tests, including ECG and blood examination. He said Dallewal's health condition appeared to be stable for now. The bench on December 19 referred to civil rights activist Irom Sharmila continuing her protest for more than a decade under medical supervision and asked the Punjab government to convince Dallewal for a health examination. It had pulled up the state for not running medical tests on Dallewal. Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border since November 26 to press the Centre to accept the agitating farmers' demands,

including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops. Farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by the security forces. The Haryana Government set up the barricades on the Ambala-New Delhi National Highway in February after it was announced that the farmers would march to Delhi in support of their demands, including legal guarantee of MSP for their produce.

# JD(U) leaders accuse Kejriwal of ignoring dalit representation, corruption taint



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Janata Dal (United) on Friday accused Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal of not giving representation to Dalits and backward classes, and said a leader tainted with corruption charges has no right to give suggestions to someone like Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The attack on the former Delhi chief minister from two key JD(U) leaders, Union minister Lalan Singh and Sanjay Jha, came a day after Kejriwal wrote a letter to Kumar asking him to "deeply reflect" on Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged insulting comments for B R Ambedkar. Kejriwal had written a similar letter to another key BJP ally, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Jha responded to the AAP leader by writing he did not send a single leader from the Dalit and backward castes to the Rajya Sabha and accusing him of backtracking on his promise of picking a Dalit deputy chief minister in Punjab. Jha asked if the AAP leader could not find anyone from these classes to replace him as Delhi chief minister when he resigned and cited Kumar's choice of Dalit leader Jitan Ram Manjhi to take him place in 2014. Kejriwal has had links with an organisation known for its stand against reservation, joined hands with the Congress after swearing to never ally with it, hates people from Bihar and poorvanchal as is clear from their poor living conditions in the national capital, he alleged. Singh told reporters that Kejriwal had no right to question the JD(U) president and took a swipe at him over his incarceration in jail in a corruption case after entering politics through an anti-corruption movement headed by veteran activist Anna Hazare. He then

dumped Hazare, the Union minister said, adding, "A corrupt person has no right to offer advice to Nitish Kumar who was a Union minister and is now chief minister for so many years and still can not be accused of any misconduct." Sharing the letters on social media, Kejriwal said people feel that those who love Ambedkar can not support the BJP that "insulted" the architect of India's Constitution, and asked Kumar and Naidu to ponder over it. Shah's remark on Babasaheb was not only "disrespectful" but also revealed the BJP's perspective towards him and the Constitution, the AAP leader said in the letters to the two chief ministers. "The statement made by Shah in Parliament regarding Babasaheb has left the entire nation stunned. His remark that 'chanting Ambedkar-Ambedkar has become a fashion these days' is not only disrespectful but also reveals the BJP's perspective towards Babasaheb and our Constitution," Kejriwal wrote. JD(U) leaders strongly defended Shah, saying he only exposed the Congress insult of Ambedkar, an iconic figure, especially among Dalits. "The home minister threw light on those pages of history which you and the leader of your alliance Rahul Gandhi do not want to see. Shah told the country as to how a hurt Ambedkar had to resign from Nehru's Cabinet due to neglect of Dalits and women. I can understand that you and your alliance leader Rahul Gandhi would not have liked such a discussion at all," Jha wrote in the letter. The Congress was in power in Bihar till 1990 and enjoyed its fruits later till 2005 in alliance with the RJD but it was Kumar who gave reservation to Dalits and extremely backward classes in local bodies, he added.

# 10 Crore rural women mobilised into 90.87 Lakh self-help groups under DAY-NRLM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While total bank loans disbursed to SHGs till November 2024 are Rs 9.71 lakh crore, over 10.05 crore women from rural households have so far been mobilised into 90.87 lakh self-help groups (SHGs) under the Deendayara Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), the Parliament was informed on Friday. The Mission is being implemented in 7,138 blocks in 742 districts across 28 States and six UTs, said Minister of State for Rural Development Dr Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani said in a written reply in Rajya Sabha. The number of SHGs formed and supported under DAY-NRLM during the last three years is

21.54 lakh, he said. So far, DAY-NRLM has supported the establishment of 1,245 women-owned producer enterprises/farmer producer companies, covering around 15 lakh women members. Further, 1.78 lakh producer groups have been promoted covering 32 lakhs women members. DAY-NRLM provides funds to create a resource in perpetuity for the community institutions to strengthen their institutional and financial management capacity and build their track record to attract mainstream bank finance. These include Revolving Fund of Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000 per SHG and Community Investment Fund up to Rs 2.50 lakh per SHG. The total amount of Capitalisation Support (Revolving Fund and

Investment Fund) provided is Rs 48,290 crore. He said that in order to reduce the effective cost of bank credit to women SHGs, DAY-NRLM provides interest subvention to SHGs on loans from banks. In response to another question, the Minister said that the Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP), a sub-scheme under DAY-NRLM, supports the SHG women or their family members to set up small enterprises. SVEP has so far supported 3.13 lakh rural enterprises. Elaborating on the SHG women's engagement, the Pemmasani said that they are deployed as Banking Correspondents Sakhis, improving access to banking services, including deposits, credit, remittances, pensions and insurance.

# Maldives speaker to visit India with parliamentary delegation from February 10-14

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday said the Speaker of People's Republic of Maldives accompanied by a parliamentary delegation will visit the country from February 10-14 next year. Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita informed the Lok Sabha in a written response to a query. He was asked whether a number of parliamentary exchanges have been conducted by the government recently in alignment with the emphasis on the 'Neighbourhood First' Policy adopted in the recent years. The query also sought details of all parliamentary exchanges held in the recent years with special reference

to the People's Majlis of Maldives. "In keeping with the objectives of the 'Neighbourhood First' Policy for enhancing people to people relations, regular parliamentary exchanges with our neighbouring countries have been taking place over the years," he said. In his response, he also shared details of the recent parliamentary exchanges with the neighbouring countries including with the Maldives. "At the invitation of Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha, Speaker of People's Republic of Maldives accompanied by a parliamentary delegation will visit India from 10-14 February 2025," the minister said. He informed the Lower

House that the Lok Sabha Speaker visited Maldives from September 1-4 in 2019; and the Speaker of Maldives visited India in December 2019, in April 2022 and in August 2022. President Mohamed Muizzu had visited India in October this year and held "extensive" talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He had said in joint press conference after meeting Modi that the ties between the Maldives and India are "centuries-old, as evident throughout our histories". Besides, Margherita said, an 11-member Sri Lankan parliamentary delegation led by the Speaker visited India from December 16-20 in 2023.

# Over 14,000 Janaushadhi kendras opened across India to provide affordable medicines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Friday informed the Lok Sabha that over 14,000 Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras (PMBJKs) have been opened in the country as on October 21 to provide quality generic medicines at affordable prices. In a written response to a question, Union Health Minister J P Nadda said under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) Scheme, 2,047 types of medicines and

300 surgical devices have been brought under its ambit, including cardiovascular, anti-cancer, anti-diabetic drugs. The PMBJP scheme was launched by the government to set up dedicated outlets known as PMBJKs to provide quality generic medicines at affordable prices. On the progress made under the National Programme for Prevention and Control of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and stroke in the country, Nadda said non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are

diagnosed and treated at various levels in health care facilities. The treatment in government hospitals is either free or highly subsidised for the poor and needy. Treatment of major NCDs are also available under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PMJAY). This scheme provides health cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to approximately 55 crore beneficiaries corresponding to 12.37 crore families constituting the bottom 40

per cent of India's population. The Centre has also recently approved health coverage for all senior citizens of the age 70 years and above irrespective of their income under PMJAY, Nadda said. Nadda said the latest ABPM-JAY package provides cashless healthcare services related to 1,961 procedures across 27 specialities. These treatments are available at a network of more than 29,929 hospitals empanelled under the scheme, Nadda said. Affordable Medicines and

Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT), an initiative launched by the Union Health Ministry aims to provide affordable medicines for treatment of cancer, cardiovascular and other diseases. As on November 30, 2024 there are 218 AMRIT pharmacies spread across 29 states and Union Territories, selling more than 6,500 drugs (including cardiovascular, cancer, diabetes, stents, etc), implants, surgical disposables and other consumables at a significant discounts up to 50 per cent

on market rates, Nadda said. The Centre implements the strengthening of tertiary cancer care centres facilities scheme in order to enhance the facilities for cancer care at tertiary level. The National Health Mission provides support for improvement in health infrastructure, availability of adequate human resources to health facilities, to improve availability and accessibility to quality health care especially for the underserved and marginalised groups in rural areas, Nadda informed.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## An abhorrible practice

The SC's observation on witchcraft practices is a timely reminder that women still face humiliation under various pretexts

In a landmark observation, the Supreme Court of India recently described the victimisation of women under accusations of witchcraft as a 'blot on the constitutional spirit.' The case before the apex court, involving egregious acts of abuse and violence against women in Bihar's Champaran district, has brought the spotlight on the persistent issue of witch-hunting in the country. The court's remarks emphasise the urgent need to eradicate such practices that undermine the dignity, equality and human rights enshrined in the Constitution of India. The bench, comprising Justices CT Ravikumar and Sanjay Karol, was dealing with a petition concerning a disturbing incident that occurred in early 2020. Women were publicly assaulted, disrobed, and accused of witchcraft. One of the accused individuals, Lakhpati Devi, along with others, faced charges for these heinous acts. Reportedly there was police apathy towards the victim. The apex court expressed its shock and dismay at the brutality of the acts and the apparent indifference of the legal machinery.



Such incidents, the court observed, are a direct affront to the dignity and rights of women, particularly in rural areas where equality remains a distant goal. The court highlighted the role of superstition, patriarchy, and social control in perpetuating witch-hunting practices. It called for the eradication of these regressive beliefs, which often target vulnerable women such as widows and the elderly. Indeed, such practices stand in stark opposition to the scientific temper mandated by the Constitution. Unfortunately these are not isolated cases but are rampant in rural India. The Constitution of India guarantees justice, liberty, equality and dignity for all citizens. Practices like witch-hunting undermine these principles and perpetuate a culture of discrimination and violence against women. What is more shocking is the apathy of the government in such cases who are equal partners in crime. The court reiterated that the responsibility of investigating and adjudicating authorities is heightened in cases involving violations of human dignity. The Supreme Court also criticised the state for not challenging the High Court's non-speaking order, which granted a stay on the proceedings. The bench's observations underscore the need for a multi-pronged approach to address witch-hunting. This includes strengthening laws to explicitly criminalise witch-hunting and ensuring stringent punishment for perpetrators. Besides, promoting scientific temper and educating communities about the illegality and immorality of witch-hunting. But most important is establishing support mechanisms for survivors, including legal aid, rehabilitation, and psychological counseling. The government machinery also need to be sensitised in dealing with such cases. The Supreme Court's remarks serve as a clarion call to address the deep-seated issues of superstition and patriarchy that enable witch-hunting. The victimisation of women under such baseless allegations is not merely a social evil but a constitutional failure.

citizens. Practices like witch-hunting undermine these principles and perpetuate a culture of discrimination and violence against women. What is more shocking is the apathy of the government in such cases who are equal partners in crime. The court reiterated that the responsibility of investigating and adjudicating authorities is heightened in cases involving violations of human dignity. The Supreme Court also criticised the state for not challenging the High Court's non-speaking order, which granted a stay on the proceedings. The bench's observations underscore the need for a multi-pronged approach to address witch-hunting. This includes strengthening laws to explicitly criminalise witch-hunting and ensuring stringent punishment for perpetrators. Besides, promoting scientific temper and educating communities about the illegality and immorality of witch-hunting. But most important is establishing support mechanisms for survivors, including legal aid, rehabilitation, and psychological counseling. The government machinery also need to be sensitised in dealing with such cases. The Supreme Court's remarks serve as a clarion call to address the deep-seated issues of superstition and patriarchy that enable witch-hunting. The victimisation of women under such baseless allegations is not merely a social evil but a constitutional failure.

### PICTALK



Elephants inside an enclosure at Alipore Zoological Garden in Kolkata

# Revisiting the Places of Worship Act



PRAFULL GORADIA

The Places of Worship Act, 1991, was enacted to maintain the religious status of sites as of August 15, 1947 but there is misunderstandings about its purpose

How the Places of Worship Act (1991) is being dealt with at present is due to many not being aware of how and why the Act came about. Evidently, the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao (1991-96) in his heart of hearts was a staunch Hindu. He was anxious to contribute to help solving the then existing—or festering—problem at Ayodhya. Most developments that took place at the Janmasthan on December 6, 1992, spoke of Rao's silent participation in the cause of Ram Lalla.

The most clinching evidence of the Prime Minister's contribution was indicated by the facts when I left Ayodhya on that momentous day. It was 5:45 pm; all the three domes of the Babri edifice had been brought down. All the ten walls were still standing and so was the rest of the structure. Soon after we sat in our car to proceed to Lucknow, my companions and I heard on the transistor radio that the Uttar Pradesh government of then chief minister Kalyan Singh had been dismissed by the Centre, and Governor's rule imposed. That meant whatever was done thereafter was the handiwork directed by someone at the Centre. At the Centre, even the then-home secretary Madhav Godbole is on record saying that he did not know a thing about what was happening and had learnt about it only through the radio and television.

This author has not met not knows anyone who has claimed that he has seven even a photograph of the edifice walls without their domes. At 10 pm that very night, PM Narasimha Rao addressed the nation on television, wherein he assured the people of India that he would rebuild the Babri Masjid as soon as possible. This gave the impression that the entire edifice had been destroyed. The walls were tall and thick as was the style of the architecture of the 16th century. The chabutara around the walls was also solid and tall, apart from being large. Even the domes, which had been the most vulnerable part of the structure,



took selected men of the Uttar Pradesh Public Works Department (PWD) to bring them down, an endeavour that began in the morning and lasted till 4:30 pm when the last dome fell. I came to know that they were men of the PWD, from two of the five photographers whose cameras had been smashed and they beaten up and left with bleeding faces. The photographers thought they were obliging the karsevaks, whereas for government servants, being photographed would have cost them their jobs.

