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BJP announces NDA boycott of Assembly bypoll in Erode

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, JANUARY 12

THE BJP-LED NDA has joined the AIADMK and the DMDK in announcing a boycott of the February 5 Erode East Assembly bypoll in Tamil Nadu.

State BJP president K Annamalai announced the NDA's decision late on Saturday night, referring to the bypoll as a "by-election for a by-election". This was a reference to allegations of malpractice during the 2022 bypoll held in the constituency.

"The coming 2026 Assembly polls are meant to remove the DMK from power. The NDA is moving towards that target and does not want to allow the DMK to confine people like cattle once again," Annamalai said, recalling that there were accusations at the time about the MK Stalin-led party "confining" people at designated places.

"All the leaders of NDA who desire people's welfare, after detailed consultation, have decided to boycott the Erode East bypoll. Our target is to remove the DMK in the 2026 elections and give the NDA's good governance to people," Annamalai said, adding **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

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IDEA EXCHANGE

'Greatest challenge for innovation in India is cultural. Families want their children to be safe, not take risks'
CHINTAN VAISHNAV
FORMER MISSION DIRECTOR, ATAL INNOVATION MISSION
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Devotees gather in Prayagraj on Sunday, a day before the start of the Maha Kumbh. Vishal Srivastav

Petal shower to chopper ride to holy dip, stage set for start of Maha Kumbh today

An estimated 45 crore people are expected to visit Prayagraj over next 45 days

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 12

MAHA KUMBH 2025, expected to bring over 45 crore people to Prayagraj over a period of one-and-a-half months, will begin on Monday with the first snan, or holy bath.

Even before the Kumbh officially began, the Sangam — the meeting point of the rivers

Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati — witnessed a huge gathering of pilgrims. According to officials, around 50 lakh people took the holy bath at the Sangam in Prayagraj on Sunday.

The Uttar Pradesh government's Horticulture Department has made preparations to shower flower petals on pilgrims on all major snan days, starting Monday. Over 20 quintals of rose

petals will be used for this purpose and they will be showered over an area of 4,000 hectares, officials said.

The Tourism Department has announced the start of a special helicopter ride from Monday onwards to witness the Kumbh. This will be priced at Rs 1,296.

According to officials, all 13 Akharas that take part in the Kumbh have entered the Kumbh site with their processions.

Visitors to Prayagraj for the Kumbh have come from across the country and from different parts of the world. Among them was Laurene Powell Jobs, wife of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.

Five major snan will start with the first one on Paush Purnima, which is Monday, followed by three rituals known as Shahi or Amrit Snan, which will take place on Makar Sankranti on Tuesday **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

EXPRESS NETWORK



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EXPLAINED

CULTURE KUMBH ORIGIN, HISTORY, APPEAL [PAGE 16](#)

Lifts to computers: 4 of 10 Govt tenders can't comply with Make in India rules

Depts say sometimes it makes more economic sense; mandate doesn't create supply response, says official

TENDERS FLOATED OVER LAST 3 YEARS		
	No. of tenders	Value
Scrutinised by DPIIT	3,590	₹1,74,145 cr
Found non-compliant	1,502	₹63,911 cr
Top violations		No. of tenders
Provisions of the 2017 order not incorporated		982
Asking for specific brands		450
Restrictive turnover requirement		152
Asking for specific foreign certification		50

Source: DPIIT records *As of November 2024

AGGAM WALIA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

ENFORCING the 2017 Make-In-India order in government procurement is easier said than done.

Rules framed under the Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order prohibit tenders that restrict or discriminate against domestic suppliers either by specifying foreign brands or setting eligibility conditions around turnover or production capability that may put domestic firms at a disadvantage.

However, over the last three years, an estimated 40% of over

3,500 high-value tenders, which accounts for Rs 64,000 crore, floated by Government departments were flagged as "non-compliant" with these rules by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), the nodal agency for the 'Make in India' push, according to records reviewed by *The Indian Express*.

From lifts to CCTV cameras, medical supplies to desktop computers, records show, departments were turning to foreign brands arguing that these made better economic — and quality — sense than their **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

After record high in 2023, footfall in mohalla clinics fell 28% last year

Stakeholders say drug shortage the primary reason; data shows clinics are far more popular among Delhi's women

ANKITA UPADHYAY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

AFTER UNPRECEDENTED footfall in 2023 — 1.94 crore visits by the citizens of Delhi — the Capital's mohalla clinics saw a 28% dip in 2024 to 1.39 crore appointments, an application filed under the Right to Information Act and official documents sourced by *The Indian Express* have revealed.

The decline, health department officials, doctors and experts say, is primarily due to a drug shortage that the mohalla clinics faced last year.

Mohalla clinics, the centre-piece of the Aam Aadmi Party government's health infrastructure, were first set up in October

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AN **EXPRESS** RTI APPLICATION

2015. Since then, the clinics, which are meant to be the first point of contact for patients with basic illnesses, have caught the attention of many from across the world, including former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, who wrote a letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal praising the project.

The Capital has 546 mohalla clinics spread across 70 assembly constituencies. A senior official from the state health department

CONSULTATIONS

No. in lakh		
Year	Male	Female
2019	15.14	20.53
2020	12.65	15.22
2021	11.89	14.76
2022	52.37	68.35
2023	85.86	108.65
2024	64.17	75.49

Data sourced under RTI and from Delhi govt officials

said more than 60 per cent of doctors there are women, which provides a sense of comfort that **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Jaishankar to be at Trump inaugural, will meet incoming team members

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the January 20 inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump.

Announcing the visit, the Ministry of External Affairs on Sunday said, "On the invitation of the Trump-Vance inaugural committee, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar will represent the Government of India at the swearing-in ceremony of

EXPLAINED Looking at continuity

INDIA AND the US have invested in a strong bilateral relationship in the last two decades, and support has been largely bipartisan. Delhi's moves are part of securing the continuity of bipartisan consensus with Trump 2.0. Jaishankar has repeatedly said India is not worried about Trump, the way others are.

President-elect Donald J Trump as the 47th President of the United States of America."

During the visit, the MEA said, "The External Affairs Minister will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming administration, as also some other dignitaries visiting the US on that occasion."

Jaishankar visited the US in the last week of December and met Mike Waltz, NSA-designate in the incoming Trump administration.

The new administration has maintained that strengthening **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

VIKSIT BHARAT DIALOGUE

PM: Step out of comfort zone, time for India's quantum jump

Says country on course to become a \$10-trn economy by end of next decade



Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits an exhibition at the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue in New Delhi. PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

URGING THE youth to step outside their "comfort zone" while underlining that this is the time for a "quantum jump" to have a developed nation by 2047, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday that India is rapidly moving towards a \$5-trillion economy and will surpass the \$10-trillion mark by the end of the next decade.

Addressing a gathering at the

Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue in New Delhi on National Youth Day, Prime Minister Modi said the country also hopes to host the Olympics in the next decade and is working towards it with full dedication.

"India is rapidly moving towards becoming a \$5-five trillion economy, which will greatly expand development and facilities," he said. He projected that by the end of the next decade, India will surpass the \$10-trillion mark.

He said India has made rapid **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

In docking trial bid, ISRO brings satellites to 3-metre distance, puts out images



A photograph released by ISRO earlier on Sunday shows the SpaDeX satellites 'holding position at 15 metres'

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

MOVING TO attempt docking in space, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) brought two SpaDeX satellites as close as 3 metres to each other Sunday morning. After completing the manoeuvre, the space agency moved the satellites away from each other.

"A trial attempt to reach up to 15 m and further to 3 m is done. Moving back spacecrafts

to safe distance," ISRO said in a statement. "The satellites will be brought back to the positions and the docking attempted only after analysing the data."

The satellites had been left at a distance of 230 metres from each other Saturday night. Early Sunday morning, ISRO brought the satellites closer — first to a distance of 105 metres between them. They were captured as tiny specks by the on-board video camera. The satellites were then brought to 15 metres of **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

A legal luminary who raised voice against corruption in judiciary

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, JANUARY 12

SENIOR ADVOCATE and one of India's leading lawyers Iqbal M Chagla, who passed away Sunday in Mumbai at the age of 85, was known as much for his legal acumen as for his tenure as President of Bombay Bar Association, where he advocated against corruption in the judiciary in the 1990s, with resolutions passed against six sitting judges, even leading to resignations.

Chagla was one of the most sought-after lawyers for corporate houses, too. Some of the famous

cases he took up included Nestle's fight against the ban on Maggi noodles; the split of Amarchand Mangaldas, one of India's biggest law firms; the dispute between the Birla and Wadia families over real estate in Worli; and, the battle between Coca Cola and Pepsi over their advertisements.

He also advised Cyrus Mistry, who was married to his daughter Rohiqa Chagla, in the high-profile legal battle against the Tata Group — Mistry died in 2022 in a car accident.

Born in 1939, Chagla was the son of M C Chagla, the first permanent Indian Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court from

1948-58, who went on to become India's Ambassador to the US and later UK High Commissioner, and a minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet where he held the education portfolio — and later the external affairs portfolio.

Initially keen on journalism, Iqbal Chagla wanted a career in writing but studied law and was also called to the Bar at Gray's Inn, the professional association for barristers and judges in London. Having completed his Masters in History and Law from Cambridge University, Chagla returned after his mother passed away to practice in the Bombay High Court.



IQBAL M CHAGLA

1939 - 2025

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EXPRESS ENTERTAINMENT

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The laughs keep on coming, and it is a terrific mix of nostalgia and wistful thinking about the times that were that makes us throw our weights behind this film

TECH

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EXPRESS AUDIO

Story of new India through its working class ft Neha Dixit
In today's episode of *The Sandip Roy Show*, we discuss Neha Dixit's latest book *The Many Lives of Syeda X*. Through her narrative, we talk about the story of a young, working-class Muslim woman, spanning from the early 1990s to present

• In docking trial bid, ISRO brings satellites to 3-metre distance, puts out images

each other and the position held steady. Both the satellites were then clearly visible on the on-board cameras.

"We are just 50 feet away for an exciting handshake," ISRO said. After this, the satellites were brought 3 metres from each other and then allowed to drift back to a safe distance.

ISRO had to postpone the docking plans on two earlier occasions – on January 7 and January 9 – because the satellites had not been able to achieve the required alignment.