A lady IPS officer who was second-in-command at Ayodhya on that day, in answer to my query told me later that the police had instructions not to intervene unless lives were in danger; presumably, not property. She assured me that there were 15,000 paramilitary personnel in readiness at Faizabad, just 4 km away. Incidentally, she added there were consummate numbers of bulldozers in the nearby vicinity, along with their operators. Evidently, all these preparations were deployed to see the end of the Babri edifice over the next 60 hours. Indeed, an enormous thing to accomplish, in such a short time. All this happened under Central rule. To restate, the Kalyan Singh government was nowhere in power after 5:45



EVIDENTLY, THESE AFGHANS HAD BROUGHT SOME ARCHITECTS WITH THEM, WHO BUILT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BUILDINGS, INCLUDING MOSQUES

pm on December 6. It is only after being aware of these facts can one appreciate the need for the Places of Worship Act. PM Rao, being a Congressman, had to preserve his 'secular' image.

The abovementioned legislation implies how much the Rao government cared to protect the character of every place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. Ayodhya had to be the exception as it was then an object of litigation in the Supreme Court of India. Normally, while legislating, it is taken for granted that anything sub judice has its own rules. But Ayodhya was clearly brought under a provision of being excluded from the ambit of the Act, presumably because it was sub judice. Nevertheless, it was specifically kept out; in fact, it was a separate clause if the Act. Consequently, when being dealt with in the courts, never was Ayodhya, particularly the Janmasthan, mentioned even once in the context of the Places of Act.

The thrust of this submission is that this act need not be taken seriously. What this statement means is that a legitimate difference must be made between genuine places of worship and those edifices or structures that are the outcome of dacoity. There are edifices that were either directly con-

verted from temples to mosques like the Adhai Din Ka Jhoda, about a furlong away from Ajmer Sharif. Three temples were confined into one within 60 hours, or two-and-a-half days, so that the invader Mohammad Ghori would be able to pray there on his return from the decisive Second Battle of Tarain in 1192 AD.

There was no time to erase the Hindu structure. The pristine design has survived till this day. There are many such examples until the Lodi Dynasty conquered north India. Evidently, these Afghans had brought some architects with them, who built a significant number of buildings, including mosques.

How can the courts refuse to hear and try a case when someone petitions against daylight dacoity of a temple, which is either converted immediately like the one described above in Ajmer, or brought down and rebuilt like the Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad? Surely, dacoities can't be condoned out of hand? On the other hand, genuine cases of mosques having become victims of Hindu mischief can be kept out of the courts under the Places of Worship Act.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### OPPOSITION TARGETS AMIT SHAH

Madam — The Opposition claimed Home Minister Amit Shah had insulted B.R. Ambedkar. Accusing the Congress Party of opportunism, Shah charged then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with belittling Ambedkar, asserting that his resignation from the Cabinet would have no effect on the government. Shah also pointed out that when Ambedkar contested a Lok Sabha by-election in Bombay, the Congress not only fielded a candidate against him but Nehru personally campaigned to ensure Ambedkar's defeat.

Amit Shah hammered home the point about Congress singing paeans to Ambedkar only after it suffered multiple drubbings in elections, remarking the party now opportunistically chanting, "Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar... itna naam Bhagwan ka lete to janmo tak swarg mil jata." The Opposition seized upon this admittedly poorly framed sentence to accuse Shah of insulting Ambedkar. Of course, this interpretation was far from the truth. Nevertheless, Shah's clumsy construction provided the Opposition with an opportunity to embarrass him. Shah's response during Tuesday's debate was a trenchant critique of the Congress Party. This frontal assault left Congress members squirming, with only feeble attempts to counter Shah's barbs. The Congress's lip service to Ambedkar continues to find few takers.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

### DEBATE ON SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Madam — The proposal of holding simultaneous elections is fraught with a lack of clarity in its implementation and practicality for a country as vast and diverse as its expanse. The proposal has several loopholes, like midterm polls and the President's rule, and there is a lack of consideration for regional parties as well. Primarily, the proposal fails to address how precisely the central government plans to hold simultaneous elec-

## Revamp education system



The article 'From Kothari to NEP' presents a good analysis. No doubt, there is a conscious attempt made to undermine Indian education with long-term planning to subjugate the youth to be religiously oriented instead of scientifically and technologically excelling sections. The NEP has no provision to improve the standard of education and make it globally competitive. Still, the cream churned out migrants to countries abroad in search of fabulous pack-

ages and incentivised talent recognition. Medical colleges are growing in number, but the standard suffers due to insufficient expert teaching professionals, and focus has shifted to pecuniary aspects rather than imparting knowledge. Privatisation of education has its toll in terms of knowledge and employability, besides denying the aspiring poor its accessibility. The government coming up with programmes to part with skills to graduated youth is a clear example of this fact. The avaricious private players are producing marks without knowledge and degrees without employable skills. Astrology is a subject that could be learnt by anyone at any time and anywhere but need not be a part of the curriculum in university. Therefore, there is a dire need to study the whole system and make education an objective one rather than a tool to hasten the process of communalisation.

A G Rajmohan | Rampur

tions for the nation's 96.88 crore voters at the same time, as such a gargantuan exercise will be practically challenging to execute considering India's demography. Also, conducting all the elections in the same year becomes a major federal issue because it would force current state legislatures to shorten or lengthen their terms to make the election dates coincide with the national deadline. The attempt to impose an artificial cycle of elections and restrict electoral choice compromises the spirit of democracy, which is a direct threat to the constitutional recognition of India as a democratic republic. A rushed and ill-conceived policy can produce unprecedented challenges to the polity of the nation.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

### IMPOSE BAN ON FIRECRACKERS

Madam — In the recent verdict, the Supreme Court of India, instructed the Uttar Pradesh as well as the Haryana government to impose the blanket ban on the firecrackers in order to tackle the

menace of air pollution. Today, depleting air quality is among the biggest troubles for the majority of Indian cities. But the million-dollar question is, does such a blanket ban really work to control the air pollution problem in the Indian cities? Often the things that are banned officially were black-marketed unofficially.

This is the actual reality of almost everything banned so far, be it crackers, liquor, or anything else. The extent of air pollution is so huge that even anti-pollution measures like Stage IV of GRAP failed to meet the very commitment. The behavioural changing approach is the need of the hour; more and more awareness has to be established in this regard along with more and more ecological improvement initiatives for tackling this very menace of depleting air quality. Let's us all walk the talk with respect to the circular economy and sustainable practices to improve nature in a real sense.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

## The key to tackling food security and climate change



HIMANSHU VERMA

Climate-Smart Agriculture emerges as a transformative solution, combining sustainable practices with strategies to mitigate emissions and secure food systems

The demand for food is steadily increasing due to dietary changes and the growing global population. Currently, approximately 690 million people—or 8.9 per cent of the world's population—suffer from hunger. By 2050, the world will need to produce nearly 70 per cent more food to sustain an estimated 9 billion people, which makes food security an increasingly critical challenge. Climate change further exacerbates this problem, intensifying the environmental impacts of food production. Agriculture, while essential, is also a major contributor to the climate crisis, generating between 19 per cent and 29 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.



Economic losses from natural disasters are also rising globally, and the agriculture sector is particularly vulnerable. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), disaster-affected nations experienced direct economic losses of \$2,908 billion between 1998 and 2017, with climate-related calamities accounting for 77 per cent of these losses. In recent years, the impacts

of climate change on agriculture have become more pronounced. For example, India is projected to experience up to a 9 per cent reduction in key crop yields nationwide between 2010 and 2039 due to climate change. Regional impacts could be even more severe, with potential losses of up to 35 per cent for rice, 20 per cent for wheat, 50 per cent for sorghum, 13 per cent for barley, and 60 per cent for maize.

Climate change adversely affects food production and supply chains while accelerating the degradation of already fragile ecosystems. To counter these challenges, it is imperative to adopt Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices, which aim to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture while sustainably enhancing productivity and income. CSA integrates sustainable agri-

cultural practices and rural development goals, contributing to broader objectives like better environmental management and hunger reduction, as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

**Challenges to Climate-Smart Agriculture in India:** Despite its numerous benefits, the adoption of CSA practices in India faces several challenges. Climate Variability: Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and diminishing water resources threaten to lower crop productivity by 10-40 per cent by the end of the century. Rising sea levels, cyclones, and storm surges endanger agricultural lands, especially in regions like the Sundarbans, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. High Costs: Implementing CSA methods often involves significant financial investment, which can deter farmers. Policy and Regulatory Barriers: Inadequate policies and restrictive regulations hinder widespread CSA adoption.

The adoption of climate-smart agriculture is no longer optional but an urgent necessity. (The writer is Assistant Professor Agronomy, College of Agriculture & Environmental Technology, Surajmal University, Kichha, Uttarakhand; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### UNLOCKING LIFE'S TRUE POTENTIAL

Embracing faith, cultivating humility and awakening spiritual awareness can elevate life



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

I am well and truly surprised that good people don't turn to God more actively than doing some rituals, going to a religious place participating in some festivals, etc. They probably are not realising what they are missing. God is ever so keen to take us in His team. He needs lots of us either to act as His 'nimitta' (instrument) as Arjuna was for a specific purpose or just be active mediums. Good people are best placed to be mediums for God's bounties to be given to other good people. They form the bulk of people, who support the working of the Creation. And they are amply rewarded for their 'karmas' (acts). For example, farmers are crucial for keeping humanity well-fed. Teachers are crucial for educating the masses.

Parents keep the Creation going by giving birth to children and then rearing them till they can be useful citizens. Doctors look after the health of people. Workers take the load of manual requirements of humanity. Good officers fulfil the administrative requirements of our societies. Priests enable us to be in contact with God. I can go on with policemen, shopkeepers, bankers, etc. They all benefit by doing so. Why aren't these actively pursuing a good connection with God? They can gain much more.

The first reason has to be a lack of faith due to widespread ignorance. The common man, even the educated class, is helplessly unaware of all the benefits one can gain by taking shelter from God,



who owns everything. We get attracted to the richest, the most powerful, the very famous, etc., but ignore the real owner of all, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God. To top it all, God controls everything. The richest normally try to accumulate more, and many have some money to give to charity, but God has everything to give; you just have to become deserving.

The second reason has to be the overinflated ego of practically everyone. It is hard to accept that God is too big to comprehend and we are too small to accept. But that is reality. By closing our eyes like a duck we don't do ourselves any favour. And we remain sitting ducks against 'karmaphalas', which surely manifest and cause havoc in the lives of all, barring a few, who have taken shelter in God. The third reason is keeping poor company.

Who do we like to spend time with? Those who criticise one and all and who can tell jokes of the kind you know. Public image is another handicap. Only the losers turn to God. We don't have to; we will manage. Surely, this management ends in painful death only. Devotees of God and their lives on a high and are assured of better birth also. Then spiritual activities do not enthrall; they appear so childish. We would rather be grown-ups and be subservient to fellow beings, who are likely to exploit us as much as possible. So we don't get started and lose out.

This article is an open invitation to fence sitters if they chance to read it. I will cite a few amazing benefits if one does that. There will be great cleaning of the self both internally and externally. Such are the powers of spiritual activities. One will become dutiful and most likely begin to live by dharma. One will not limit oneself just to knowing spiritual truths but will also implement them in life. If a painter knows how to paint and does not paint, what is he or she likely to gain? The Creation has been designed to smoothen the lives of devotees.

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

# Philippines: The broken promise of democracy



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

The resurgence of the Marcoses, the entrenchment of the Aquinos, and the dominance of families like the Dutertes show the enduring grip of oligarchy



The 1987 Philippine Constitution, crafted in the aftermath of the 1986 People Power Revolution, was supposed to mark the dawn of a new democratic era. The ousting of Ferdinand Marcos Sr., after decades of corruption, repression, and dynastic rule, was a victory for the Filipino people, or so they were told. Yet, the Constitution, supposedly a tool for dismantling the oppressive old order, contains a glaring, unimplemented clause: Article II, Section 26, which bans political dynasties. Nearly four decades later, this promise remains a cruel joke, the prohibition nothing more than a symbol of a nation shackled by its feudal past. Political dynasties thrive unabated, and the Philippines remains trapped in a cycle of oligarchy, where power is passed down like a family heirloom, not earned through democratic means. The rise of Corason Aquino, the "hero" of People Power, has proven to be a double-edged sword.

While she restored democracy in name, she failed to eradicate the dynastic forces that had long plagued the country. Instead of dismantling the Marcos empire and the dynasties that thrived in its wake, Aquino's presidency paved the way for a new set of ruling families to stake their claim on the throne. The irony is staggering: Aquino, the symbol of resistance to Marcos, was unable to disarm the very forces that helped prop up the dictatorship. Her administration's failure to enact meaningful reform paved the way for the Marcos family's return to power, with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s rise in 2022 exposing the unyielding grip of dynastic politics, illuminating the eternal truth behind the words of José Rizal, a true revolutionary executed by the Spanish in Manila: "The Filipino is not a slave of the Spanish Government. He is a slave of his own people." The Marcoses, who plundered billions from the nation's coffers, are not the only ones to have manipulated the system to their advantage.

Under Cory Aquino, the promise of land reform was shattered, epitomised by the Mendiola Massacre of 1987, where farmers demanding land reform were gunned down. The Aquino family, despite their image as the champions of democracy, have blood on their hands, betraying the very

people they claim to defend. The hypocrisy of the political elite is staggering, with families like the Marcoses and the Aquinos using their histories of violence and corruption as stepping stones to further entrench their power. But the Aquino-Marcos rivalry is only the tip of the iceberg. In Mindanao, the Duterte family's hold on power predates Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, with a history of death squad killings and iron-fisted rule. As mayor of Davao City, Duterte ruled with an iron fist, silencing dissent and using extrajudicial executions to rid the streets of perceived enemies.

His presidency, marked by a brutal war on drugs that left thousands dead, further entrenched the dynastic system, where political power is synonymous with violence and impunity. Duterte's rise to the highest office in the land was not a victory for the people, but for a political family that used populist rhetoric to cloak its real agenda: maintaining a stranglehold on power.

The Macapagal-Arroyo family, meanwhile, turned corruption into an art form. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's presidency was marred by scandal after scandal—from the "Hello Garci" election fraud to the NBN-ZTE broadband deal, which saw billions in kickbacks siphoned off to the ruling elite. Despite the overwhelming evidence of corruption, she escaped any lasting accountability, a reflection of the Philippines' toxic political culture where the powerful are above the law.

Like so many others, she found ways to use the machinery of the state to protect her interests. The brutality of the Philippines' political system is not just figurative. The 2009 Maguindanao Massacre, orchestrated by the Ampatuan clan, remains the deadliest attack on journalists in history. Fifty-eight people, including 32 journalists,

were slaughtered in cold blood in a bid to eliminate electoral competition.

And yet, despite the horrific nature of the crime, justice has been slow and incomplete, as political dynasties use their influence to shield themselves from the consequences of their actions. In regions like Cebu and Ilocos Norte, political dynasties such as the Osmeñas, Garcias, and Fariñases manipulate elections and use their wealth to maintain control, treating public office as their domain. This cycle of violence and impunity, where the ruling class prioritises their interests, extends to the economic realm, with families like the villagers growing their wealth through political power. The system persists due to cultural deference to family authority, weak institutions, and pervasive poverty, with voters often coerced into supporting the very dynasties that sustain their suffering.

Foreign powers, particularly the United States, have long been complicit in this system. During the Marcos era, the US provided crucial support to a regime known for its human rights abuses, all in the name of anti-communism. This foreign patronage emboldened the Marcoses and set a dangerous precedent for other dynasties, who continued to seek validation and support from foreign powers. The interplay between domestic power struggles and international interests further deepens the fractures within the Philippines, exacerbating the country's internal divisions.

The Philippines' educational system, which fails to foster critical thinking or civic engagement, ensures that the cycle of dynastic rule will continue. Schools produce citizens ill-equipped to challenge the status quo, while the media, often co-opted by powerful families, serves to protect the interests of the elite. Social media, too, has become a tool for dynasties to spread propaganda, rehabilitate their tarnished images,

and silence critics. The current political spectacle centred around Vice President Sara Duterte's public threats against President Marcos, is a stark reminder of how fragile the Philippines' democracy truly is. The alliance between the Marcoses and the Dutertes, forged during the 2022 election, is now on the brink of collapse. What once seemed like a partnership between the North and south's ruling classes has devolved into a bitter feud, exposing the cracks in a political system built on corruption, nepotism, and violence.

This is not a battle for the people's interests, but a struggle for control between two families, each vying for supremacy in a system that has failed its citizens. This feud is not just political—it has geopolitical ramifications. Marcos' pivot towards the US and his opposition to China's claims in the South China Sea have reignited regional tensions, while Duterte's pro-China stance during his presidency deepened divides within the Filipino elite.

This divergence in foreign policy has intensified the rift between the Marcos and Duterte families, as they seek to align themselves with opposing global powers.

The Philippines, caught between these imperial rivalries, faces not only internal political decay but external pressures that threaten to destabilise the nation further. As the midterm elections approach, this dynastic battle threatens to unravel whatever semblance of governance remains. Marcos seeks to consolidate power, while Sara Duterte faces the looming threat of impeachment. Yet, the Duterte family's influence, particularly in Mindanao, ensures that this battle will not stay within the confines of parliament. The streets could erupt, worsening societal divisions.

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



THE IRONY IS STAGGERING: AQUINO, THE SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE TO MARCOS, WAS UNABLE TO DISARM THE VERY FORCES THAT HELPED PROP UP THE DICTATORSHIP. HER ADMINISTRATION'S FAILURE TO ENACT MEANINGFUL REFORM PAVED THE WAY FOR THE MARCOS FAMILY'S RETURN TO POWER.

## Patent risks: Key strategies for businesses amid rising litigation costs

Businesses today must adopt proactive strategies like Freedom-to-Operate searches and patent liability insurance to mitigate risks and protect their innovations

In November 2024, a US jury ruled in favour of Netlist, a company specialising in computer memory and storage solutions, ordering Samsung to pay \$118 million in damages for willfully infringing Netlist's patented technology. This follows an earlier verdict in April 2024, where another jury found Samsung guilty of similar patent infringements, awarding \$303 million to Netlist. Together, these penalties amount to \$421 million—an extraordinary sum that could destabilise even the most established organisations. In India, the Delhi High Court recently delivered a landmark judgment favouring the plaintiff, Antenna Inc., in a patent infringement case against Mobicom Technologies.



AMIT SINGH

The court issued a permanent injunction against the defendant and ordered them to pay damages of USD 26.04 million (INR 216 crores) to compensate for the plaintiff's loss of profits due to the infringement. **Protecting Intellectual Property:** A recent American survey highlights the substantial financial commitment of research-based organisations in the pharmaceutical sector. The annual R&D budget in

this industry often runs into hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars. The cost of developing a new drug ranges from \$314 million to \$4.46 billion, depending on the therapeutic area and assumptions used in data modeling. These figures emphasise the immense investments required in R&D, making intellectual property (IP) protection and preemptive strategies essential. In contrast, R&D expenditures in non-pharmaceutical sectors are generally lower. However, extensive patenting is increasingly common, posing risks for companies introducing new processes or products without adequate precautions. A company might unknowingly infringe on a competitor's patent, leading to unforeseen and costly litigation.

Patent disputes can result in significant delays, financial losses, and reputational damage, even when unintentional. **Escalating Costs of Patent Litigation:** The median cost of litigating a patent lawsuit through trial ranges from \$600,000 for cases with less than \$1 million at stake to \$3.625 million for cases involving over \$25 million. Similar trends are observed in India, where litigation and settlement costs are substantial. Sometimes, defendants find themselves embroiled in patent litigation due to unintentional or inadvertent infringement. In such cases, the defendants are essentially victims, underscoring the need for safeguards to prevent unnecessary legal disputes. Tools to Mitigate Patent



**Infringement Risks: Patent Liability Insurance**  
One effective safeguard against the financial risks of unintended patent infringement is patent liability insurance. This insurance, provided by specialised firms, helps cover legal expenses and damages arising from unintentional infringement. While popular in several countries, its adoption is

steadily growing in India. **Freedom-to-Operate (FTO)**  
Another cost-effective tool to minimise patent infringement risks is a Freedom-to-Operate (FTO) search. This process evaluates whether a new product or process infringes on existing patents, enabling informed business decisions and reducing the likelihood of legal disputes. Many companies conduct FTO searches before initiating new R&D projects to mitigate financial and reputational risks. An FTO search involves analysing granted and pending patents to form a techno-legal opinion on whether a product, process, or service infringes existing IP rights. These searches can be conducted using free databases provided by intellectual property offices,

with directories available on the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) website. **When Patents Block Freedom to Operate**  
If an FTO search reveals conflicting patents, companies have several options:  
1. **Licensing Agreements:** Companies can negotiate licensing or purchase patent rights to gain access to the necessary technology.  
2. **Patent Pools:** Collaborative agreements among companies in the same technological field allow shared access to patents, resolving disputes and controlling costs, especially for essential products like medicines.  
3. **Designing Around:** Companies can modify existing processes or products to avoid infringement.

**Steps to Minimise Litigation Risks:** Regardless of the strategy chosen, it is crucial for companies to address patent infringement risks early in the research and commercialization process. Proactive measures such as in-licensing, cross-licensing, patent pooling, and designing around can help avoid future disputes. While an FTO search cannot completely eliminate the possibility of litigation due to limitations in patent databases and search expertise, it significantly reduces potential threats. (The writer is a deputy controller of patents and designs, Kolkata.; views are personal)

## SC asks Centre to file fresh report on 1984 anti-Sikh riots trials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Centre to file a fresh status report within two weeks on the status of trials in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih asked additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhatt to file an affidavit and permitted the petitioners in the case to file detailed objections. During the hearing, Bhatt said recommendations of the special investigation team, set up by the top court, were carried out.

A counsel appearing for one of the petitioners submitted there were some glaring instances in the SIT report and said 500 cases were clubbed in one FIR and the investigating officer could not probe them. "There were many instances where 498 cases were clubbed in one FIR and IO had to investigate all of them. Initially when the hearing began, the court felt that it should be confined to Delhi only. But we have done nothing about other states. We have given examples of Kanpur, Bokaro, etc., nothing has happened," he said.

The top court assured it will look into all these aspects. Delhi witnessed large-scale violence and killings of persons from the Sikh community following former PM Indira Gandhi's assassination by her bodyguards in 1984 and the cases stemming from the incident have seen some major twists and turns 40 years on.

According to the Nanavati Commission Report, there were a total 587 FIRs registered in Delhi in relation to 1984 riots that witnessed 2,733 people being killed. Of the total, the police shut about 240 cases as "untraced" and about 250 cases resulted in acquittals.

However, it was only in May 2023 that the central probe agency the CBI filed a chargesheet against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler for his alleged role in the killings of three people on November 1, 1984. The CBI alleged Tytler "incited, instigated and provoked the mob assembled at Pul Bangash Gurdwara Azad Market area in the national capital on November 1, 1984. The incident resulted in the burning down of the gurdwara and killing of Thakur Singh, Badal Singh and Guru Charan Singh.

## Delhi LG interacts with 500+ school principals and teachers, discusses NEP, mental health



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Friday interacted with scores of principals and teachers of more than 5,000 private schools in the national Capital, discussing issues like bomb threats, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and mental health of students among others.

He took to X and shared, "In the series of #Samvaad@RajNiwas today, had the privilege of engaging and interacting with over 500 principals/ teachers

representing over 5000 private schools of Delhi that cater to lakhs of students. We discussed pressing issues like the challenges in implementation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, mental health of students, teacher training, government apathy, and transportation and infrastructure constraints."

He added, "Was glad to share with the audience that steps have already been initiated to address the FAR issue for additional classrooms. While concerns about recent bomb threats and cyber

crimes were raised by the teachers, at the same time they also appreciated the role of the police in handling these situations seamlessly and expeditiously." The Delhi LG shared that the idea of early-stage R&D for students as suggested by the teachers is intriguing and worth exploring. "However, we must guard against societal segmentation in education and ensure that interests of all segments of society are addressed. It is time to be vigilant and vocal for the rights of our students, teachers & the entire education fraternity," he said.

## HM highlights strategic importance of Siliguri corridor

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a significant development Union Minister Amit Shah on Friday emphasized the importance of Siliguri corridor in Darjeeling district of North Bengal calling it "very important" insofar as it connected the North East to the rest of the country.

"Siliguri corridor is very important. It connects the Northeast states, and SSB's alertness helps us to protect the region," the Home Minister speaking at the 61st Raising Day celebrations of the Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB) in Siliguri said lauding the role of the paramilitary group in safeguarding the India borders with friendly nations like Nepal and Bhutan and its contribution to combating Naxalism in Bihar and Jharkhand.

Saying that SSB's pivotal role had helped counter the naxalite menace Shah said that "Bihar and Jharkhand are now free from the Naxal movement because of the efforts of SSB." Shah's presence at Siliguri corridor and his statement assumes importance in the

backdrop of worsening situation in Bangladesh since the ouster of former Prime Minister Sk Hasina from power in that country.

Also called Chicken's Neck the Siliguri corridor is thus called because it is a narrow stretch of land of about 60 kilometres in length and almost 22 kilometres in width --- even tapering to 17 kilometres in certain places --- skirted on two sides by Nepal and Bangladesh. Saying that SSB's role in preventing illegal border activities had been commendable Shah said a time had come when there was a need of high degree of alertness along the border to deal with the trans-border anti-social elements. "The time has come to find the anti-social elements who are illegally using open fencing," along the international border he said. Earlier, paying tribute to the brave soldiers of the force Shah in a post on X, wrote "on the foundation day of the Sashstra Seema Bal, I pay my tribute to all the immortal martyrs of the Force and extend my best wishes on the Foundation Day to all the personnel and their families."

## Three-day state mourning for Om Prakash...

From page 1

According to an INLD statement, Chautala passed his Class 10 and Class 12 exams while in jail. He was 82 when he scored first division marks in his Class 12 examination. His clearing of the Class 10 exam was an inspiration for the Bollywood film "Dasvi". During his political career, Chautala raised his voice against the anti-people policies of ruling governments and went to jail several times. He also spent 19 months in jail during the Emergency, it said. During the past few years, Chautala made efforts to form a third front, meeting his old associates Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda. The efforts, however, did not yield a result.

## Heavy snowfall, shabdeg, and kangris...

From page 1

The minimum temperature in Qazigund, the gateway to Kashmir, was minus 7.6 degrees Celsius, minus 6.5 degrees Celsius in Kupwara in north Kashmir and minus 5.8 degrees in Kokernag of south Kashmir minus, the weather department said. The meteorological department has predicted a mainly dry weather till December 26 with a possibility of light snowfall in higher reaches of the Valley on the night of December 21-22.