"After the last manoeuvre, the satellites had drifted away, but they were safe. Now, we are re-attempting the entire process. There are certain fixed hold points, the satellites would be brought to these hold points again, before we attempt docking again," an ISRO official had said earlier.

Under the docking plan, the Chaser satellite is to be progressively brought closer to the Target satellite, holding positions at a distance of 5 km, 1.5 km, 500 m, 225 m, 15 m and 3 m, before joining together. All the hold points were accomplished Sunday.

Once the satellites dock, the space agency will also demonstrate the exchange of electrical power between them and give commands to the composite spacecraft as one.

A successful docking will make India the fourth country

in the world – after the United States, Russia and China – to have achieved this feat in space.

The SpaDeX mission is designed to demonstrate space docking, a process by which two fast-moving satellites or spacecraft are brought into the same orbit, brought closer together, aligned autonomously or manually, and finally joined. This capability is necessary for carrying out missions that require bigger payloads that a single launch cannot carry.

The first actual Indian mission requiring the docking capability is likely to be Chandrayaan-4, which is supposed to bring lunar samples back to Earth. The re-entry module of this mission, which will be designed to withstand the heat of re-entry to the Earth's atmosphere, is planned to be launched separately. The transfer module carrying samples from the Moon will come and dock with the re-entry module in the Earth's atmosphere.

Docking will also be required for setting up the Bharatiya Antariksh Station. The first module is planned to be launched in 2028. It is supposed to have five modules, which are expected to be launched separately and brought together in space. A manned mission to the Moon, which will also require the capability, is not expected to happen before 2040.

• BJP announces NDA boycott of Assembly bypoll in Erode

that the state had been pushed to a "dark period" with no safety for various sections of society. The Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), which is led by former Union Minister Anbumani Ramadoss, is among the NDA constituents in Tamil Nadu.

On Saturday, the AIADMK also announced it was skipping the bypoll, citing the ruling party's alleged misuse of official machinery and money power in previous polls. "The DMK used muscle power to win the Erode bypoll in 2023. They will deploy the same tactics again, preventing peaceful voting," said AIADMK chief and former CM Edappadi K Palaniswami. The AIADMK's ally DMDK followed suit on Sunday morning. The DMK, which has fielded V C Chandrakumar in the bypoll, has dismissed the boycott as its rivals' admission of electoral defeat.

In early 2023, a bypoll was necessitated in Erode East following the sudden death of veteran Congress leader EVKS Elangovan's son Thirumagan Evera. Thirumagan, a rising star in Tamil Nadu Congress and a direct descendant of social re-

former Periyar E V Ramasamy, briefly served as MLA before he died of cardiac arrest. Elangovan, a former Tamil Nadu Congress president, won the bypoll only to succumb to illness on December 14.

Erode East, carved out as an independent constituency in 2008, has about 2.26 lakh registered voters, including 1.16 lakh women, 1.1 lakh men, and 23 transgender individuals. With a blend of urban and semi-urban populations, people there heavily depend on agriculture and textile industries. The seat has been historically favoured the two Dravidian majors, DMK and AIADMK, largely influenced by alliance dynamics. In 2021, Erode East was contested by the Tamil Maanila Congress, a junior partner in the AIADMK-led alliance.

For the leadership of the DMK, the bypoll contest was being seen as an informal barometer for public opinion ahead of the Assembly polls next year. However, with two of its major rivals deciding to not contest, the DMK will be expected to coast to victory even if the election is held.

—WITHPTINPUTS

FROM PAGE ONE FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Time for India's quantum jump: PM

strides in the last 10 years and the youth will not only drive the greatest transformation in the country's history but also be its biggest beneficiaries.

"For any country to move forward, it is imperative to set big goals. Goals are our life blood, our tonic. We have seen over the last 10 years that we have been setting big goals and achieving them, be it resolving to be open defecation-free or providing bank accounts to all Indians," he said.

Modi said the youth must take ownership of the Viksit Bharat goal and assured them that the ideas presented during the dialogue would become part of the country's policies.

"Achieving big goals is not solely the responsibility of government machinery but requires the collective effort of every citizen," he said and highlighted the importance of deliberation, direction and ownership in achieving national objectives.

"In the 1930s, the US went through an economic crisis, but it resolved to come out of it and adopted the New Deal. There was a time when Singapore was in a bad state but with the right leadership and discipline, they became a developed nation and a huge trade hub. We too dreamt of independence. We struggled, sacrificed, and achieved independence from the British empire."

He said India is making rapid strides as a space power, with plans to establish a space station by 2035. He noted the success of Chandrayaan and the ongoing preparations for Gaganyaan, with the ultimate aim of landing an Indian on the Moon. He emphasised that achieving such goals will pave the way for a developed India by 2047.

The Prime Minister expressed confidence that with a large young population, India will have a "golden period" over the next 25 years. "I can imagine a Viksit Bharat, one which is economically, socially, and strategically strong. This is the moment for India to take a quantum jump

and it will only happen by acting upon our ideas."

As India's economy grows rapidly, it can spend more on infrastructure, railways, roadways and overall development, he said.

"India is now nearly a \$4-trillion economy, significantly increasing its capabilities. The current infrastructure budget is over 11 lakh crore rupees, nearly six times higher than a decade ago, and more is being spent on railways alone than the entire infrastructure budget of 2014," he said. This increased budget, he said, is evident in India's changing landscape, with Bharat Mandapam being a beautiful example.

• After record high in 2023, footfall in mohalla clinics fell 28% last year

encourages women patients to visit.

Data accessed by *The Indian Express* testifies to this – since 2019, the number of appointments by men has been 2.42 crore, while for women, this figure is 3.02 crore. In fact, more women have visited mohalla clinics every single year since 2019 [see box].

According to RTI data, 2019 saw 15.14 lakh consultations by men and 20.53 lakh by women, but the numbers dipped in 2020 and 2021, the Covid years. However, 2022 saw a surge – 52.36 lakh consultations by men and 68.34 lakh by women.

This figure rose even further in 2023 – 85.85 lakh consultations by men and 1.08 crore by women. That trend changed in 2024, though, as mohalla clinics saw 64.17 lakh consultations by men and 75.48 lakh by women, a decline of 25.2 per cent and 30.5 per cent respectively compared to the previous year.

Stakeholders say a drug shortage at the clinics is the primary factor. In September 2024, The Indian Express reported from three government hospitals and six mohalla clinics in Southeast, East and West districts and found a shortage of essential drugs – meant to be available for free to patients – across the board.

The key reason was non-payment of vendors and a change in tender conditions, as a result of which two-thirds of the companies didn't participate in the tender process this financial year. To put the crisis in context, at the time of reporting, only Rs 5 crore had been spent to procure medicines from the essential drug list this year – a far cry from Rs 164 crore in the financial year 2023-24 and Rs 247 crore the previous year.

While larger hospitals could navigate the crisis by procuring the drugs from local vendors, albeit at a higher cost, mohalla

clinics and smaller hospitals faced a more dire situation.

The silver lining

Health department officials say they remain optimistic that the dip in 2024 is a blip and the footfall will continue to increase. They also highlighted what they say is the clearest success of mohalla clinics – the overwhelming preference by women.

Doctors and health experts *The Indian Express* spoke to said women have been accessing five key health services – for diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, pregnancy-related issues, and seasonal issues such as flu and cold. "Among elderly women, knee and generalised pain are two common issues," said a doctor, adding that women also visit for issues related to the menstrual cycle, post-MTP care, family planning and counselling.

"We provide hormonal tests and medicines and also run

anaemia programmes where we provide weekly iron and folic acid supplementation," said the doctor.

"The treatment, diagnosis and consultation are free, compared to private healthcare where the costs are high. Mohalla clinics provide social security to women who often do not have the freedom to spend on themselves," said another doctor.

Explaining the post-pandemic surge in numbers, a senior official from the state health department said that in 2022, the Delhi government opened around 100 more mohalla clinics.

"During the pandemic, we started conducting Covid tests as well, which brought more people from the vicinity, more importantly women.

Later, even immunisation programmes started at the clinics, including Covid vaccine," said the official.

• Jaishankar to be at Trump inaugural, will meet incoming team members

Indo-US ties has been a bipartisan commitment and enjoys support on both sides of the aisle.

But Trump's return brings challenges as well – he has spoken out against tariffs by the Indian government, even calling it the "tariff king" and "abuser of tariffs" in the past. So, the Indian side is expecting a tough challenge on the trade front, which has grown beyond USD 190 billion in 2023.

The other challenge that India expects is on the issue of illegal immigration, a political hot-button issue during the elections. In the last year, the Biden administration sent back about 1,100 people on flights who had entered the US illegally.

The Indian government maintains it does not support illegal immigration, and does not want the issue to cast a shadow

on legal immigration. In recent weeks, there has been much debate over the H-1B visa issue as well, raised by far-right Republicans, and the Indian community has had to face the ire of the MACA Republican base.

However, Trump has backed the H-1B programme, and acknowledged frequently using it for his own properties, calling it a "great programme". His ally and backer, Elon Musk, owner of Tesla, X and SpaceX, had waded into the debate on hiring H-1B visa-holders with many in the right wing opposing it.

Musk said he "will go to war" on the issue and asked right-wingers to "take a big step back".

The H-1B programme allows businesses in the US to employ skilled foreign nationals.

The Indian side maintains that Indian professionals contribute to the US economy as

well, and the Indian American community is viewed as an influential, educated and wealthy "model minority" group in the US.

In the light of these issues, the Indian establishment has moved in early to engage with the incoming Trump administration. And Jaishankar's two back-to-back visits are testament to that effort.

Delhi believes that the growing assertiveness of China has been a strategic glue for India and the US, including under Trump 1.0, and expects that to continue in his second term as well.

Trump championed the Quad grouping by reviving it, and is expected to continue with it. The Biden administration has started the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies, and Delhi hopes it will continue with

the Trump administration – since Beijing is the biggest competitor on these critical and emerging technologies as well.

During his visit in December, Jaishankar was said to have met senior members of the Trump team – other than those of the outgoing Biden administration.

The Biden administration sent NSA Jake Sullivan to India last week on a wrap-up visit, and Delhi is counting on a sense of continuity in the next term with Trump in the Oval Office.

There is a possibility of Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting France for the Artificial Intelligence summit early February, for which French President Emmanuel Macron is also trying to bring Trump. If that works out, the two leaders will have their first opportunity for an in-person meeting on the sidelines of the AI summit.