As the harsh winter period begins, the demand for 'kangri' (earthen fire pot filled with charcoal) has risen sharply as the residents prepare to face the bone-chilling cold. People stock eatables and other essential commodities for the period as the national highway often closes due to heavy snowfall.

## DND flyway will remain toll-free: SC

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The Bench said NOIDA overstepped its authority by delegating the powers to NTBCL to collect or levy fees and it has led the general public to part with hundreds of crores of rupees. The High Court, in October 2016, had ruled that there will be no toll collected henceforth from those using the 9.2 km-long, eight-lane DND flyway. The order was passed as the High Court allowed a PIL by the Federation of Noida Residents' Welfare Association. The PIL, filed in 2012, had challenged the "levy and collection of toll in the name

of user fee by the Noida Toll Bridge Company". In an over 100-page judgment, the high court had held, "the user fee which is being levied/realised is not supported by the legal provisions relied upon by the Concessionaire (Noida Toll Bridge Company), Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (promoter and developer of the project) and the Noida Authority." It had said the "right to levy and collect user fee from the commuters as conferred upon the Concessionaire under the concession agreement suffers from excessive delegation and is contrary to the provisions of the UP Industrial Development Act".

## PM Modi leaves for Kuwait today

From page 1

The Indian Rupee remained legal tender in Kuwait until 1961, a symbol of the enduring economic and cultural ties. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally established in 1961, with India initially represented by a trade commissioner. Emir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabbar Al Sabah came on a private visit to India in July 2017. The last high-level visit from either side was that of the prime minister of Kuwait to India in 2013.

## NIA raids multiple locations, in five States

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Further investigations have revealed that several front organisations and student wings had been tasked with identifying suitable recruits to work as underground cadres to wage war against the government of India and to commit violent naxal and terror acts, it added.

## Be mindful of public comments...

From page 1

In Pakistan, the number of cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Pakistan this year stood at "112 till October 2024," he said.

The corresponding figures for 2022 were 47 in Bangladesh and 241 in Pakistan, while in 2023 the figures were 302 in Bangladesh and 103 in Pakistan, according to the data he shared.

The minister said the Indian government has urged "Pakistan to take steps to prevent religious intolerance, sectarian violence, systemic persecution and attacks on minority communities and ensure their safety, security, and well-being." He added,

"India continues to highlight the plight of minorities in Pakistan at appropriate international fora."

Cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in other neighbouring countries (except Pakistan and Bangladesh) are "nil," the minister said.

Singh was asked about the total number of cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities reported in neighbouring countries during the last three years, country-wise and year-wise; and the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the ministry to protect minorities, including diplomatic interventions and relief measures.

The Union minister in his

response also said the "government has taken serious note of these incidents and shared its concerns with the government of Bangladesh."

"India's expectation is that Bangladesh will take all necessary measures to ensure safety and welfare of Hindus and other minorities. The same was also reiterated during the visit of the Foreign Secretary to Bangladesh on December 9, 2024," he added. The High Commission of India in Dhaka "continues to monitor the situation" related to the minorities in Bangladesh "closely," the Minister of State for External Affairs said.

"The primary responsibility for the protection of life and

liberty of all citizens, including minorities, rests with the government of the country concerned," he said.

Ties between India and Bangladesh came under severe strain after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina took shelter in India. He heads Bangladesh's interim government as its Chief Advisor.

Relations between the two nations deteriorated further in recent weeks over attacks on the Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

## Bitter Winter Session comes to an end

From page 1

The bitterness between both sides was palpable by the fact that Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die within three minutes of its resumption, and without the valedictory message by Speaker Om Birla. As the Speaker had banned protest within the premises of Parliament, members resorted to verbal spats and sloganeering in the Lok Sabha, forcing Birla to adjourn the House. The Lok Sabha's productivity was nearly 58 per cent, according to its secretariat, a far cry from days when it hovered around 100 per cent and even beyond.

The Rajya Sabha, however,

agreed to let Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar read out his valedictory remarks before adjourning the House sine die. In his concluding remarks, Dhankhar called upon parties to rise above political differences and restore the sanctity of parliamentary discourse, striking a note of balance amid opposition's charge that he has often been partisan. He said the House effectively functioned for just 43 hours and 27 minutes with a productivity of merely 40.03 percent during the Winter Session that began on November 25.

Later at a Press conference, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju laid the blame at the door of the

Opposition, especially the Congress, saying their continuous protest despite an earlier agreement to allow Parliament to run was the principal reason behind the low productivity.

During this Session, five Bills were introduced in Lok Sabha, which passed four of them. The Rajya Sabha passed three bills. A special Session was also held in the 'Samvidhan Sadan' to commemorate the Constitution Day on November 26.

During the debate Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked Congress, especially the Nehru-Gandhi family, for its "mutilation" of constitutional values but then Opposition parties

seized on a couple of sentences of Amit Shah's reply to accuse him of insulting Ambedkar and launched protests inside and outside Parliament.

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) MPs led counter protests, accusing the Congress of slighting Ambedkar and ignoring his legacy during its long decades in power. While the Opposition INDIA Bloc was a divided house with its members such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Trinamool Congress (TMC) disagreeing with the prominence given to the Adani issue by the Congress. However, they rallied together over Shah's comments.

## 11 killed in LPG tanker-truck collision on Jaipur-Ajmer highway

From page 1

Modi said in a social media post, "Deeply saddened by the loss of lives in the accident on Jaipur-Ajmer highway in Rajasthan. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon. The local administration is assisting those affected." Union Home Minister Shah spoke to Chief Minister Sharma. Describing the accident as extremely sad, Shah said the local administration is working to provide treatment to the injured.

"The road accident in Jaipur, Rajasthan is extremely sad. I express my deepest condolences to the families of

those who lost their lives in this accident. I spoke to the Chief Minister Mr. @BhajanlalBjp in this regard. The local administration is working to provide immediate treatment to the injured. I wish for the speedy recovery of the injured," he wrote in a social media post in Hindi. Of the about 35 people injured, nearly half are "very critical", Rajasthan Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar said.

Jaipur Police Commissioner Biju George Joseph, who was at the crash site with several officers of his department, said an outlet nozzle of the LPG tanker was damaged in the collision, leading to a gas leak that caused the blaze. The crash occurred around 5.45

am, when it was still dark, in front of a school, according to officials.

"Vehicles behind the tanker were engulfed in flames. Other vehicles coming from the opposite directions also caught fire and the vehicles collided," he said. The gas leak also spread the fire in a flash, leaving no scope for those in nearby vehicles to come out. People were seen rushing and taking off clothes engulfed in flames.

The injured were rushed to the SMS hospital in Jaipur in more than 25 ambulances. Dr Deepak Maheshwari, principal of the SMS Medical College, said eight people have died.

He said 43 people were brought to the hospital. Five of

them were pronounced dead and three succumbed to injuries during treatment, he said, adding that seven people are on ventilator support. Officials at the spot indicated that the casualty count may go up. Police suspect some people could not get out of their vehicles in time and got burnt.

Earlier in the day, eyewitnesses reported spotting flames from nearly a kilometre away as thick black smoke filled the sky and ambulances and fire brigade vehicles rushed towards the crash zone. A school van driver on his way to pick up students recounted with horror the sight of a man engulfed in flames on the road.

The crash initially affected a nearly 300-metre stretch of the highway, leading to a long queue of vehicles. The traffic congestion grew rapidly with time and by the afternoon, choked the arterial road and traffic had to be diverted to alternative routes. Authorities cleared the highway of the burnt vehicles to resume vehicular movement.

After news of the accident spread, Chief Minister Sharma and Khimsar rushed to the SMS hospital. Sharma spoke to administration officials and doctors and issued directions to ensure proper treatment was facilitated. He also visited the accident site and spoke to police officials. "I visited the hospital as soon

as I got news of the incident. This is a very unfortunate incident. Instructions have been given to ensure proper treatment and other arrangements," he told reporters at the crash site. Khimsar told reporters at the hospital that all doctors, resident doctors and nursing staff of the medical facility have been called in to manage the situation and another ward opened to accommodate patients. A 'green corridor' was set up from the accident site to the SMS hospital, he added.

An official said a private sleeper bus headed for Jaipur from Rajsamand was behind the gas tanker when the accident occurred and efforts were underway to find the

details about the passengers on board.

A fire department official said, "A few fire tenders from Mansarovar were rushed to the spot based on primary information, but later more were sent from other stations as well." A team from the regional transport office also reached the spot to investigate the incident and Forensic Science Laboratory teams collected evidence. Local people complained of itching in the eyes and breathing problems due to the smoke. Some said a few birds were found dead nearby. A pipe factory along the highway suffered damage in the incident.

Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Prem Chand Bairwa

and Minister of State for Home Jawahar Singh Bedham also reached the accident site, while state Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra and several BJP and Congress MLAs visited the hospital. Jaipur Police has issued helpline numbers 9166347551, 8764688431 and 7300363636 for people to get in touch for inquiries or relevant information. Speaking to reporters near the hospital, Dotasra said, "Many of the injured are critical. Such incidents should not happen and for this, governments should make arrangements." He said the government should form a high-level committee and take concrete action so that such incidents are not repeated.



# Pakistan's ballistic missile programme emerging threat to US: White House

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Asserting that Pakistan developing sophisticated missile technology will give it the capability to strike targets well beyond South Asia, including in the US, a top White House official said on Thursday that the Asian country's actions are an emerging threat to the United States. Such a remark by the top White House official comes a day after the US slapped sanctions on four Pakistani entities, including the state-owned flag-ship aerospace and defence agency — National Development Complex (NDC) — on charges of them contributing to Pakistan's ballistic-missile programme. The other three entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise. All three are based in Karachi. Based in Islamabad, the NDC is responsible for the ballistic-missile programme. It has worked to acquire items to advance Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. "As a result, the (Joe) Biden

administration has implemented a series of steps to contend with further development of long-range missile systems. Over the last year, we have issued three rounds of sanctions against non-Pakistani entities that have provided support to Pakistan's ballistic-missile programme," Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer told a think-tank here. "And yesterday, we issued sanctions directly against Pakistan's state-owned National Development Complex, which the United States assesses is involved in the development and production of Pakistan's long-range ballistic missiles, the first time we have sanctioned a Pakistani state-owned enterprise tied to missile development," he said. "Simply put, we are going to keep the pressure on Pakistan regarding its long-range missile programme, even as we also continue to seek diplomatic resolutions to address our concerns," Finer said in his remarks at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a top American think-tank. In his remarks, Finer said

recently, Pakistan has developed increasingly sophisticated missile technology, from long-range ballistic missile systems to equipment that would enable the testing of significantly larger rocket motors. "If these trends continue, Pakistan will have the capability to strike targets well beyond South Asia, including in the United States, raising real questions about Pakistan's intentions," he said. The list of countries that possess both nuclear weapons and the missile capability to directly reach the US homeland is very small, and they tend to be adversarial towards the United States — Russia, North Korea and China — Finer observed. "So candidly, it is hard for us to see Pakistan's actions as anything other than an emerging threat to the United States. Now, leaders across our administration, myself included, have raised these concerns repeatedly with senior Pakistani officials," he said. "We have been a longtime partner with Pakistan on development, on counter-terrorism and other security issues,

including quite sensitive issues. We have provided support to Islamabad during difficult times and we continue to desire a cooperative relationship in these areas of shared interest," Finer added. "That makes us question even more why Pakistan will be motivated to develop a capability that could be used against us. Unfortunately, it is our sense that Pakistan has failed to take these concerns and, frankly, the concerns of others in the international community seriously and continues to advance these capabilities," he said. "Just looking at a map and looking at ranges, we believe that this is fundamentally focused on us," Finer said in response to a question. "I think that is an inescapable conclusion based on the information that we have got and that is why this is of such great concern because the United States cannot, will not simply sit back and watch the development of this capability that we believe could pose a threat ultimately down the road," Finer said.

# Russian missiles target Kyiv after Ukraine fires US-made missiles across the border

AP ■ KYIV

A Russian ballistic missile attack on Ukraine's capital Kyiv early Friday killed at least one person and injured nine others, officials said. Moscow claimed it was in response to a Ukrainian strike on Russian soil using American-made weapons. At least three loud blasts were heard in Kyiv shortly before sunrise. Ukraine's air force said it intercepted five Iskander short-range ballistic missiles fired at the city. The attack knocked out heating to 630 residential buildings, 16 medical facilities, and 30 schools and kindergartens, the city administration said, and falling missile debris caused damage and sparked fires in three districts. "We ask citizens to immediately respond to reports of ballistic attack threats, because there is very little time to find shelter," the air force said. During the almost three years since the war began, Russia has regularly bombarded civilian areas of Ukraine, often in an attempt to cripple the power grid and unnerve Ukrainians. Meanwhile Ukraine, struggling to hold back Russia's bigger army on the front line, has attempted to strike Russian infrastructure supporting the country's war effort. The Russian Ministry of Defence said the strike was in response to a Ukrainian missile attack on Russia's Rostov border region two days earlier. That attack used six American-made Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, missiles and four Storm Shadow air-launched missiles provided by the United Kingdom, it said. That day, Ukraine claimed to



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, firefighters work on the site of a damaged building after a Russian missile attack in Kyiv, Ukraine on Friday. AP/PTI

have targeted a Rostov oil refinery as part of its campaign to strike Russian infrastructure supporting the country's war effort. The use of Western-supplied weapons to strike Russia has angered the Kremlin. Ukraine fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles into Russia for the first time on November 19 after Washington eased restrictions on their use. That development prompted Russia to use a new hyperson-

ic missile, called Oreshnik, for the first time. President Vladimir Putin suggested the missile could be used to target government buildings in Kyiv, though there have been no reports of an Oreshnik being used for a second time. Answering the Ukrainian attack on Rostov on Wednesday, the Defence Ministry said it carried out a group strike with "high-precision, long-range weapons" on the command centre of Ukraine's military intelligence

agency and another location where it said Ukraine's Neptune missile systems are designed and produced. The attack also targeted Ukrainian ground-based cruise missile systems and US-made Patriot air defence systems, the Defence Ministry said. "The objectives of the strike have been achieved. All objects are hit," the defence ministry said in a Telegram post. Its claims could not immediately be verified.

# India-US defence relationship advancing in terrific, exciting ways: Pentagon

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The defence relationship between India and the US is accelerating and advancing in terrific and exciting ways, the Pentagon has said amidst the transition from the Joe Biden administration to that of President-elect Donald Trump. "The US-India defence relationship stands on its own. It is accelerating and advancing in terrific and exciting ways, both as it relates to defence industrial base cooperation as well as operational cooperation across the services," Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defence for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, told

reporters at a news conference here. "It (the India-US defence ties) is a continuing growth area, even as the India-China relationship waxes and wanes," Ratner said in response to a question. India has been accorded the status of the Major Defence Partnership by the United States. Biden administration officials have described the defence ties as one of the key pillars of this relationship. In October, India concluded an agreement with the US for the procurement of 31 General Atomics MQ-9B (16 Sky Guardian and 15 Sea Guardian) remotely-piloted aircraft and their associated

equipment, which will enhance the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities of India's armed forces across all domains. India and the US concluded the Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) this year, enhancing the mutual supply of defence goods and services. During their meeting in September, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Biden committed to advancing ongoing discussions on aligning their respective defence procurement systems to further enable the reciprocal supply of defence goods and services.

# 8 dead as speedboat carrying migrants capsizes

AP ■ ATHENS

A speedboat carrying migrants capsized Friday morning off the eastern Greek island of Rhodes, leaving eight dead, Greek authorities said. The coast guard said the incident occurred while the speedboat was carrying out "dangerous maneuvers" to try and evade a patrol vessel, causing migrants to fall into the sea. Eighteen of the migrants were rescued. Rescue workers on three coast guard vessels and a helicopter were working near the resort area of Afantou Beach in the northeast of the island. It was unclear whether other passengers were missing, authorities said. Eight of the survivors have been hospitalized, local officials said, with one of them in critical condition, according to state-run television. Rhodes, one of several large Greek islands located near the coast of Turkey, is on a busy illegal smuggling route in the eastern Mediterranean. At the main port of the island, police and ambulance workers held up sheets of gray tarp as the recovered bodies were carried into an ambulance. It was the second deadly incident involving migrants in the past week, as authorities in Athens brace for a spike in arrivals as a result of wars in the Middle East. Seven migrants were killed and dozens are believed to be missing after a boat partially sank south of the island of Crete over the weekend — one of four rescue operations during which more than 200 migrants were rescued. The search south of Crete around the tiny island of Gavdos was called off Wednesday.

# UN General Assembly asks court to say what Israel needs to provide in Gaza

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The UN General Assembly approved a resolution on Thursday asking the UN's highest court to state what Israel's obligations are in Gaza and the West Bank to provide humanitarian assistance essential for the survival of Palestinian civilians. The vote on the Norwegian-sponsored resolution seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice was 137-12, with 22 abstentions. The United States, Israel's closest ally, voted against the resolution. Resolutions in the 193-member

General Assembly are not legally binding, though they do reflect world opinion. It follows the ICJ's condemnation of Israel's rule over lands it captured 57 years ago. In a non-binding opinion in July, the court said Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territories is unlawful and called on Israel to end its occupation and halt settlement construction immediately. Thursday's resolution also follows Israeli laws passed in late October, which take effect in 90 days, that effectively ban the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, from operating in the

Palestinian territories. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stressed that no other UN agency can take on the UNRWA's role and a UN spokesman reiterated on Thursday that under international law, as the occupying power, Israel would be responsible for fulfilling the basic needs of Palestinians if the UNRWA is banned. Norway's deputy foreign minister, Andreas Kravik, told reporters that the international community has a responsibility to react to tens of thousands of deaths in Gaza and virtually the entire population experiencing

acute hunger, and some near famine. He said many countries, the UN and its agencies, and aid organisations are ready to step up their humanitarian efforts but the problem is "there is a lack of access". Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon told the assembly before the vote that its members were debating "the same recycled nonsense, where all that matters is attacking Israel and challenge its right to protect its citizens". "This time the Palestinians are using a new tool in this diplomatic circus: the International Court of Justice," he said.

# Chinese national charged with acting as Beijing's agent in local California poll

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A Chinese national was arrested on Thursday on charges of acting as an illegal agent for Beijing when serving as the campaign manager for an unnamed politician elected to a city council in Southern California two years ago. The arrest of Yaoning "Mike" Sun, 64, came at a time of rising concerns that the Chinese government has cultivated a network of operatives to influence local elections in the US to install politicians who are friendly to Beijing and can help promote Chinese interests. According to a complaint filed on Tuesday in the US District Court for the Central District of California, Sun is accused of conspiring with Chen Jun, who was sentenced to 20 months last month for acting as an illegal agent of the Chinese government. Chen, 71, also a Chinese national, pleaded guilty in July to using Chinese money to

bribe federal agents to undermine the anti-Beijing spiritual group Falun Gong. The charge against Sun shows that Chen also conspired to interfere with local elections. It was not immediately clear if Sun had a lawyer who could speak on his behalf. Sun was instructed by Chen to write up a report in 2023 to recount to Chinese officials how they helped the local politician get elected, according to the affidavit. Subsequent writings between the two men described the city councilperson as a "new political star" and included a request for USD 80,000 to fund more pro-Beijing activities in the United States, according to the court documents. Chen asked Sun to list all the mainstream American politicians the city councilperson was familiar with and told Sun that it would be "very effective to elevate" the status of the councilperson in China. "This case is yet another example of a very disturbing trend:

the People's Republic of China is seeking to influence foreign and domestic policy in the United States," Martin Estrada, US attorney for the Central District of California, said in a call with reporters. "To do so, government officials in China are seeking to help get elected individuals who they see as being friendly to Chinese foreign policy." The councilperson is not named in court papers. Yaoning Sun is listed as a campaign treasurer for Arcadia city council candidate Eileen Wang on a campaign statement filing stamped in February 2022, according to records on the city's website. In filings later in 2022, another individual is listed as the treasurer, the records show. Wang ran for election to the city council in 2022 and won. She ran a tutoring services company in the city about 15 miles (24 kilometres) northeast of Los Angeles and has participated in numerous community groups, according to her biography on the city's website.

# Venezuelan opp member leaves Argentine diplomatic compound

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

One of the six members of Venezuela's political opposition who have been sheltering for nine months in the Argentine diplomatic compound in the capital, Caracas, abandoned the premises Thursday. Two people familiar with the situation at the facility confirmed to The Associated Press that Fernando Martinez left the

ambassador's residence and was home. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. The conditions under which Martinez left the compound were not immediately clear. Since late November, the group has denounced the constant presence outside the residence of Venezuelan intelligence service agents and police. It has also accused the government of President Nicolas Maduro of

cutting electricity and water services. The government has denied the allegations. Those who remain at the Argentine ambassador's home include the campaign manager and communications director of opposition powerhouse Maria Corina Machado. The government of President Javier Milei allowed them into the compound in March after authorities loyal to the ruling

party issued warrants for their arrest, accusing them of promoting alleged acts of violence to destabilize the country. Martinez was involved in a parallel government that the opposition created after Maduro's widely considered sham reelection in 2018 and participated in negotiations between the opposition and the government. He was minister of communications and transportation in the 1990s.

# Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain laid to rest in San Francisco

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Zakir Hussain was laid to rest on Thursday at a San Francisco cemetery as renowned percussionist A Sivamani and other artists performed on their drums at a little distance away in a tribute to the tabla maestro. Hussain, one of the world's most accomplished percussionists, died at a San Francisco hospital on Monday due to complications arising from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease. He was 73. He was laid to rest at the Fernwood cemetery in San Francisco on Thursday. Hundreds of his admirers gathered at Hussain's funeral to pay their last respects. Sivamani and several other musicians played drums at a little distance away to pay him a tribute. Sivamani told PTI Video, "Rhythm is God, that is why

Zakir bhai. I learned a lot in our journey from 1982 till now. Every moment you are here with us in the rhythm. Every time I hit the rhythm, you are there. We love you Zakir Bhai. Have a lovely journey. Please give my pranam to all the masters." Hussain, the son of the legendary tabla player Alla Rakha, revolutionised the instrument, taking it beyond the limits of classical music to other forms, including jazz and Western classical. The celebrated musician, one of India's most well-known, received four Grammy Awards in his career spanning six decades, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year. Hussain is survived by his wife Antonia Minnecola and daughters Anisa Qureshi and Isabella Qureshi. Hussain received the Padma Shri in 1988, the Padma

Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023. In his career spanning six decades, the musician worked with several renowned international and Indian artists, but it was his 1973 musical project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar, and percussionist TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together Indian classical and elements of jazz in a fusion hitherto unknown. Sivamani after Hussain's death in a Facebook post said he would go to San Francisco to see him for the last time. "No Zakir Bhai, you cannot leave us like this. This is just unbelievable...I'm on the way to San Francisco. I want to see you... one last time...I want to hold your hands... my brother, my Guru... I'm devastated...life will never be the same again," Sivamani had said. Messages of condolence poured

in on social media as the news of Hussain's demise spread. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called him a true genius who revolutionised the world of Indian classical music. Grammy winner musician Ricky Kej remembered Hussain for his "immense humility, approachable nature". "One of the greatest musicians and personalities India has ever produced. Along with being the best himself, Zakirji was known for...being responsible for the careers of numerous musicians, who are now forces to reckon with themselves. He was a treasure trove of skill and knowledge and always shared and encouraged the entire music community through collaborations and his actions. His legacy will live on forever, and his influence will be felt for generations. He left us too soon," Kej had written on X after his demise.



Percussionist A Sivamani performs during the funeral of Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain at Fernwood Cemetery in San Francisco, US, on Thursday. PTI

# Six entities pay ₹ 3.49 crore to settle front-running trade case with Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Six entities, including Samir Kothari and Jitendra N Kewalramani, has settled with Sebi in a case pertaining to the suspected front-running of trades by paying ₹ 3.49 crore towards settlement charges.

The other entities that settled the matter with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) are Kuntal Goel, Jitendra N Kewalramani HUF, Dipika J Kewalramani and Pallavi Shailesh Nayak, Sebi said in the order on Thursday.

Apart from the settlement amount, Sebi's committee placed other conditions to settle the case.

These included disgorgement of unlawful gain totalling ₹2.06 crore along with 12 per cent interest per

annum from the date of the impugned transaction to the date of filing of the settlement application for disgorgement to be paid by Samir Kothari, Kuntal Goel and Jitendra N Kewalramani.

Also, the six entities will voluntarily debarred themselves from the securities markets for six months.

The order came after Sebi received four separate settlement applications from the applicants in March 2024, proposing to settle the instant proceedings through a settlement order "without admitting or denying the allegations".

"It is hereby ordered that the proceedings initiated against the applicants, vide show cause notice dated January 24, 2024, is disposed of," Sebi's Chief General Manager



Santosh Shukla said in the settlement order. Sebi conducted an investiga-

tion to ascertain whether there was any violation of the provisions of PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) rules by certain entities dur-

ing the period from January 2021 to October 2022.

Pursuant to the investigation, a common show cause notice dated January 24, 2024, was issued to certain entities, including the applicants.

The SCN alleged that the applicants and other notices were consistently placing orders ahead of Bharat Kanaiyalal Sheth Family Trust, Ravi Kanaiyalal Sheth Family Trust and Arjun Discretionary Trust (collectively referred to as the Big Clients) in the equity (cash) segment of NSE and were squaring off the same.

Further, Jitendra, who was the authorised person of Angel One was, directly or indirectly, in possession of the details of the impending orders to be placed by the big clients.

Accordingly, during the investigation period front running trades were allegedly executed by him in his own trading account and the trading accounts of certain entities, including the applicants (except Kuntal Goel and Samir Kothari), who were all related/associated to him during the probe period.

Sebi also alleged that Jitendra was connected to Kothari through an employer-employee relationship, while Kuntal, who possessed the information of the impending trades of the big client is connected to Samir Kothari by way of frequent calls leading to the non-public-information-of-the-impending orders of the big clients.

The rest of the notices/ applicants were, directly or indi-

rectly, in possession of the details of the impending orders to be placed on behalf of the big clients, through Jitendra, who then placed orders in clients' accounts to generate abnormal profits.

Therefore, the regulator alleged that the notices have contravened the PFUTP norms.

Thereafter, the applicants filed revised settlement terms which were approved by Sebi's High Powered Advisory Committee (HPAC). Apart from remitting the disgorgement amount, individually, Jitendra N Kewalramani paid ₹ 64.29 lakh, while Kuntal paid ₹ 55.90 lakh, and ₹ 57.20 lakh each paid by Kothari, Jitendra N Kewalramani HUF, Dipika J Kewalramani and Pallavi Shailesh Nayak.

## Sensex tanks 1,176 points, Nifty falls below 23,600 level

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty plunged about 1.5 per cent on Friday, taking their downtrend to the fifth straight session, due to risk aversion in the global markets after the hawkish stance of the US Federal Reserve.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 1,176.46 points or 1.49 per cent to settle at 78,041.59. During the day, it slumped 1,343.46 points or 1.69 per cent to 77,874.59. The NSE Nifty tanked 364.20 points or 1.52 per cent to 23,587.50. From the 30 blue-chip Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India, Tata Consultancy Services, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries were the biggest laggards.