• Lifts to computers: 4 of 10 Govt tenders can't comply with Make in India rules

domestic counterparts.

Many departments have also underlined that some foreign brands specified in their tenders have manufacturing operations in India.

In February 2023, DPIIT found that of the 1,750 high-value tenders – above Rs 1 crore for services, Rs 50 crore for goods, and Rs 100 crore for works – floated since October 2021 by Central government procuring entities, 936 tenders valued at Rs 53,355 crore were non-compliant with the 2017 rules.

The DPIIT's analysis, presented to a Committee of Secretaries (CoS) chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, showed that when these "violations" were flagged to procuring entities and respective ministries, corrective action was taken in 180 tenders and "no re-

sponse" was received in 706 cases, records show.

In 2020, the 2017 order was further tightened by introducing a method of classification: as a norm, departments should only source from local suppliers with local content more than 50% if there is sufficient local capacity and competition; if not, then they can also source from suppliers with local content between 20-50%; suppliers whose local content is below 20% were classified as "non-local suppliers" and allowed only in exceptional cases, like a global tender.

By November last year, soon after the 10th anniversary of the flagship 'Make in India' initiative, the number of high-value tenders that didn't conform to the 2017 order increased to 1,502 out of 3,590 tenders scrutinised (42 per cent),

amounting to Rs 63,911 crore.

A total of 982 tenders (65 per cent) were found non-compliant for not incorporating provisions of the 2017 order; 450 tenders (30 per cent) for specifying foreign brands; and 152 (10 per cent) for having restrictive turnover requirements.

In 2019, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and DPIIT Secretary had instructed top bureaucrats across ministries to "advise their procuring agencies to desist from such practices," records show.

The departments of Military Affairs and Atomic Energy were yet to update their procurement policies to align with the 2017 order, DPIIT told a review committee in November 2024, records show.

As of April 1, 2024, the

Department of Telecommunications, along with the ministries of Electronics and Information Technology, Civil Aviation, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Textiles, and Steel, had not updated their procurement rules to incorporate the 2020 amendments to the 2017 order.

The DPIIT and the listed departments and ministries did not respond to requests for comment.

In 2022, DPIIT compiled common tendering practices across ministries that it called restrictive and discriminatory toward local suppliers.

For example, foreign brands such as Cisco, NEC, Alcatel, and Siemens were being specified in tenders for telecom products; while HP, Dell, and Lenovo were being specified for IT products.

Similarly, tenders for the sup-

ply of lifts were specifying foreign brands like Otis, Kone, Mitsubishi, and Schindler. Even though these companies have manufacturing capacities in India, as noted by some procuring entities in meetings with DPIIT, specifying brand names in tender documents violates the 2017 order for being restrictive and discriminatory through exclusion of other domestic brands.

In 2019, the Container Corporation of India Ltd (Concor) justified limiting a bid for procurement of lifts from just three companies—Schindler, Otis, and Thyssenkrupp—as they needed to replace old lifts on "an urgent basis". Concor noted that these are "established brands and all have their manufacturing units in India". The clarification came after Gujarat-based Omega Elevators filed a grievance against the bid and "requested that they

must also be given fair and equal opportunity to participate in the tender," records show.

"The main thing is, there has to be a supply response from the domestic suppliers. There may be some cases where errors have also been made. In other cases, foreign brands might be specified because they're the only ones which meet the technical requirement. A mandate doesn't create a supply response. It just raises costs and undermines the quality and functionality of things in some situations," a former senior official said on the condition of anonymity.

At the CoS meeting in February 2023, the Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary said that the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) was facing issues in procuring quality made-in-India lifts for its projects.

At the meeting, the Finance

Secretary also noted that violations like requirement of excessive turnover or mentioning a specific brand not only violated the 2017 order but also the government's General Financial Rules (GFRs), which oversee use of public finances.

Then, the CoS directed ministries to "fix responsibility in case of violation" of the order and "take stringent action against officers responsible for such violations".

It also flagged "the inordinate delay in reporting action taken by procuring entities" on grievances received, which increased by over four times from 556 in October 2019 to 2,190 in February 2023.

Again, in April 2024, a review committee noted that only three ministries—Railways, Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Power—had been submitting monthly compliance reports to DPIIT since it made reporting mandatory in

August 2023. Until November, a total of 18 ministries and departments had not provided any action taken reports.

In 2021, AIIMS, Jodhpur had cancelled a tender that listed a suture brand trademarked by Johnson & Johnson in its technical specifications after Aurolab Trust in Madurai filed a grievance.

The Health and Family Welfare department also issued a show-cause notice to AIIMS, Jodhpur for having a restrictive turnover requirement of Rs 1000 crore for the supply of surgical sutures worth Rs 2 crore in a tender issued in February 2022.

The Confederation of Indian MSME in ESDM & IT also managed to get a tender for the supply of desktop computers floated by Balmer Lawrie and Company Ltd cancelled for making foreign certifications mandatory for local suppliers.

Leopard strays into Gurgaon residential society, rescued

SOPHIYA MATHEW
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

A MALE leopard strayed into a residential society in Gurgaon's Sohna area early Sunday morning, triggering panic among residents.

The feline, aged around 5-6 years as per Forest Department officials, entered Anmol Ashiana Society, which is at the foothills of the Aravalli range.

According to police officers, a security guard on duty at the society first spotted the leopard in the basement parking around 2 am and immediately informed them.

Assistant Commissioner of Police, Gurgaon, Abhilaksh Joshi, said, "A police team stationed at Bhondsi reached the spot and informed officials concerned of the Wildlife Department. After a joint operation that lasted for several hours, the leopard was caught and released into the forest."

Station House Officer (SHO) Chander Bhan confirmed that it was a four- to five-hour joint rescue operation.

By the time officials reached the spot, the society's residents had trapped the leopard in the Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), as per Wildlife Department officials.



A forest official said the leopard was healthy and could have wandered from the Aravallis in search of food. Express

"The leopard took cover behind some sacks and material near a tank inside the STP. Our team strategically cut a smaller opening in the iron rod gate, allowing us to coax the leopard into a cage adjacent to it. By spraying water through pipes, we prompted the leopard to move into the cage. We were able to capture the leopard safely without using any tranquilisers," said Divisional Forest Officer Wildlife, Gurgaon, Ram Kumar Jangra.

The forest official confirmed that the feline was healthy and could have wandered from the Aravallis in search of food and is likely to have entered the society by jumping a wall under construction.

The animal was later released in the forest range, around 20-25 km away, in the early morning hours.

Jangra added that the area at the foothills of the Aravalli forest was prone to such instances.

"We keep getting such complaints. Nowadays, it is increasing... it was only around 20 days ago that we rescued a leopard from a Haryana village. The leopard population is also increasing because of conservation efforts, it is common in these areas for them to enter farms and villages," he further said.

NOIDA LINK ROAD

Two dead as SUV crashes into divider, collides with two cars

HIMANSHU HARSH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

TWO PERSONS died and one was injured when an SUV allegedly hit a divider and crashed into two vehicles on the opposite lane in the early hours of Sunday on the Noida Link Road, said police, adding that a hunt has been launched to trace the SUV driver who has been absconding since the accident.

"According to the complainant, Aakash Basisea, he was traveling from Noida to Delhi in his Maruti Baleno when a black Mahindra Bolero, coming from the opposite direction, rammed into a divider, and then hit his car before crashing into a taxi that had three people onboard," said Abhishek Dhania, Deputy



Cab driver Arjun Singh Solanki was killed in the accident.

Commissioner of Police (East Delhi). The incident was reported at around 1:14 am.

"The taxi driver, identified as Arjun Singh Solanki, and a female passenger, Suman Dhoopra, died on the spot while another passenger, Sanjeev Dhoopra (Suman's husband) was severely injured. The couple was rushed to Kailash Hospital in Sector 27 in Noida where Suman was declared dead," the DCP said, adding that Sanjeev

The SUV driver is absconding since the accident and a search has been launched to trace him, said police.

was unable to give a statement to police due to his injuries.

Dhania said that efforts are being made to trace and arrest the driver of the Mahindra Bolero who fled the scene following the crash.

"Police have registered an FIR under sections 281, 106(1) (causing death by negligence) and 324(3) (loss or damage to property) of the BNS at Mayur Vihar Police Station based on Aakash's statement, and the investigation

is currently underway," he added.

The bodies of the deceased have been sent to Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital for postmortem.

Another police officer said that the deceased taxi driver was a native of Khurja in Uttar Pradesh and had been living in a rented accommodation in Dadri, Greater Noida.

He was the sole breadwinner of his family and is survived by his wife, and two children, aged 8 and 6 years.

The officer further said that Suman Dhoopra (63) and Sanjeev Dhoopra (67), a chartered accountant, were going to their home in Gurgaon from Noida when the accident happened.

The complaint, Aakash, works with a Noida-based firm..

DENSE FOG TO PREVAIL FOR THREE DAYS, YELLOW ALERT SOUNDED

Day temperature dips after rainy weekend; GRAP III curbs revoked as AQI improves

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

DENSE FOG is set to prevail in Delhi till Wednesday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said as it sounded a yellow alert for the Capital. Even as the blanket of fog continues to affect rail, road, and air transport, rain over the weekend has resulted in a slight improvement in the air quality in the city — from an average AQI (air quality index) at 397 (categorised as "very poor") on Friday to 278 (poor) on Sunday.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the city on Sunday saw an improvement in air quality compared to the day before when the AQI was at 327. Citing the improving trend in the air quality, the



The maximum temperature settled at 17.3 degrees Celsius on Sunday. Amit Mehra

Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) revoked the anti-pollution curbs under Stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) with immediate effect on Sunday evening from

National Capital Region (NCR). Restrictions under GRAP III entail hybrid model of classes for up to Class V in schools, a ban on plying of BS III petrol and BS IV diesel vehicles, and a ban on all demolition works and mining activities. Meanwhile, a rainy weekend also brought down the daytime temperatures in the city.

The nighttime temperatures, however, remain higher than usual. The Safdarjung observatory, which is representative of Delhi's weather, reported 2.2 mm of rainfall on Saturday. While there was no rain reported after 8:30 am, on Sunday, early morning light showers resulted in a drop in temperature — the maximum temperature settled at 17.3 degrees Celsius, around three notches below the season's normal.

The nighttime temperature

saw a slight increase of one degree Celsius in 24 hours at 9 degrees Celsius. On Monday, the day's high is expected to be 19 degrees Celsius, a notch below normal. The night temperature is likely to settle at 7 degrees Celsius.

During the week, as per the weather office, both maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to fall below normal, with the minimum expected to hover around 6 degrees Celsius and the maximum at 19 degrees.

Sounding a yellow alert, the IMD has said smog or moderate fog is likely at most places, with dense fog conditions at a few places in Delhi in the morning hours on Monday. Very dense fog conditions are expected on Tuesday and Wednesday.

On Wednesday, light rain is likely in evening or night hours.

Man killed in Audi hit and run: Accused held after 60-km chase

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

A DAY after an Audi allegedly jumped off a divider on Ring Road near the World Trade Centre and crashed into another car, killing a man (28), the absconding accused was arrested following a 60-km chase and an analysis of footage from 50 CCTV cameras, police said on Sunday.

Identified as Paras Pathaniya (25), a resident of Paschim Vihar, the accused immediately fled the spot after the Audi that he was allegedly driving crashed

into an Ertiga early on Saturday morning, said officials. He was living in Canada between 2018 and 2024 but he had shifted back to Delhi last year in April, they added.

The CCTV footage and other available evidence were used to draw up a possible sequence of events, as per officials. Surendra Choudhary, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South West, underlined, "After analysing approximately 50 CCTV cameras, the team chalked out a route and arrested the accused following a chase of around 60 kilometres."

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BENGALURU **5** DECEMBER

HYDERABAD **9** DECEMBER

JAIPUR **20** JANUARY

JODHPUR **3** DECEMBER

LUCKNOW **11** FEBRUARY

PUNE **20** JANUARY

CHANDIGARH **ADMISSION OPEN**

GTB NAGAR, DELHI
6 JAN, 8 AM

दिल्ली
21 JANUARY, 11 AM | 6 JANUARY, 11 AM

जयपुर **20** JANUARY

जोधपुर **3** DECEMBER

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3 OF 10 NOW OPERATIONAL

Drone platform, CCTVs: Police get new anti-riot vehicle fleet

ALOK SINGH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

A DRONE landing platform on the roof, provisions for launching stun guns (tear gas shells), and CCTV surveillance to monitor events during emergencies: the Delhi Police has introduced a new fleet of anti-riot vehicles — also known as 'Vajra Vahan' — to handle large protests and riot situations more effectively, said officials.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Provisioning and Logistics) Vinit Kumar confirmed the induction of the modified anti-riot vehicles into the force.

The new vehicles are said to be designed to provide safety and security to personnel deployed in riot control. Unlike the older versions, an officer said, which had troops seated directly against window screens covered with iron mesh, the new vehicles offer more secure and comfortable seating arrangements with troops positioned centrally inside. "The sitting arrangement is such that they can also launch stun guns from inside comfortably if required," the officer said. These highly modified, air-conditioned vehicles are designed not only to protect the



NEW FEATURES

- Drone platform
- Can launch tear gas from inside
- 360-degree MBSL (Multi Barrel Shell Launcher) system
- Fog lights all around
- Top quality stainless steel mesh on windows.
- Two-way mic system
- AC installed and insulated water system for summer and winter
- First-aid facility

troops inside during encounters but also to offer better control over riot situations, the officer added. These vehicles can maneuver into crowds and allow officers to launch tear gas shells through a 360-degree MBSL (Multi Barrel Shell Launcher) system installed on its rooftop. To increase the vis-

ibility during fog or smoke, the vehicles are also equipped with fog lamps, installed on all four sides.

Each 'Vajra Vahan' can carry up to 12 troops, with additional space for a driver and another person in the front cabin. "The vehicles have a drone landing platform on its rooftop and the officers can man-

age the machine while moving the vehicle from inside. There are the display screens inside to keep a tab on outside activities while maneuvering through the crowd," the officer said. The new vehicles also come equipped with an insulated water system, ensuring comfort for officers during both hot and cold weather. It also has stretchers and first aid boxes inside.

A two-way microphone system has also been installed, allowing the driver to communicate with the troops inside the vehicle. The glass windows are said to be covered with a top quality stainless steel mesh, unlike the older ones that used iron mesh that was prone to rusting. Another senior police officer said the fleet of 'Vajra Vahans' has grown from 25 to 35 with the addition of these 10 newly modified vehicles. Three of these vehicles are now operational, which have been allocated to the Outer, Outer-North, and Shahdara districts.

"Seven of them are parked at the Provisioning and Logistics unit of Delhi Police Police at Rajpur Road in North district and they will be handed over to other districts soon," the officer added.

Two sisters fall to death from 4th floor of residential building, family seeks answers

HIMANSHU HARSH
GURGAON, JANUARY 12

TWO SISTERS, working as domestic helps in Gurgaon's Sector 40, were found dead on Friday with the police saying that the two had jumped from the fourth floor of a residential building. While the police are investigating the case as a suicide, having registered it under Section 194 (inquiry and report on suicide) of the BNSS, family members of the two women are still seeking clarity.

Deepak Kumar Kushwaha, the husband of one of the

women, Chandini, left his home in Gurgaon's Sector 40 on Friday at around 9:30 am, heading to his job as a store helper at Grand Bazaar, just 500 meters away in Sector 40 HUDA Market.

"I was out delivering an order in Sector 45 when I received a call between 1 and 1:30 pm from a resident of the building. She told me that my wife was nowhere to be found and asked me to come home quickly," Deepak said. Chandini, 21, worked as a domestic help on the second and fourth floors of the residential building, and the couple lived in the parking area of the building.

Upon returning home, Deepak, 23, couldn't find his wife. He began searching for her, checking both the second and fourth floors.

He called his brother-in-law, Punit Kumar, to see if he had any information. "Punit told me he didn't know. My sister-in-law, Rashmi, worked as a domestic help too. She would visit my wife every day with her 2.5-year-old daughter after finishing her morning shift to spend time together," Deepak explained.

When Punit couldn't give an answer, Deepak returned to the parking area. "That's when I

found them (the two women) unconscious under the shade at the back of the parking lot," he said.

Lalit Kumar, SHO Sector 40 (Gurgaon), said, "We are investigating the case from all angles... The post-mortem of the bodies has been done but the reports are pending. We will have a clearer picture once the reports come in."

Kushwaha said he and Chandini had plans to leave for Jhansi on Sunday. "We had booked a ticket to Jhansi today (January 12) to meet her aunt... why would she steal or die by suicide?" Deepak questioned.

'Fascinated by the layers of history, diversity and things to see in Delhi'



My Delhi
Ambassadors on this city - their home

STEWART WHEELER
FORMER DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER, CANADA

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

'A TRIP to India or Delhi is not a one-time thing... you need to slow down and take in all the richness around you' — this was how Stewart Wheeler, who was former Deputy High Commissioner of Canada, described his home of nearly a year. Wheeler was expelled on October 14 last year over a diplomatic row between India and Canada. Currently, there is no Canadian envoy in India.

Wheeler began his assignment as Deputy High Commissioner for Canada in India (with concurrent accreditation to Nepal and Bhutan) in September 2023, after more than four years of service as Chief of Protocol of Canada. He has been an officer in Canada's Foreign Service for over 29 years, with postings in Washington, London, Bogota, and Kabul.

He received the Minister of Foreign Affairs Award for Foreign Policy Excellence and the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal, and earned the Operational Service Medal — South-West Asia Ribbon for his civilian service in Afghanistan in 2010-2011.

Wheeler spoke to *The Indian Express* last year in August as part of a series of interviews with Ambassadors about Delhi — their home. Edited excerpts:

One place in Delhi that you love visiting?

That's a difficult question... because what I'm fascinated by in Delhi is the layers of history, diversity and things to see... It's a challenge to find... when I can go as peacefully as possible, in this city of millions, and visit some of the amazing historical places...



Stewart Wheeler, former Deputy High Commissioner of Canada. *Abhinav Saha*

it's finding out what day of the week you can go and see the sunset at Humayun's Tomb or Qutub Minar. I'm always envious of my friends who put up pictures of their travelling, going around on the weekends, and seeing some of the ruins of old palaces and forts. So, I have a very long bucket list of places to see in Delhi.

Three things that stood out during your stay?

The three things are hard to nail down... but I kind of summarised one thing that is constantly intriguing about the city — it's a little bit of a paradox.

The part that we live in here is very calm and manicured. So, it's surprising that when you get out into traffic and drive around the city, it's just bursting with life... and you realize there's amazing diversity and dynamism. You see people from all walks of life. It's the energy of the city. But at the same time also seems like a sleepy city. For that reason, it's kind of like a paradox for me. I was also struck by the Canadian connections. I think everyone growing up in Canada has Indian friends because the Indian diaspora in Canada is huge. I've travelled around the world and you don't necessarily see Canadian brands popping out at you. But here, I think it was the first week, I don't know how many Tim Hortons coffee shops I saw. There's one at the airport... You go grocery shopping and the French fries are McCain French fries in the freezer. In the Metro,

the train coaches are made by Bombardier, a Canadian company. It is nice to see Canadian brands that remind you at home...

Encounters that will stay with you even when you aren't in Delhi anymore?

There are lots... day-to-day life ones and the event ones.

We were curious about the idea that there is a wedding season in Delhi. We would hear music from weddings floating over the trees... or we're driving around and, all of a sudden, we see people marshalling the horses because they're doing a mountain horseback arrival of the groom...

Aside from the festivals and the wedding season, I would say some of my memories will be of events where I was really astonished by how Indians are interested and engaged in talking about ideas.

I remember we hosted a film festival and we presented a film, a co-production between Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta and Delhi filmmaker Sirat Taneja, a transgender woman. It's a kind of documentary that Deepa herself takes part in... it's a discussion of the challenges of a transgender woman's life in Delhi. Transgender people, whether they're in Delhi or they're Toronto, have a challenging time in life. But there was a full auditorium that wanted to hear them talk after the film.

... So I have snippets of events... where it really re-

minded me that Indians don't just want to talk politics. Indians want to talk about life. They want to talk about Philosophy. They want to talk about art.

Is there anything that you will miss when you say goodbye to the city?

Well obviously, food. People, more than anything else... And I will miss the idea that on a Sunday morning, I could get up and go somewhere to learn about a fascinating snippet of history... see the bricks and mortar of a tomb or a palace or something of a civilisation that is still there and haunting the city... I think I'll miss the discussions and food-based encounters I have with friends here.