In contrast, JSW Steel, Nestle and Titan were the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. Equity markets in Europe were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Thursday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,224.92 crore on Thursday, according to

exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 72.18 a barrel. Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05 on Thursday. The Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70.

## Bihar has potential to become major growth engine: Minister

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Industries and Tourism Minister Nitish Mishra on Friday asserted that the state is poised to play a key role in the country's growth engine, as he announced a record Rs 1.8 lakh crore investments across sectors, more than triple the amount received at its maiden investor meet last year. Detailing the investment proposals received at the end of the two-day 'Bihar Business Connect 2024' investor summit, Mishra said several memorandums of understanding (MoUs) entailing investment of over Rs 1.8 lakh crore have been signed. Sun Petrochemicals will invest Rs 36,700 crore in renewable energy, including pump hydro and solar plants. Adani Group is looking to invest Rs 20,000 crore in setting up an ultra-supercritical thermal power plant. Besides, the group also announced investment towards expanding the cement capacity as well as in



the warehousing and logistics sector. At the summit, leading companies such as NHPC (Rs 5,500 crore for renewable energy sector), SLMG Beverages (Rs 3,000 crore for food processing sector), Shree Cements (Rs 800 crore in general manufacturing category), and Haldiram Snacks Pvt Ltd (Rs 300 crore for food processing sector) also inked

MoUs with the state. "The state government is committed to develop Bihar into a major destination for investment in the country. I express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who participated and became a part of this new journey of Bihar... I am fully confident that Bihar has the potential to become a major growth engine of the country. We signed MoUs

with different investors worth Rs 1.80 lakh crore in different sectors... It's a huge achievement for Bihar," Mishra said. "Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already said that Bihar is advancing... We are moving ahead strongly in that direction," he asserted. Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha said Bihar is the "land of history and future of the country." "After Independence, large investments were made in Jamsheerpur (which was then a part of united Bihar) and Rohtas. Bihar has always been providing an industrial base," Sinha said. "Today, Bihar is also working in the field of exploration of heavy mines and minerals... In Jamui and Rohtas, Gaya and Jehanabad," he added. Bihar Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar, who was scheduled to address the concluding day of the summit, could not attend the event due to illness, officials said.

The state's Energy Minister Bijendra Prasad Yadav, however, read out a message on behalf of the CM. "The Bihar government has made several policies for development of industries. It is a matter of happiness that now you (investors) are working towards the development of Bihar. I am confident that people of the state will receive the benefits of the environment that is being created for industrial development in the state," the chief minister's message said. Bandana Preyashi, Secretary, Industries Department, said compared to last year, the state received significantly more investment proposals in the 2024 summit. "Last year, the sum was Rs 53,000 crore. Investments will be made in food processing and general manufacturing, health, information technology, logistics, plastics and rubber, real estate, renewable energy, textiles, leather and hospitality and skill development sectors," she said.

## HC upholds award of tender to Adani Group to redevelop Dharavi slums

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In what came as a big relief to the Adani group, the Bombay High Court on Friday dismissed a petition filed by UAE-based Seclink Technologies challenging the Maharashtra government's decision to cancel its 2019 bid for the redevelopment of Dharavi slums and issue a fresh tender in 2022. "There was no arbitrariness, unreasonableness or perversity in the decision of awarding the contract," a HC division bench of justices DK Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar noted as it dismissed a petition filed by UAE-based Seclink Technologies Corporation, which has challenged the Maharashtra government's decision to award the contract to Adani Properties Pvt Ltd. The dismissal of Seclink's peti-

tion should be seen in the context that the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) figured prominently during the 2024 Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls as it was a major bone of contention between the BJP-led MahaYuti and the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, which is a part of the Opposition MVA, had announced that if elected to power, it would cancel the DRP contract awarded to the Adani group. It may be recalled that M/s Seclink Technologies had emerged as the highest bidder for the project in 2018, but the tender was scrapped in 2019 by the Maharashtra government which initiated a fresh tender process in 2022 with modified conditions for the redevelopment project. Seclink had originally won the bid for the Dharavi redevelop-



ment project in 2019, surpassing Adani's bid of Rs 4,539 crore. However, in 2022, the Eknath Shinde-led MahaYuti government decided to include 45 acres of railway land in the project for slum rehabilitation, which was not part of the original proposal. The state government sought

advice from Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni on ways to accommodate the costs of acquiring the railway land. Kumbhakoni recommended a new tender to reflect the changes. Consequently, the Maharashtra government cancelled the 2019 tender and launched a fresh

bidding process in 2022. On its part, Seclink argued that the inclusion of railway land had already been accounted for in the original 2019 tender, as the bid map included nearly 90 acres of railway land. Questioning the government's rationale behind cancelling the bid, Seclink argued that the

new tender terms were designed to exclude them and benefit Adani. Seclink further stated that it suffered a financial loss of Rs 8,424 crore due to the cancellation of its bid. Defending its decision to cancel the earlier tender awarded to Seclink, the Maharashtra government told the high court that the revised conditions were not arbitrary but had been developed after careful consideration of the changed economic landscape. The state government argued that the financial and economic conditions had shifted significantly between 2019 and 2022, influenced by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, fluctuations in the Rupee-USD exchange rate, interest rate volatility, and an overall high-risk investor environment. The State government also argued that these changes necessitated adjustments to the

project's terms, ensuring the development was financially viable and aligned with the larger public interest. While rejecting the contentions made by Seclink that the revised tender was "tailor made" to suit a particular firm of the private conglomerate, noting three bidders had participated in the process, the HC bench said: "The petition lacks force and hence stands dismissed." "As far as the submissions made on behalf of the petitioner that tender conditions were tailor-made to suit a particular tenderer, we may observe that in response to the fresh tender three bidders had participated out of which two bids were found to be technically qualified. Meaning thereby, at least two bidders fulfilled the technical conditions and therefore, since there were more than two bidders in the field who participated out of

which two technically qualified, it cannot be said that the tender conditions were tailor-made so as to suit only a particular bidder," the HC bench noted. Senior Advocate Virendra Tulzapurkar with advocates Mandar Soman, Suraj Iyer, Jenil Shah, Devendra Ailawadi, Mani Thevar, Anuj Singhand Abhishek Karnik instructed by Ganesh and Co appeared for the petitioner. Senior Advocate Milind Sathe with Additional Government Pleaders Jyoti Chavan, Atul Vanarse and advocates Bhushan Deshmukh, Aditya Mhase appeared for the State. Senior Advocate Ravindra Kadam with Senior Advocates Vikram Nankani, Zal Adhyarujina and advocates Rohan Kadam, Karan Bhide, Rati Patni, Kathleen Lobo, Vikrant Dere instructed by Wadia Ghandy & Co appeared for Adani Properties.

## CREDAI urges Central Govt to reconsider 18% GST on FSI charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) has urged the Central Government to reconsider its proposal to impose an 18% Goods and Services Tax (GST) on Floor Space Index (FSI) and additional FSI charges paid to local authorities for real estate projects. CREDAI warned that the move could escalate housing prices by approximately 10% across India, disrupting housing affordability and project viability. CREDAI emphasized that applying GST on FSI charges would significantly increase construction costs, especially if imposed retrospectively. Developers could face hefty financial liabilities, potentially stalling ongoing projects and jeopardizing homebuyers' investments. Even a prospective implementation could hinder the government's 'Housing for All' mission by making affordable housing economically unviable. "FSI charges constitute a sig-



nificant portion of project costs," said Boman Irani, President of CREDAI National. "The proposal to impose 18% GST on these charges could destabilize the real estate sector, leading to increased housing prices and delayed project deliveries. We urge the government to exempt FSI charges from GST." CREDAI cited legal provisions supporting its stance. According to Notifications 14/2017 and 12/2017 under the GST Act, services provided by Central, State, or local authorities related to functions listed in Article 243W of the Constitution—such as urban planning and land regulation—are exempt from GST. The twelfth schedule of the Constitution explicitly includes

urban planning, land-use regulation, and slum improvement among municipal functions, reinforcing the industry's claim that FSI charges should remain outside the GST's scope. The association also highlighted that developers cannot claim Input Tax Credit (ITC) on GST paid for such charges, causing double taxation and further inflating housing costs. This, in turn, would adversely impact the purchasing power of middle-class homebuyers, who make up 70% of the housing market. CREDAI has appealed to the Central Government to maintain the current exemption on FSI charges. The association warned that imposing GST could create a cascading effect, reducing housing supply and demand while affecting economic growth linked to the real estate sector. "The government must maintain the current status quo," Irani stressed. "Any retrospective or prospective GST levy could destabilize the sector, delay project completions, and compromise homeownership dreams for millions of Indians."

## Gold dips ₹170 to ₹78,130 per 10 gm; silver plunges ₹1,850

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices extended the slide for the third straight session and fell ₹ 170 to Rs 78,130 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid selling by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity ended at Rs 78,300 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver prices plunged ₹ 1,850 to ₹ 88,150 per kg due to reduced offtake by industrial units and coin makers. The white metal closed at ₹ 90,000 per kg in the previous session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity went lower by ₹ 170 to ₹ 77,730 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹ 77,900 per 10 grams. Traders attributed the fall in yellow metal prices to lacklustre demand from local jewellers. In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery rose ₹ 50 or 0.07 per cent to trade at ₹ 75,701 per 10 grams on Friday. "Gold witnessed minor buy-



ing as the USD 2,600-level on Comex acted as a temporary support, alongside ₹ 75,500 in the domestic MCX market. The momentum remains volatile due to uncertainties surrounding the interest rate cycle. "Although the Fed decided to keep rates lower, its projections indicated fewer rate cuts going forward, which has maintained pressure on gold prices for the past two days," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said. Meanwhile, silver futures contracts for March delivery slumped ₹ 647 or 0.74 per cent to ₹ 86,540 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Globally, Comex gold futures advanced USD 13.10 to USD 2,621.20 per ounce. "Market players will watch the core Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) prices index data due later today, and more selling will be witnessed in precious metals counters if the actual figure comes above estimates," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. According to Kotak Securities, Comex gold futures saw some recovery and traded near USD 2,620 per ounce on Friday, but headed for weekly decline as investors reassessed interest rate expectations following the US Federal Reserve's latest decision. Despite a rate cut, Fed Chair Powell's emphasis on continued inflation progress tempered expectations for further easing. Resilient economic data, including upwardly revised consumer spending, further weakened the case for imminent rate cuts, the brokerage firm said. Silver quoted 0.41 per cent lower at 29.29 per ounce in the overseas market.

## Rupee recovers from all-time low, gains 10 paise to 85.03 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee saw some recovery from its all-time low level and appreciated 10 paise to close at 85.03 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, on softening of the US dollar index and a potential intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Forex traders said the rupee is likely to remain in a weakening mode due to significant dollar demand. The Dollar Index (DXY) is expected to remain elevated, with resistance near the 110 level in the near-term amid a reduced likelihood of significant Fed rate cuts in 2025. The Federal Reserve cut rates by 25 basis points on Wednesday, but its forward guidance for 2025 has softened, with expectations reduced from four rate cuts to just two. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.07 against the greenback. During the day it witnessed an intraday high of 84.95 and a low of 85.12 before ending the session at 85.03 (provisional) against dollar, higher by 10



paise over its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 19 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at a fresh all-time low of 85.13 against the US dollar. Traders said the rupee recovered from lower levels in the latter half of the day on softening of the US dollar index and a potential intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). A decline in crude oil prices also supported the rupee at lower levels. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on weak domestic markets and overall strength in the US dollar amid a hawkish Fed and improved US economy," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.