If you had to introduce Delhi to someone back home, what would you say?

I would say everything I've just said. I tend to get very excited about places I've lived in. So, it's a good question because I need to distill it into a one-minute version as I start going on and on and on. And people's eyes glaze over like 'no I only have two or three days in Delhi, I'm not going there for a lifetime'.

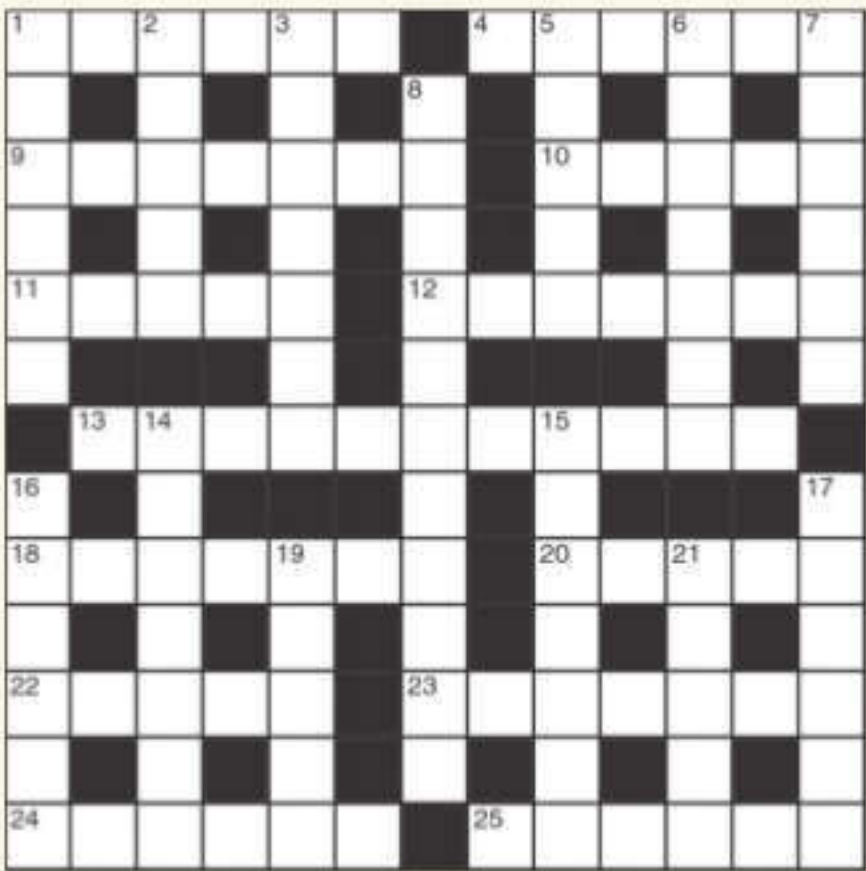
So, I would tell people that there is so much going on — there are food festivals... monuments... People have to realise that a trip to India or Delhi is not a one-time thing. You need to slow down and take in all the richness around you... not be so rushed that they can't take an extra afternoon and go see something in Jaipur because a door opened and they found an amazing artisan working on old furniture or something and he wants to take them to where that furniture came from. You can't do that if you're on a tight schedule bus tour.

My advice is that you will have a hugely rich visit if you come to Delhi for three-four days and go to one or two other places.

If I could get a job later, for Incredible India as a part of the tourism campaign, I think I would gladly do that in my retirement.

FULL INTERVIEW ON
www.indianexpress.com

CROSSWORD 5572



- ACROSS**
- 1 Disgraceful complaint (6)
 - 4 A real sport (6)
 - 9 Short rhyme upheld by Colet (7)
 - 10 Smart girl that is after a share of the proceeds (5)
 - 11 A mouthful of water (5)
 - 12 As enjoyed by a sick celebrity? (3,4)
 - 13 Rose — taken from the garden? (3,3,2,3)
 - 18 Vessel avoided by poor sailors? (7)
 - 20 Worker encountered me coming back first (5)
 - 22 Developed in the wrong way (5)
 - 23 Be keen then disgruntled by employment (7)
 - 24 Not a tough business proposition? (6)
 - 25 Hold out longer? (6)
- DOWN**
- 1 Withdraw a direction to surrender (6)
 - 2 Common stock (5)
 - 3 Mount that is dangerous when active (7)
 - 5 Be best man? (5)
 - 6 Chemical container sent up with speed (7)
 - 7 Pin inserted into a joint (6)
 - 8 Rule to which there can be no exception (6,5)
 - 14 Hackneyed tour now rearranged (7)
 - 15 A burden upon the spirit (4,3)
 - 16 One taps a cask with it (6)
 - 17 Turn up at ten on the dot initially (6)
 - 19 One of an opening pair (5)
 - 21 Doctor with practice on computer accessory (5)

Solutions Crossword 5571 Across: 1 Pointed, 5 Hosea, 8 Thought it over, 9 Heart, 10 Spheric, 11 Aligns, 12 Adrift, 15 Dungeon, 17 Gales, 19 Measured tread, 20 Nudge, 21 Turns in Down: 1 Pitch, 2 Isolation ward, 3 Tighten, 4 Detest, 5 Hitch, 6 Severe illness, 7 Apricot, 11 Abdomen, 13 Dog Star, 14 Intent, 16 Etude, 18 Sedan

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

But to have a ____, and to be ____, under any and all trials, is the mark of a man! — Charles Eastman (6...4)

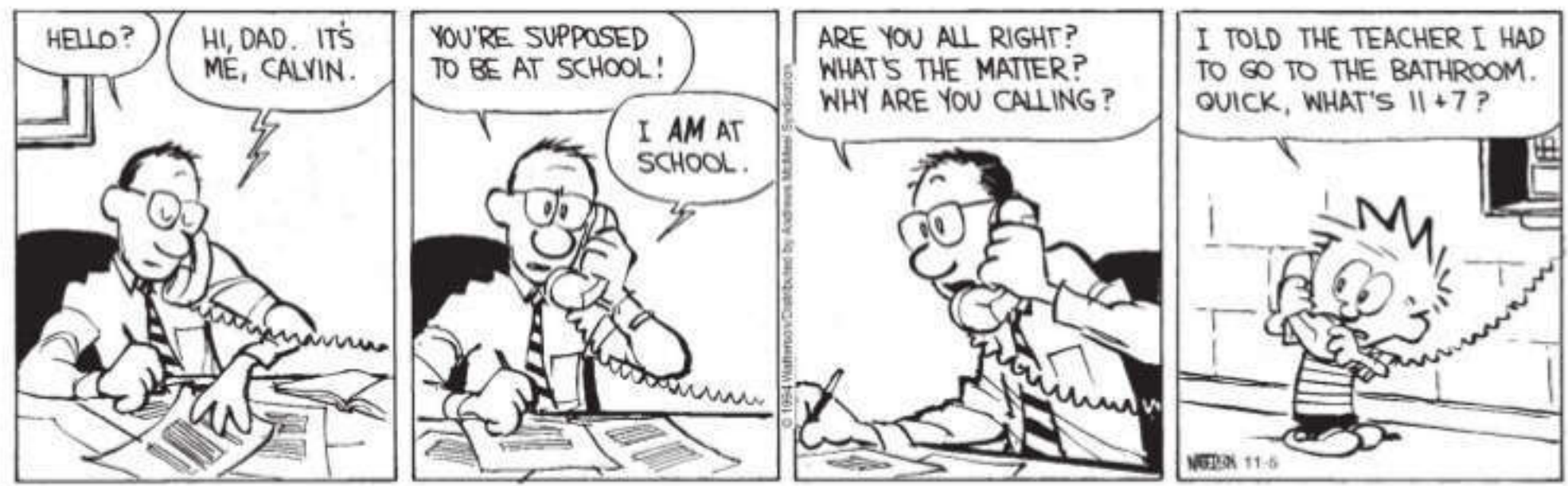
BDEER **ACEMNU**
DFIRT **EOORDF**

Solution: BRED, DIRT, EARTH, NOOD, FIRM. But to have a firm, and to be true under any and all trials, is the mark of a man! — Charles Eastman

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



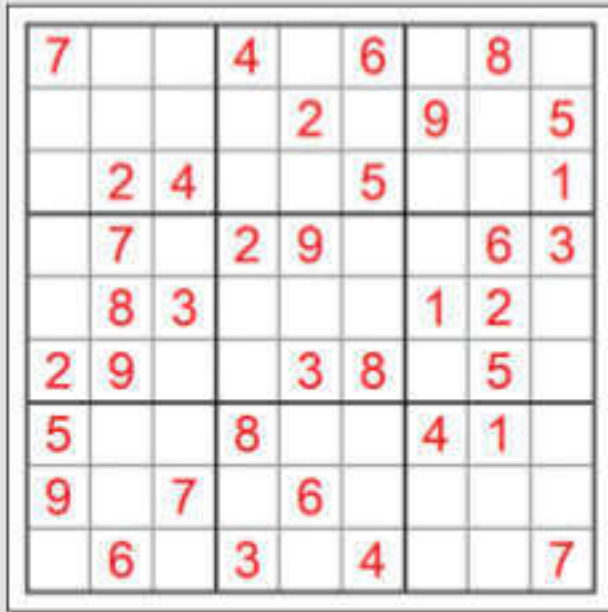
MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



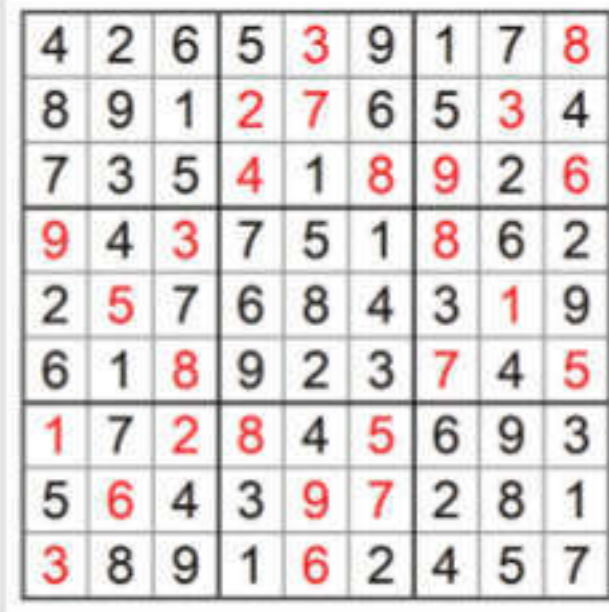
Difficulty Level 5s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SUDOKU 5834



SOLUTION SUDOKU 5833



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Overall, this is not a week for clear thinking. However, neither is it a time to let your imagination run riot. The planetary picture can be rather argumentative, but only if you allow trivial events to provoke you. Stick to your principles and the results could be very constructive.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

You will gain from discussing all your long-term hopes and wishes with as many people as possible. This is hardly the moment to dig your heels in and resist the inevitable. If you do insist in keeping things exactly as they are, then it could hit you in the pocket.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

You're coming to the end of a brief cycle which has brought a surge in your personal ambitions and welcome professional developments. There'll be one last emotional push at the end of the week, and you'll have the confidence to forge your own path whether partners support you or not.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

No matter how misjudged you feel, think twice before you settle any old scores. This is one of those weeks when a chance remark could start a full-scale war. The fact is that someone close to you is under incredible pressure, and they need your help and understanding.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

A great deal has happened in the past which has caused you grief — in that you're not unusual. However, unless you decide to wipe the slate clean now, some adverse planetary aspects this week may stir up a number of continuing dramas.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

What a perplexing time this is. However, planetary movements over the next few days bring welcome changes. Friends and partners who have been out of sorts will regain their composure. But you may also have to patch up a partner's emotional bruises.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

You may now need to spend more time on your own and not expend so much energy keeping up a front. In addition, relations with children now seem to be more important. Younger family members will show you the way to enjoy yourself, so don't stand on ceremony.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

Your personal stars are under a little pressure, which is why you may need to dispose of some unwanted emotional baggage this week. Today's lunar position emphasises meetings and unusual discussions, anything which can ease the path of your work and daily routine.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

Your imagination may lead you a merry old dance, and feelings like resentment, jealousy, anger and the desire for revenge are lurking. However, first you should make a fair and reasonable assessment of the situation. Let the facts speak for themselves.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Seldom have your stars looked more passionate — at least not for a month or so! Such feelings will of course have intense repercussions for your romantic affairs, but will also influence other areas of your life. Adopt a bold and colourful approach.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

You are much stronger than you think, and even apparently disastrous developments will turn out in your favour. You must pay special attention to partners who are swept away by feelings they can't understand — and don't tangle with authority, either.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

You are likely to get wound up about moral questions, but you're also liable to jump to conclusions and misunderstand what is really going on. Say your piece, but be a good listener. If partners know that you're giving them your attention, they'll respond in kind.

5 DECISION 2025

DELHI
ASSEMBLY
ELECTION



KEJRIWAL CHALLENGES SHAH 'Won't contest if BJP gives homes to slum residents'



Arvind Kejriwal and Satyendar Jain at Shakurbasti. Amit Mehra

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

ISSUING A challenge to Union Home Minister Amit Shah Sunday, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal said he won't contest the Delhi polls if the BJP withdraws cases related to slum demolitions and gives an undertaking in court that all displaced people would be rehabilitated on land they have been evicted from within 24 hours.

His statement comes a day after the BJP leader, addressing a 'Jhuggi Basti Pradhan Sammelan', called upon slum dwellers "to liberate Dilli from this *aapda*."

Standing outside the Railway Jhuggi Camp in the Shakur Basti constituency with MLA and ex-minister Satyendar Jain, Kejriwal called himself the "protector of slums and slum residents" and said the BJP remembers slum-dwellers only during elections.

"We saw recently how BJP leaders spend a night in different slums. Why didn't you come here... 10 years ago? All this jhuggi tourism is nothing but drama to get votes. The BJP is a party of rich people. They think those in jhuggis as *keeda makoda* (insects). Do you think they are spending time here because they want votes from you," he said.

Attacking Shah, Kejriwal said, "At an event yesterday, Shah called people from several jhuggis and abused me. The BJP says *jahan jhuggi wahan makan*. We also believe in this scheme. But *jahan jhuggi wahan kiska makan? Jhuggi walon ke liye? Nahi. Jahan jhuggi wahan inke dost ka makan, builders ka makan*. (But whose land? Its their friend's land, the builder's land). Everyone knows who they are."

"Withdraw all cases filed against the people of jhuggis, and submit an affidavit in court that you will give houses to all those people on the same land where they lived earlier... I will not contest the elections. I give you this challenge, accept it.

At 10% of city's electorate, why slum dwellers will be a crucial factor in Assembly elections

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

THE ALMOST 3 lakh households in Delhi's 675 slums and 1,700 JJ clusters make up almost 10% of the electorate and, as a result of their sheer size, form one of the most crucial vote banks in the Capital. As the February 5 Assembly polls draw near, these areas have dominated the discourse, with all three major parties vying to bring residents of these places over to their side.

The AAP is making efforts to keep slum dwellers, seen to be its core voter base, on its side while the BJP is hoping to make a dent and make gains in what is not considered to be its traditional support base. Congress, on the other hand, is looking to regain its support in these areas, which it believes has drifted towards AAP in the last 10 years.

While AAP has targeted the BJP over demolitions in slums in Tughlakabad, Sundar Nagri, Okhla, and other places ahead of the G20 Summit in 2023, the BJP launched the "Jhuggi Vistarak Yojana" just after it won all seven seats of Delhi in last year's Lok



At the Railway Jhuggi Camp in Shakurbasti. Amit Mehra

Sabha polls.

Congress, which is looking to open its account, is conducting a door-to-door survey in slums to focus on all sections of the electorate. Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, will kickstart the party's campaign on Monday with a "Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan" rally in Zero Pushta of Seelampur, which houses slums and an unauthorised colony.

On Sunday, AAP chief Arvind

Kejriwal continued his party's attempts to keep this key voter base intact and said he would not contest the polls if Union Home Minister Amit Shah signed an affidavit promising houses to slum dwellers and withdrew cases against them. He was speaking at Shakur Basti.

A senior AAP leader admitted that "increased anti-incumbency" may lead to a changed scenario, adding that the party was going all-out to tell slum dwellers about

the benefits of voting again for it and its welfare schemes.

According to Delhi government data, the New Delhi Assembly constituency has around 67,000 households in slum areas while the West Delhi constituency has the lowest, with around 22,000 households. Slums in Delhi are inhabited mostly by migrants who hail from UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and comprise people from across communities. They form a significant chunk of beneficiaries of AAP's welfare schemes.

BJP's game plan

The BJP's efforts are visible too as its top leadership, including PM Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, repeatedly referred to slum dwellers in their addresses. Earlier this month, Modi inaugurated houses for slum-dwellers under the BJP's "Jaha jhuggi, Wahan Makan" campaign, while the Union Home Minister addressed a public meeting in an unauthorised colony Saturday. The party has stepped up its efforts in the slums, with party leaders, workers, and 250 *vistaraks* working at the booth level and interacting with locals.

BJP's Jhuggi "Vistarak

Abhiyan" in-charge and Delhi BJP general secretary Vishnu Mittal explained why parties were going all out to reach out to slum dwellers. "There are around 15 lakh voters in slums of Delhi, of which around 9-10 lakh cast their vote. Of this around 7 lakh people vote for the AAP while the BJP gets 2 lakh votes. The remaining vote for the Congress and other parties... Even if we can sway another 4-5 lakh of these votes in our favour, it will be a game-changer."

Mittal said the BJP came up with the scheme after conducting extensive surveys and interacting with people to "gain their trust". "We also realised a large number of slum-dwellers are unaware of the Centre's schemes. But we are making them aware of how the BJP has successfully implemented cash-for-women schemes in other states while the AAP has failed to do it in Punjab," he said, adding that while slum-dwellers had been voting for AAP due to free amenities, only a few were receiving them now.

A BJP leader admitted the party had not managed to connect with slum dwellers so far and this time adopted a "humanitarian" approach.

BALLOTIN

Atishi kicks off crowdfunding campaign

New Delhi: Chief Minister and AAP's Kalkaji candidate Atishi Sunday launched a crowdfunding campaign to contest the Assembly polls. At a press conference, she said, "Raising Rs 40 lakh through improper means would have been easy for a sitting Chief Minister, but our principles do not allow it. Had we compromised, we could never have achieved the transformation of government schools and hospitals, or ensured free healthcare." **ENS**

AAP spreading misinformation, no claim over any post: Bidhuri

New Delhi: BJP's Kalkaji candidate Ramesh Bidhuri Sunday said he was not the party's chief ministerial face and the claim made by AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal was "completely baseless." Kejriwal, citing sources Saturday, claimed BJP had decided to project Bidhuri as its chief ministerial candidate. The same claim had been made by Delhi CM Atishi Friday. Bidhuri said he is a loyal party worker, committed to public service and the country, and has no claim over any post. "I am as much committed towards the people, as I am towards BJP. Talking about the post of chief minister in reference to me is absolutely baseless," he said. **PTI**

AAP MLA's 'links' to illegal immigrants: BJP's Irani targets CM

New Delhi: The BJP Sunday hit out at AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, questioning his "silence" over the alleged links of his party MLA Mohinder Goyal to a syndicate facilitating Aadhaar and voter ID cards to illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Delhi. Addressing a press conference, BJP leader Smriti Irani claimed the probe agency had found signatures and seals of AAP MLAs Mohinder Goyal and Jai Bhagwan on Aadhaar update forms for 26 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in the city. Hitting back, AAP spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar alleged it was Amit Shah's failure that Rohingya settled across Gujarat, UP, Haryana, and the rest of the country. **PTI**

'Ek baar Congress ko mauka dijiye': Alka Lamba at Kalkaji campaign

DEVANSH MITTAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

THE CHILDREN are having a blast, dancing to the beats of a loud drum. A small crowd of women gathers around them — and more are being called — at the open ground in Gandhi Camp, Srinivaspuri, which serves multiple purposes as a parking lot, a space for dumping garbage, and a playground with a trampoline.

Those in charge of gathering the crowd are aware it is too small for the 'guest' who's arriving soon. Nevertheless, they request women standing on the street to join them while shouting into their phones: "*Jaldi aa jao 20-25 auraton ko lekar* (Come quickly with 20-25 women)."

The crowd is waiting for Alka Lamba, the 49-year-old fielded by the Congress to contest from Southeast Delhi's Kalkaji constituency. She is facing off against sitting AAP MLA and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and former BJP South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri.