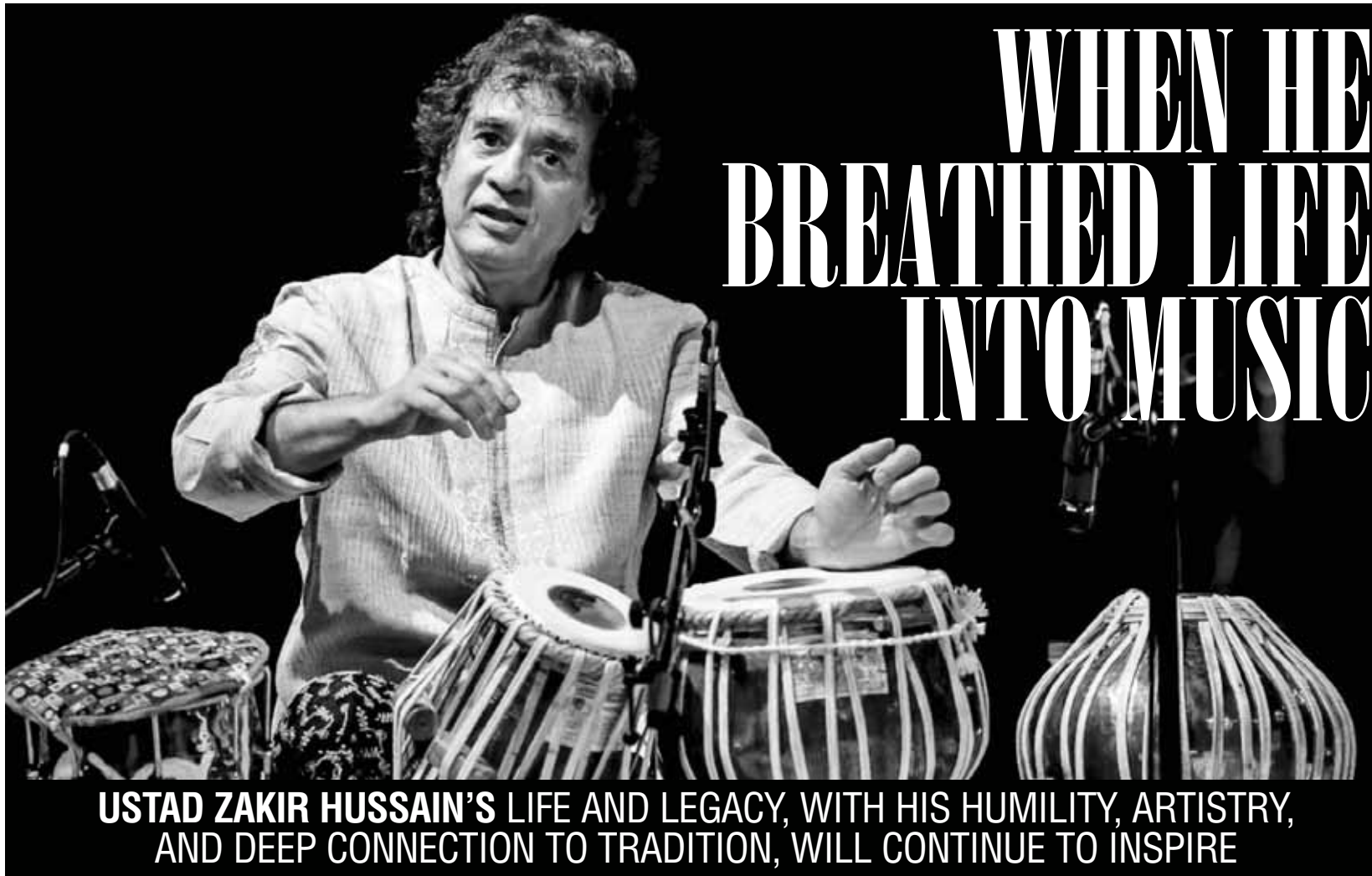
It would be wrong to say that I – like many other admirers of *Ustad Zakir Hussain* – am not shocked and mourning the demise of the maestro on December 15, 2024. But while there are countless messages on social media from those who are offering their tributes and remembering the maestro's greatness, it is a moment to also remember *Zakir Hussain* for his humility despite his multiple accolades and achievements. I must also convincingly add that it would further be wrong to say that the world of 'taal' and 'rhythm' fell silent on December 15, 2024, as *Ustad Zakir Hussain* breathed his last in San Francisco at 73, leaving behind an unparalleled legacy in the realm of music. For decades, his hands transformed the tabla from a classical Indian percussion instrument into a universal language, one that bridged the East and the West, traditional and contemporary, music and magic. It can, however, be said that while the 'taals' and 'taranas' seem momentarily muted, *Zakir Hussain's* music continues to echo in the hearts of millions.

Born on March 9, 1951, in Mumbai, *Zakir Hussain* was the son of *Ustad Alla Rakha*, another tabla virtuoso. From a young age, *Zakir* was destined for greatness, showing an uncanny ability to master the intricacies of rhythm. His music wasn't just a recital of beats – it was a dialogue, a dance, a spiritual experience. Even as a child prodigy, he bore the weight of his father's towering legacy with grace, eventually shaping his own path and taking 'tabla' to a realm previously unimaginable.

#### REDEFINING THE TABLA

*Zakir Hussain* revolutionised the art of tabla playing, elevating it from its conventional role as a supporting instrument to a soloist's pride of place on the world stage. With a profound understanding of tradition and heritage, he seamlessly blended his technical virtuosity with creative improvisation, crafting performances that transcended genres and boundaries. His hands moved like poetry, crafting rhythmic patterns so intricate and yet so accessible that even the untrained ear could sense the brilliance of his craft.

His collaborations with artists across the globe are a testament to his genius. With guitarist *John McLaughlin*, he co-founded the band 'Shakti', a pioneering force in fusion music that blended Indian classical music with jazz and rock. His work with *Mickey Hart* of the 'Grateful



**USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN'S LIFE AND LEGACY, WITH HIS HUMILITY, ARTISTRY, AND DEEP CONNECTION TO TRADITION, WILL CONTINUE TO INSPIRE**

Dead' in 'Planet Drum' brought Indian percussion to global prominence, winning a Grammy for Best World Music Album in 1992.

He had the remarkable ability to connect disparate musical traditions, forging symphonies that spoke to the universal spirit of humanity. Whether performing with *Ravi Shankar* in a sitar-tabla 'jugalbandi' or jamming with *Yo-Yo Ma's* 'Silk Road Ensemble', he approached each with reverence and curiosity, breaking barriers without ever diluting the essence of the tabla.

#### WHAT PARAMPARA (LINEAGE) MEANT FOR THE USTAD

Despite his global persona, *Zakir Hussain* remained deeply rooted in Indian musical traditions. His performances were steeped in the wisdom of centuries, carrying forward the parampara (lineage) of the Punjab gharana while infusing it with his own

innovations. He viewed the tabla as not just an instrument but a storyteller, capable of expressing every shade of human emotion – from the ecstatic to the meditative. His renditions of complex 'talas' ('teental', 'jhaptal', and 'rupak tal') revealed his mastery of rhythm and timing, yet what set him apart was his ability to infuse each beat with life and soul. Even as he experimented with cross-cultural sounds, *Zakir Hussain* never let the tabla lose its identity. He saw fusion as a dialogue rather than a compromise, where traditions could coexist and enrich one another.

In his lecture-demonstrations, *Zakir Hussain* often spoke about the spiritual dimension of music. For him, the tabla was a medium of devotion and transcendence, a way to connect with the divine. It is this depth of understanding that lent his performances an ethereal quality, leaving audiences spellbound.



#### A LESSON IN HUMILITY

*Zakir Hussain's* fame was unparalleled, yet his humility remained his most endearing quality. Despite receiving countless accolades, including the *Padma Vibhushan*, *Padma Bhushan*, *Padma Shri*, *Sangeet Natak Akademi Award*,

*Kalidas Samman*, the *United States National Heritage Fellowship*, and the *Grammy Awards*, he carried himself with the grace and simplicity of a true artist. He was equally at ease performing in the grandest concert halls of the world and in intimate 'baithaks' (gatherings). He often attributed his success to his gurus, his parents, and his fellow musicians, never once allowing his stature to overshadow his respect for the art form. "I am just a student," he would say, even as the world hailed him as a master. He viewed music, like life, as a journey rather than a destination and won the love and admiration of millions of fans worldwide. His recordings, whether solo albums like *Making Music* or collaborations like *Friday Night* in San Francisco, remain timeless treasures. *Zakir Hussain's* artistry lies in his unparalleled ability to create magic through jugalbandis with luminaries of Indian classical music. His tabla became

a dynamic companion, engaging in profound musical dialogues with *Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia's* flute, *Ustad Amjad Ali Khan's* sarod, *Pandit Shivkumar Sharma's* santoor, *L. Subramaniam's* violin, and *Ustad Bismillah Khan's* shehnai. These collaborations celebrated the interplay of rhythm and melody, captivating audiences with performances that evoked joy, wonder, and reverence. *Zakir Hussain* also collaborated with maestros like *Ustad Ali Akbar Khan* (sarod), creating harmonies that bridged the spiritual and the artistic. In recent years, he extended his genius to a new generation, performing with *Niladri Kumar* (electric sitar), *Rakesh Chaurasia* (flute), and *Kala Ramnath* (violin), proving his tabla transcends time and tradition. These jugalbandis were not mere performances but soulful exchanges, transforming the stage into a realm of divine musical ecstasy.

*Zakir Hussain's* tabla seamlessly complemented the soul-stirring renditions of legends like *Pandit Bhimsen Joshi*, *Kishori Amonkar*, *Pt. Birju Maharaj*, and *Pt. Rajan-Sajan Mishra*. With *Pandit Jasraj*, his intricate rhythmic patterns enriched majestic 'khayal' performances, blending melody and rhythm to captivate audiences. Equally remarkable were his collaborations with *Girija Devi*, *Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna*, *Pt. Ajoy Chakraborty*, and *Ustad Rashid Khan*, where his tabla brought depth to 'thumris', 'kritis', and other 'gayaki ang', enhancing their emotive essence. With humility and brilliance, he elevated vocal accompaniment and the rhythmic artistry of 'ghungroos', setting unparalleled standards in the interplay of rhythm and melody.

#### LEGENDS NEVER DIE

And as we remember the legend, it was he who transformed the tabla into an instrument of infinite possibilities, inspiring countless musicians to explore its depths. His students, many of whom are now torchbearers of the art form, continue to carry forward his teachings, ensuring that the rhythms he created will never fade. In the words of the maestro himself: "Music is a prayer. It's a conversation with the universe. It's infinite, just like the spirit of the human soul!"

Wah Ustad... Wah... ! We will never miss saying this. Farewell.

— *Rajdeep Pathak, Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti*



## ART OF SELF-REFLECTION

Anupam Sud's exhibition explores human vulnerability through powerful printmaking techniques, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Walking into *Anupam Sud: The Journey A Full Circle* at the *Palette Art Gallery* is like stepping into the mind of an artist who has spent decades exploring the intricacies of human existence. Her works don't just hang on the walls; they resonate, confront, and invite contemplation. This exhibition, spanning five decades of her artistic practice, feels less like a retrospective and more like a conversation, a dialogue between past and present, between the artist and her audience.

*Anupam Sud's* art is unflinchingly honest. Her etchings and prints capture the vulnerability of the human body and spirit, portraying it with a rawness that is both unsettling and deeply empathetic. There is nothing superficial here; each line, shadow, and texture is



deliberate, layered with meaning and emotion. Her figures, often placed in sparse, almost theatrical compositions, seem to ask questions rather than offer answers. Who are we beneath our constructed identities? What does it mean to be human in a society that often feels fractured and disconnected? What sets *Sud* apart is her mastery of technique, but even more so her willingness to push its boundaries. From

her early etchings to her recent pandemic-era print collages, there's a sense of fearless experimentation. She refers to her process as embracing the "controlled accident," and this philosophy permeates her art. It's not just about precision but about allowing the unexpected to shape her work, a balance of discipline and spontaneity. Perhaps most striking is how her art reflects her lived experience. Her portrayal of urban life, the complex roles

of women, and the quiet struggles of everyday existence are deeply personal yet universally relatable. The human body becomes a motif, a vessel for exploring themes of resilience, fragility, and self-reflection. This exhibition is more than a celebration of a career; it's a reflection of the power of art to evolve and endure. Even as *Sud* acknowledges the physical challenges of printmaking, her work continues to pulsate with energy and relevance. Her art speaks to the soul, challenging viewers to pause, reflect, and connect, not just with her work but with themselves. *Anupam Sud's* journey, as captured here, is a reminder that art, at its best, asks questions that stay with us long after we leave the gallery.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



## A THEATRICAL FEAST OF LAUGHTER

A lively three-day journey of laughter and theatre, where comedy and powerful performances sparked joy, reflection and unforgettable connections, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people," and nowhere was this more evident than at the *Hasya Rang Utsav*. Over three unforgettable days, the festival brought together the joy of stand-up comedy and the depth of theatre, reminding audiences of the transformative power of humour. From belly-aching laughter to moments of quiet reflection, this celebration of wit and performance art left an indelible mark on everyone who attended.

The festival began with a bang, as the ever-charming *Sunil Pal* took to the stage. Known for his effortless humour and relatable anecdotes, *Pal* had the audience in stitches with his clever observations on daily life. His performance was a shared experience, as the laughter rippled through the crowd, breaking barriers and setting the tone for the days ahead. The evening continued with *Charandas Chor*, *Habib Tanvir's* iconic satire brought to life under the direction of *Rajesh Tiwari*. This story of a thief with an unusual moral compass combined folk music, rich storytelling, and a sharp critique of human hypocrisy, leaving the audience both entertained and

contemplative. Day two brought the unstoppable energy of *Ehsaan Qureshi*, whose rhythmic comedy and sharp wit had the crowd



roaring with laughter. His ability to find humour in the smallest details made every punchline resonate deeply. The evening continued with *Ghar Ka Na Ghar Ka*, written by *J.P. Singh*. Tackling the societal obsession with male heirs, the play used humour to hold a mirror to deeply rooted traditions. Witty dialogues and relatable characters made the satire both hilarious and thought-provoking. The festival's grand finale was nothing short of spectacular. *VIP*, a comedian with an infectious stage presence, swept the audience off their feet with his quick humour and high-energy act. The night concluded with *Bank Manager*, a masterful adaptation of *Anton Chekhov's* works, directed by *Shyam Kumar*. With its clever exploration of human absurdities and comic misunderstandings, the play was a fitting end to this laughter-filled journey. The *Hasya Rang Utsav* captured the essence of how humour can connect, heal, and spark reflection, leaving its mark on both the audience's hearts and minds. It was a celebration of life, its complexities, and the joy of shared moments of laughter.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



## BEATS IN THE

By **TEAM VIVA**

Music has the extraordinary ability to bring people together, and this was beautifully evident at a recent concert in New Delhi. Held at *ibis New Delhi Aerocity*, the event brought music enthusiasts under one roof for an unforgettable evening of melody, rhythm, and connection.