As news arrives that Lamba, who is supposed to undertake a door-to-door campaign on Sunday, is nearby, there is some confusion amongst her supporters about whether there are enough garlands to welcome her. When she finally does reach the spot, she wastes no time in formalities. She knows she has a tough task ahead of her today: introduce herself to



Alka Lamba at Gandhi Camp, Srinivaspuri. Express

potential voters. "My name is Alka Lamba and my leader is Rahul Gandhi ji, who has sent me here to serve you," she says.

As she walks over a half-built road and pipelines that supply water to houses — both of which were laid in the past week say residents — she asks the people to give the Congress a chance again. "*Ek baar Congress ko mauka dijiye* (Just give one chance to the Congress party again)," she says. "*Ek baar lauto Congress ke saath* (Return to Congress once more)."

The party has been in the political wilderness for over a decade in Delhi, drawing a blank in the last two elections in 2015 and 2020. Kalkaji too was once a Congress stronghold, sending a representative to the Delhi Assembly from 1998 to 2013. The party got just 12.72% votes from

the seat in 2015 and 4.64% in 2020.

At the ground, Lamba climbs atop a chair and starts speaking. The small crowd gathered around comprises women and children; the few men listening are curious passersby. Lamba's focus remains on the women. Rallying against the AAP — her primary point of attack — she says: "If they wanted to give Rs 2,100 to you every month (under Mahila Samman Yojana), why didn't they do it until now?"

Her BJP rival finds mention only in the context of his controversial remarks comparing roads to Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks.

Lamba then reminds the gathering that young people will be given Rs 8,500 every month — the Congress's latest poll promise called Yuva Udaan Yojana — till they get a job and that women will get Rs 2,500 (under its Pyari Didi Yojana) to fight rising prices if the Congress forms a government in the Capital.

"Today, there is no treatment for poisonous air and disease. People are just going to government hospitals and coming back without treatment. The Congress has promised that as soon as we form a government, we will give Rs 25 lakh health insurance for everyone," she says.

"*Satark, panje ka nishaan, 5 saal ke liye, 5 muddo par*. Congress *aap se vote maang rahi hai* (Congress is seeking votes on five issues; on February 5, press the hand symbol for five years)," she says.

Dropped from Karawal Nagar, BJP MLA Mohan Bisht back in the running

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

AFTER A day of protests and demonstrations outside its party office at Pandit Pant Marg, the BJP Sunday announced that sitting Karawal Nagar MLA Mohan Singh Bisht will contest the upcoming Assembly polls from Mustafabad.

Bisht was replaced by former AAP MLA and minister Kapil Mishra in Karawal Nagar, a constituency he has won five times — in 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2020. He was defeated by Mishra, who was then in the AAP, in 2015.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Bisht said, "The party's leadership kindly acknowledged that I am the most senior MLA that it has in Delhi... I was the MLA of Mustafabad from 1998 to 2008 when the Karawal Nagar constituency was formed. The people have come out on the streets in support of me (after the announcement of his name)... I'm sure this seat will be the first amongst those the BJP will win."

After the BJP's second list on Saturday, which saw some major changes, those who have been denied a ticket protested. Bisht was then convinced by its national state leadership that his being accommodated on subsequent lists was "a matter of time", according to a senior leader.

Sources said Bisht was replaced in Karawal Nagar based on party surveys, which exhibited Mishra's "hold on the substantial Purvanchali population", making him a better choice.

"On the other hand, more than 60% of the Mustafabad seat, including its significant Pahadi population, was part of the Karawal Nagar Assembly before delimitation in 2008; Mohan ji is still immensely popular in those areas," a senior Delhi BJP leader said.

"He was reassured that he is one of the tallest leaders that the party has in the city and it will throw its weight behind him in Mustafabad as much as it will do so for Mishra in Karawal Nagar, after which he (Bisht) is said to have agreed to follow whatever responsibility the party would hand him," another leader said.

A group of protesters from Tughlakabad in South Delhi also held a dharna at the gate of the Delhi BJP office. While the party fielded Rohtas Bidhuri from the seat, former South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri's relative Vikram Bidhuri was denied a ticket. He had lost to AAP's Sahi Ram Pehelwan in the 2020 polls.

A similar protest was also held by some party workers outside the Delhi BJP office against Mehrauli candidate Gajinder Yadav.

(INPUTS FROM PTI)

GROUND REPORT

At city's mohalla clinics, staff complain but patients maintain faith in AAP

ANKITA UPADHYAY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

A FEW kilometres away from the commercial hub of Rani Bagh, hundreds of shacks made out of haphazardly arranged bamboo sticks and covered with plastic sheets form a jhuggi jhopdi cluster. This is home to around 8,000 *safai karamcharis*, truck drivers, porters and their families. A wide road pierces through the JJ colony. This stretch, paved in the past, is now pockmarked with potholes and each time a truck zooms pass, a cloud of dust emerges, momentarily turning the shacks invisible.

The mohalla clinic that is situated at the entrance of this JJ colony stands out. Two rooms built inside a porta cabin is the only access to health care for these low-wage workers and their families. Five patients — three middle-aged men, a woman donning a woollen cap and holding the hand of a little boy — are standing in a queue before the pharmacist's desk. They need medicine that is distributed free in these Delhi government clinics. The pharmacist, however, is on leave and the lone doctor who manages this clinic is doubling as a pharmacist too.

"I've already seen these patients. One of them complains of stomach ache... another dizziness... cold also," the doctor says.

A round-faced bulky spectacled man with an already receded hairline, the doctor isn't happy at all. "I've prescribed medicine to them but most of it isn't available. Out of the 160 essential medicines, we have only 60," he says.

"For example, we've been short of Telma 40 and Metformin. Patients take whatever we give them and go home."

'Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics' has been the flagship scheme of the AAP with more than 500 such clinics running across the Capital.

The first clinic was set up by the AAP government in Peeragarhi, Shakurbasti constituency, on July 19, 2015. Satyendar Jain, the area MLA, was the AAP government's first Health Minister before he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in May 2022.

The constituency had sent Jain to the Delhi Assembly in the last three elections. In the 2020 polls, he won the seat with 51,165 votes and defeated BJP's S C Vats who got 43,573 votes. The constituency has 1.47 lakh people registered in the electors list including 75,620 male voters, 71,792 female voters and 5 third gender voters.

Back at the JJ colony clinic, the doctor says, "*Shururat badhiya hui thi par ab cheezin gadbad ho gayi hai* (The beginning (of these clinics) was excellent but now things are not in place anymore)."

"I know what happened. The never-ending fight between the L-G and CM ruined this scheme... It is only because of these fights that mohalla clinics are in such bad shape... there is no medicine and whatever medicine is given to us also is never sent on time."

He says that the situation became "especially difficult after (the then CM) Arvind Kejriwal and Jain were sent to jail".

The doctor also talks about another "burden" for the staff at these clinics. "There is a lot of unnecessary paperwork for them. The AAP government is very jittery after the allegations of corruption made by the L-G last year."

"They (staff) have to update all the data in the tablet first, then manually in the register and also provide patients with prescription papers. It makes no sense," he complains. "It's sad that mohalla clinics were the favourite project of the AAP government but they failed to take care of the people working in these clinics".

The doctor and the two other staff members are critical of the AAP for a different reason though. "Their only purpose seems to lure voters through such schemes like free bus rides for women, Mahila Samman Yojana and distribution of free medicine. "They (AAP) know this will ensure they remain in power," the multi-task worker says. The doctor and nurse agree.



Who should form the next government in Delhi? Surprisingly, all three officials of the clinic wish Kejriwal to be Chief Minister while they insist (Narendra) Modi remain Prime Minister. "That will be good for Delhi. The BJP does not have a face to represent. We don't know who will be the CM," says the nursing staff.

A patient, who later identified himself as Lal Yadav, a cleaner at a transport company nearby, joins the conversation. "How can AAP

work? BJP put Kejriwal and Jain behind bars.... one was Chief Minister, another Health Minister... who will manage things," he says in a complaining tone.

Yadav, 50, lives across the road from the Clinic. He has suffered from diabetes for the last 10 years and is a regular at the clinic.

Outside, AAP seems to have maintained its hold on the electorate in the JJ colony. The alleged corruption charges against Kejriwal and Jain like the excise



Patients waiting outside mohalla clinics in the city; (left) the clinic in Shakur Basti. There are more than 500 such clinics running across the Capital. Express

policy case or the 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy don't seem to have made a dent on its support base.

"*Corruption to sab karte hain par Kejriwal free me dawai deta hai* (Everybody is involved in corruption but Kejriwal gives us free medicine also)," Yadav explains.

He says he wishes the next AAP government will build them homes. "I've been living in this jhuggi for more than 20 years now. Both BJP and AAP governments gave the slogan '*Jahan*

Jhuggi Wahan Makaan (A house will replace a jhuggi)" but instead they have only demolished jhuggis and not built houses here".

Ravindra Jadhav, 40, another JJ Colony resident says many among his neighbours have registered their wives for a new scheme — Mahila Samman Yojana. "If AAP comes back to power, this scheme will help people like me a lot. Every woman will get Rs 2,100 monthly," he says. He also insists he simultaneously supports Kejriwal and Modi. "*Modi ji apni jagah theek hain or Kejriwal ji apni jagah*," he says.

This simultaneous admiration for Kejriwal and Modi, which transcends party politics and electoral rivalry, is a common thread running across most of the jhuggis in Shakur Basti.

Four kilometres away, the mohalla clinic in the bustling Rani Bagh market caters to the residential blocks of Rani Bagh.

Manjeet Kaur, a 60-year-old housewife, is standing in a queue. "There is no doubt Kejriwal has done a lot. I can get any bus ride for free. We don't have to pay electricity bills. We get free medicine also," she says. "But they (AAP) must work on cleanliness now."

Kaur had come to fetch Telma 20 for her high blood pressure but didn't find it. "At least I got medicine for my granddaughter. She has had a cold," Kaur says.

Manju Sharma, 62, has come for medicine for a cold. She says she's always supported Kejriwal in the Assembly polls. "*CM toh ye hi theek hai. Ye janta ko jaante hain. Wo pradhan mantri hi theek hai kyuki BJP kuch muft nahi de rahi hai*. ((Kejriwal) is good as CM. He knows the people here. (Modi) is good as PM because BJP doesn't give anything free)," he says.