The spotlight of the evening was on *Nikhita Gandhi*, who delivered a mesmerising performance that kept the

audience enthralled. With her soulful voice and dynamic stage presence, she performed some of her most beloved tracks, including the hauntingly beautiful "Qaafirana." The setlist also featured chart-topping numbers like "Raabta," "Burr Khalifa," and "Do You Love Me," each song showcasing her versatility and leaving the audience in wonder. The concert was more than just a musical performance, it was an experience. The thoughtfully curated ambience, combined with delectable food and warm

hospitality, enhanced the joy of the evening. Every detail, from the stage design to the sound quality, contributed to making the night both intimate and exhilarating. As the final chords faded into the night, the crowd departed with beaming faces, humming tunes that stayed long after the concert ended. It was a remarkable evening, a celebration of music and human connection that will be cherished for a long time to come.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

# Teenage sensation Konstas called up for Boxing Day Tests, McSweeney dropped

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was handed a maiden call up as Australia on Friday dropped rookie opener Nathan McSweeney for the final two Test matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India. The 19-year-old is set to become Australia's youngest Test batting debutant in over 70 years. If Konstas, who turned 19 on October 2, is selected in the playing XI in the Boxing Day Test, he would become Australia's youngest Test debutant since captain Pat Cummins, who was 18 years and 193 days old when he made his debut against South Africa in Johannesburg in 2011. The teenager would also become the youngest specialist batter to debut for Australia since Ian Craig when he played against South Africa at the MCG in 1953 aged 17 years 239 days.

Konstas' inclusion follows a series of disappointing performances from the Australian top order in the first three Tests especially McSweeney. The 25-year-old, who made his Test debut in the series-opener in Perth, failed to score a single half century and could only manage scores of 10, 0, 39, 10 not out, 9 and 4 in his six innings and was dismissed by Indian pace Jasprit Bumrah spearhead four times. Konstas had been in the reckoning to partner experienced Usman Khawaja after grabbing the attention of Cricket Australia's selection committee following his twin Sheffield Shield centuries for New South Wales. He had scored an unbeaten 73 at the MCG against India A while notching up a ton (107) in the Prime Ministers XI pink ball game against India in Canberra. "Sam gets a call up to the Test squad for the first time. His style of batting offers a point of difference and we look



forward to watching his game develop further," Australian Chair of Selectors George Bailey said.

"We remain confident Nathan has the ability and temperament to succeed at Test level in the future. It was a

difficult decision to leave him out. "It has clearly been a challenge at the top of the order for

batters throughout the series and we want to provide the option of a different line up for the next two matches," he

added. Konstas' inclusion follows a warning from former pacer Merv Hughes, who cautioned selectors against making any changes to the batting lineup for the Boxing Day Test. The former selector said it would have been a "panic call" move from Australia to add Konstas in the squad. "Now it would almost be a panic call to me... Just stay calm. They drew the last Test. The last two Tests have been a draw and a win, so what is there to panic about," Hughes had told 'The Courier Mail'. Konstas had said earlier this week, "It would be a dream come true (playing the Boxing Day Test)." "Maybe I'd get a little nervous before the game, but I've worked really hard for that. Hopefully, it happens one day, but we'll see." Pacer Jhye Richardson has also been included in the 15-member squad in place of Josh Hazlewood, who has been ruled out due to a calf injury. Richardson, who himself has

overcome a series of injuries, has not featured in a Test match since his three appearances during the 2021-22 Ashes series. "In the absence of Josh Hazlewood, Jhye provides further options in the fast bowling space. It has been pleasing to see his successful return throughout the early part of the domestic summer," Bailey said. Speedster Sean Abbott is also back in the squad for the remaining two games while uncapped Tasmania all-rounder Beau Webster, who was added ahead of the second Test in Adelaide, retains his place in the 15-member group. Australia squad for 4th and 5th Test: Pat Cummins (c), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Travis Head (vc), Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Jhye Richardson, Steve Smith (vc), Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster.



## Tough task awaits Chennaiyin FC against Mumbai City

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Seeking to bridge the gap with the top six, visiting Chennaiyin FC will have their task cut out when they take on fancied hosts Mumbai City FC in their Indian Super League match here on Saturday. The Islanders have an impressive record against Chennaiyin FC, being unbeaten in their last nine ISL meetings. Mumbai have won and drawn twice in their last five matches, and are currently occupying the seventh spot with 17 points from 11 games. Chennaiyin FC are ninth in the table, having garnered 15 points from 12 matches but their previous five outings have seen them succumb to a loss thrice. Neither of them are too far off the sixth-placed Jamshedpur FC, who have 18 points from 10 matches. The Petr Kratky-coached team have struggled offensively, scoring the fourth-least goals in the season (14) so far, whereas the Marina Machans better them in this metric with 17 strikes. Mumbai City have fared better at the back, keeping the third-most clean sheets (4) in the league, conceding only 13 goals, as opposed to the 18 of the Chennaiyin FC. Mumbai City FC have not conceded in their last three ISL games. If they manage another clean sheet, it will mark their longest streak since 2018. Interestingly,

Chennaiyin have netted merely once in their previous three games in the competition. Mumbai City have hit the woodwork seven times this season, the second-highest tally behind Odisha FC (9 times). Last season, they set a single-season high of 10. While it does show that they are constantly on the lookout for creating chances in the final third, the frontline will have to come together to convert these opportunities with greater consistency. Chennaiyin FC have lost their last two away games, failing to score in both. The last time the Marina Machans went on a longer losing run away from home was a stretch of four games between December 2023 and February 2024, which included a 0-3 loss to Mumbai City FC (December 28, 2023). To get their season back on track, a positive result here would be important. Chennaiyin FC have conceded just four goals in the first half of their ISL games this season, the lowest in the league. However, they conceded 14 goals in the second half, the joint most with Kerala Blasters FC. The Marina Machans will have to ensure that they do not continue to lose their shape at the back once the game enters its second essay. Jamshedpur FC face East Bengal FC In Kolkata, Jamshedpur FC will eye their first-ever league double over East Bengal FC when they face off at the Salt Lake Stadium.

## Ashwin's desire to evolve all the time made him stand out: Shastri

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Ravichandran Ashwin's constant drive to evolve and excel in his craft, coupled with his focus on self-improvement rather than being concerned about the opponents made him stand out, says former India coach Ravi Shastri. The 38-year-old surprised the cricketing world by announcing his retirement in the middle of the Test series against Australia after the end of the third Test in Brisbane on Wednesday. "What stands out for me was his wanting to evolve all the time. He wasn't the kind of guy satisfied as to where he started," Shastri said on 'The ICC Review'. "For me it was his guile, wanting to excel in his craft and (especially) in the last two-three years the way he got the ball to the way, gave it a rip and got it to dip on the batsman with drift made him stand out," Shastri said. Known for his relentless drive to develop his game,



Ashwin consistently worked on new deliveries and refined his action, even in the later stages of his career. "He wanted new tricks to be learned. He pursued it, practiced hard at it and continued to look for new things as his career progressed, to keep up with the times," Shastri said. "His legacy will be of being a terrific match-winner, a fabulous record, 537 sticks. I mean anyone over 500 (in

Test cricket) is special." Ashwin, who made his debut in 2011 against the West Indies, quickly cemented his place in India's Test side. He retired as India's second-highest wicket-taker with 765 scalps, including 537 in Tests. Ashwin and fellow spinner Ravindra Jadeja often bowled in tandem, leading India to numerous victories. Shastri felt the "spin twins" played a role in each other's success.

"And for him to do it in his span and the way he has done it, especially when it came to bowling in the last four or five years, I think in India, along with Jadeja, I think they were a terrific pair, the real spin twins." "They complemented each other well and they spurred each other on, so I would say a lot of Jadeja's wickets in the last five-six years have come because of Ashwin and vice-versa." Shastri highlighted that Ashwin's nearly identical record against left and right handed batters -- 269 wickets against right-handers and 268 against left-handers -- demonstrated just how versatile and effective the spinner was, regardless of the opponent or their playing style. "You look at his record against right-handers, against left-handers, it's pretty much similar, you know, which says it all. It didn't matter to him who he was bowling against. He was up for it," he added.



## Tottenham beats Man United 4-3 in the English League Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Son Heung-min scored a spectacular goal directly from a corner to fire Tottenham into the English League Cup semifinals in a thrilling 4-3 win over Manchester United. Spurs will play Premier League leader Liverpool for a place in the final, and Arsenal was drawn against Newcastle in the other last-four matchup. Son's strike in the 88th-minute at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium came as Spurs tried to hold off a dramatic comeback from United, having led 3-0 in the second half. United had pulled it back to 3-2 and was pushing for an equalizer when Son whipped in a curling right-footed shot past goalkeeper Altay Bayindir. "Obviously we made it harder than it should have been, for sure," Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou said and added, "Are you not entertained?" United's players complained Bayindir had been fouled by Tottenham's Lucas Bergvall as Son's shot flew past him. Replays appeared to show contact between the two, but with no VAR at this stage of the competition, there was

no chance of a review. Jonny Evans scored again for United in stoppage time, but Spurs held on for the win that had looked all but certain shortly after halftime. Having gone ahead through Dominic Solanke's goal from close range in the 15th, Tottenham took control after the break. Dejan Kulusevski doubled the lead a minute after the restart and Solanke fired in his second in the 54th. United head coach Ruben Amorim made a triple substitution -- bringing on Joshua Zirkzee, Amad Diallo and Kobbie Mainoo. It quickly had an impact with Zirkzee forcing Fraser Forster into a flying save and then capitalizing on a loose pass by the Tottenham goalkeeper to make it 3-1. Forster was guilty of another mistake in the 70th when his attempted clearance was closed down by Diallo and ricocheted over the line. United increased the pressure, but Son's unlikely goal gave Spurs a cushion again -- and it proved to be the decisive strike after Evans' late header reduced the deficit again. "I know the studio (punditry team) is probably going into meltdown over my lack of tactics," Postecoglou said.

## India storm into U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup final

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Rampaging India extended their unbeaten run at the U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup as they reached the final with a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their last Super Four contest here Friday. Aayushi Shukla emerged the wrecker-in-chief with a four-wicket haul as the left-arm spinner conceded only 10 runs in her four overs to help India restrict Sri Lanka to 98 for nine after skipper Niki Prasad opted to bowl. Parunika Sisodia, who also bowls left-arm spin, chipped in with two scalps. Such was India's domination that only two Sri Lankan batters -- Sumudu Nisansala (21) and captain Manudi Nanayakkara (33) -- could manage double-digit scores.



The Lankan top-order fared poorly with Sanjana Kavindi (9) and Hiruni Hansika (2) staying together for a mere 12 balls. A 22-run fifth-wicket stand between Nanayakkara and Nisansala was the best for the Lankans. They raised hopes of

a rival but the latter's run out punctured all their hopes. India did not have the best of starts with opener Ishwari Aswari running herself out in the third ball of the chase without bothering the scorer. Left-arm spinner Chamodi Praboda (3/16) led the Sri

Lankan fightback by dismissing three Indian batters but opener G Kamalini (28) and Gongadi Trisha (32) ensured that the small run-chase was completed. Once they departed, Mithila Vinod, batting at number seven, carried the side home with her unbeaten 17-run cameo. India overhauled the target with 31 balls to spare. India had thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in their tournament-opener and then got the better of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka while the contest against Nepal did not yield any result. Brief Scores: Sri Lanka: 98 for 9 in 20 overs. (M Nanayakkara 33, S Nisansala 21; A Shukla 4/10) India: 102 for 6 in 14.5 overs. (G Trisha 32, G Kamalini 28; C Praboda 3/16).

## India should have a hard approach against West Indies in ODIs: Richa Ghosh

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh has urged the Indian women's team not to take the foot off the pedal after their T20I series victory, but to adopt a more aggressive approach when they face West Indies in the upcoming three ODIs. Ghosh smashed a world record-equalling fastest fifty, reaching the milestone in just 18 balls. The 21-year-old, who scored 54 off 21 balls, including five sixes and three fours, joining an exclusive club, that features New Zealand's Sophie Devine and Australia's Phoebe Litchfield. Her innings helped India pile

on 217 runs in the third T20I on Thursday. "We will look to carry the momentum and approach the ODI series and not go easy, our approach should be much harder. It is a new ground and we will try to assess the situations first and plan accordingly," Ghosh told the media here after India won the series 2-1. Ghosh said she always has had the mindset to play aggressively. "The mindset (to play aggressively) is there in every game which comes from the practice sessions. If we have done something in the practice session, it feels easier to do it in a match. I had prepared in

that manner and that helped me," she said. "I have always loved power hitting. I have also seen my father hit big shots. I have worked hard on my fitness and in the practice sessions," Ghosh added. Ghosh also credited her experiences in the Women's Big Bash League and Women's Premier League for her exploits with the bat. "I spoke with Sophie Devine and Deandra Dottin during the WBBL and WPL. I have also discussed a lot about hitting with Harry di (Harmanpreet Kaur), she is also one of the finest hitters," she said. The wicketkeeper-batter said



India wanted to put their ODI series loss to Australia behind and start afresh. "We wanted to forget the past and start afresh. We had come into this game to give our absolute best and not worry about the result and everyone gave their best," she said. Hayley Matthews rued the West Indies were not good enough in execution but said her side has a lot of positives to carry forward. "It just probably came down to execution again today. Like I said, we had really strong plans, but India also went back and obviously did some homework as well. Kudos to the way their players came out and batted," Matthews said

after India recorded their highest-ever total of 217/4 in the format. With stand-in India skipper Smriti Mandhana hitting consecutive fifties to notch scores of 54, 62 and 77 in the series, Matthews picked her innings in the final T20I as her best. "Smriti obviously had a great series, but her knock today to me was probably the best one," she said. "Having to bowl at Richa at the end was quite difficult as well. You felt almost as if you didn't land it on a penny. It was going to be pretty hard to stop her from scoring," Matthews added. With the official attendance claiming to be in excess of

47,200 for the final T20I -- the official capacity of DY Patil Stadium is 45,000 -- Matthews said it was the reason she loves playing in India. "Yeah, it was great to see. I have experienced massive Mumbai close before playing down here in the WPL. Obviously, when I am down here playing, usually they're on my side in that tournament," she said. "It is pretty crazy going up against it when they're cheering for the opposition, 100 per cent. I love playing in India for that reason. There's so many people that are into the women's game and want to come out and watch and support," she added.

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