The mohalla clinic in Peeragarhi — a mere 7 km away — however is locked as the only two staff members, a nurse and pharmacist, leave for home for the day. It is around 1 pm. Outside the clinic, three women and a man are sitting on chairs.

The population of this jhuggi mostly comprises migrants from Punjab, who came here after the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Residents have several complaints especially regarding the defunct drainage system. "The drainage is under MCD and they are not doing anything," says Mukesh, 35. He runs a fast food stall in the area. "This entire area is always flooded with sewage water. It is now entering inside homes too".

Despite complaints against the government, they say AAP has fared well. "*Ek cheez ki wajah se hum issue nahi banayenge. Kaam toh achha kar hi rahye hain vo*," (We will not make an issue out of one thing. They are doing good work," Mukesh says.

6 GOVT & POLITICS

STATE GRAPPLES WITH CRISIS AFTER SLUGFEST BETWEEN TOP 2

Anthem row intensifies in TN as Ravi slams CM 'arrogance'

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, JANUARY 12

A ROW between Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi and Chief Minister M K Stalin escalated on Sunday after Ravi accused the latter of "arrogance" and said that respect for the national anthem and constitutional duties was non-negotiable.

This comes almost a week after Ravi abruptly walked out of the Assembly, citing a breach of protocol after the national anthem was not played at the beginning of a session.

Addressing the Assembly Saturday, Stalin criticised the Governor for walking out of the session on January 6, likening his action to the "childish" behaviour that his father M Karunanidhi described in a popular dialogue he had written for a movie. Karunanidhi also made a name for himself in the Tamil film industry as a screenwriter.

"Like the famous movie dialogue of *Kalaigarn* (Karunanidhi), 'the court hall has witnessed a lot



CM M K Stalin has accused Governor R N Ravi of disrespecting 'long-held conventions'.

of strange cases', this Assembly has also witnessed strange scenes as far as the Governor is concerned. The Governor walks into the House but leaves without delivering the address," Stalin said.

He went on to say, "This House is a century-old institution created with the participation of crores of people. It has never witnessed a Governor act against the sentiments of the people and disrespect long-held conventions with political motives."

Stalin accused the Governor of not being able to "digest" Tamil Nadu's development under the DMK. "The DMK will win for the

seventh time in the elections to be held in 2026. This term will be the foundation for a record seventh term," he said. He also alleged Ravi had avoided delivering his address to the Assembly in the past three years by citing "absurd reasons".

In a strongly worded response, Ravi accused Stalin of "arrogance" and "betraying the true intentions" of his party. "Thiru M K Stalin asserts that insisting on due respect to the National Anthem is 'absurd' and 'childish'. Thanks for betraying the true intentions of the coalition of interests and ideologies to which he is a leader that does not accept and respect Bharat as a nation and Her Constitution. Such arrogance is not good. Please do not forget that Bharat is the supreme Mother and the Constitution the supreme faith for her children. They will not like or tolerate such brazen insult," the Raj Bhavan posted on X on Sunday. The DMK has not yet responded to the Governor's latest remarks.

On January 6, as the Assembly convened for its first session of the year, the proceed-

ings began with the recital of the Tamil Thai Vaazhthu, the state's official song, as per tradition. The absence of the national anthem triggered objections from Ravi, who reportedly appealed to the CM and Speaker M Appavu to ensure its inclusion. With his request turned down, Ravi left the Assembly less than five minutes after the session began.

The Governor's critique follows a larger pattern of friction between the Raj Bhavan and the state government, often reigniting debates about constitutional propriety and political one-upmanship. In January 2023, Ravi suggested that the word "Tamilzhagam" was the "appropriate" name for Tamil Nadu, adding that "Nadu" gives the impression of talking about a separate "country". Facing criticism from the DMK and even the AIADMK, he backtracked, but only after a clash with the government and an episode that saw him walk out of the Assembly. The two sides again locked horns in April 2023 over Bills passed by the Assembly but held up by the Raj Bhavan.

Swapping trains at Katra defeats purpose of rail link, says Omar

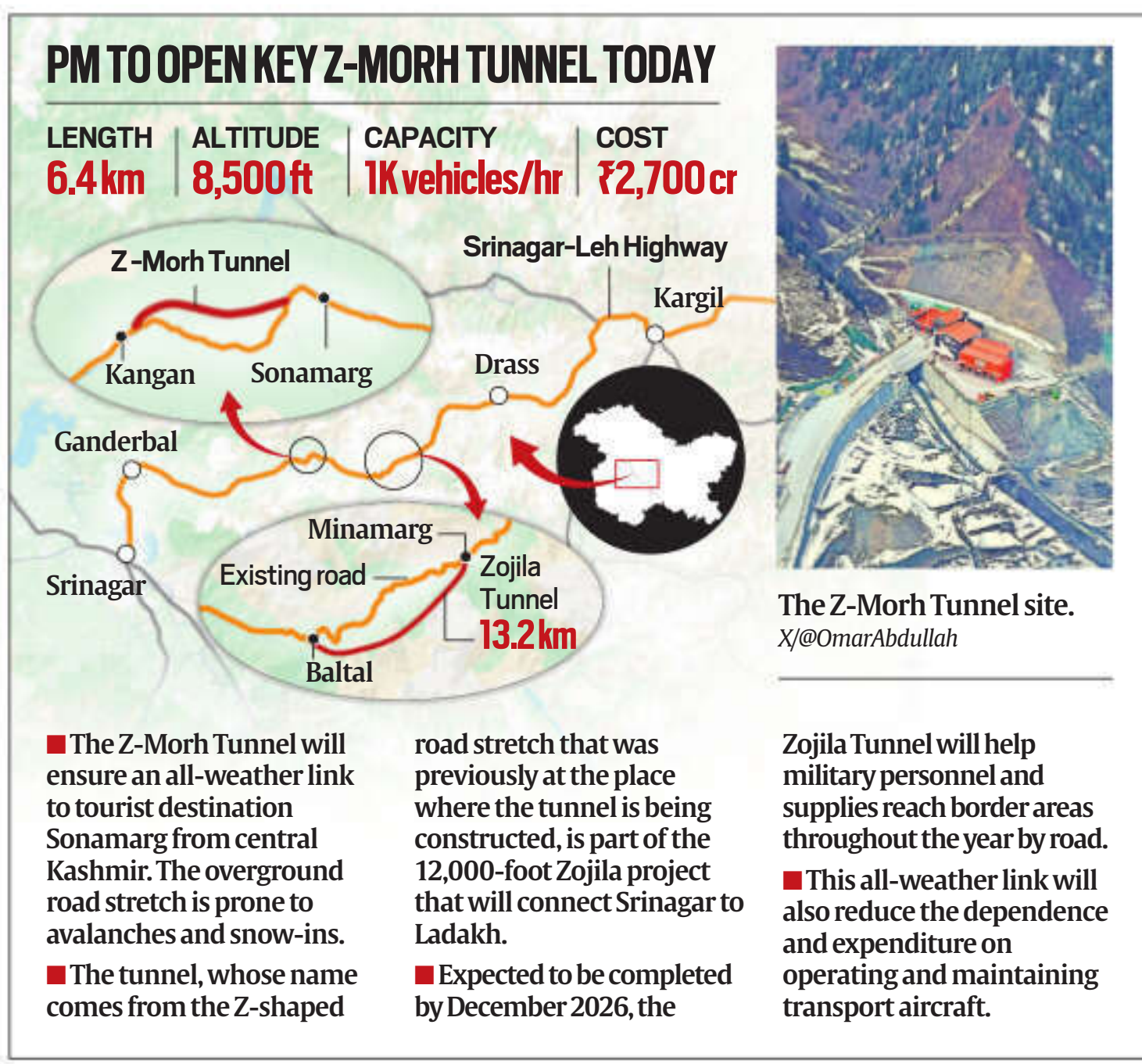
Srinagar: J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Sunday said while the issue of security on trains to the Valley was understandable, making passengers change trains at Katra will defeat the purpose of the Kashmir-Jammu rail link.

The remarks came after reports claiming that passengers would have to change trains at Katra on both sides of the journey.

"...while we understand the need to secure the train... making passengers change trains will defeat the very purpose of the line and render the thousands of crores of investment pointless," Omar said on X. "Check the train/passengers in Katra or Jammu, sure, but NO change of train will be supported by us. That said, there is no concrete proposal, and when there is we will give our inputs/suggestions." **PTI**



The Z-Morh Tunnel site. X/@OmarAbdullah



Mamata doesn't get proper information at proper time: Suspended TMC leader

FORMER TMC Rajya Sabha MP **SANTANU SEN** was suspended from the party Friday over his criticism of the government's handling of the R G Kar Hospital rape and murder case. Sen speaks to **RAVIK BHATTACHARYA**, about his suspension, what is happening in the TMC and the road ahead for him. Excerpts:

You have been a councillor and a Rajya Sabha MP. What suddenly went wrong?

I have been in politics since my student days and with the TMC since its inception (1998). To my knowledge, I never said or did anything that can be considered anti-party. In several odd situations, I have strongly defended the party. Suddenly, I have been accused of being involved in anti-party activities. I do not yet know what anti-party activity I have been involved in.

Following the R G Kar incident, you alleged that a nexus operated within the hospital and also slammed



the administration. Did this lead to your suspension?

My wife and I are alumni of the college and my daughter is pursuing her education there. A year-and-a-half ago, when I was made the chairman of the Rogi

Kalyan Samity (RKS) at R G Kar Hospital, I found out about large-scale corruption by (former principal) Sandip Ghosh (who was arrested by the CBI).

I secretly submitted documents to the authorities concerned. I was proved right when Ghosh was later arrested. My daughter faced tremendous mental and emotional torture. She was socially boycotted and harassed by Ghosh and his supporters. Ghosh even tried to fail her through personal intervention.

Despite all this, to help the TMC save face, I kept mum. I did not discuss this with anyone except a few leaders of my party. When the R G Kar incident happened, I tried to stop the movement so that Chief Minister (Mamata Banerjee) madam could address the issue. While some protesters hurled "go back" slogans at me as I was a TMC leader, a few others were trying to provoke my leadership that I was instigating the movement. Following this, I tried to withdraw myself from every-

thing. Even today, I believe some of my "friends and well-wishers" are misinforming and misguiding the leadership about me.

But why?

I do not know. Maybe it is because I never wanted to be a part of the nexus run by Ghosh and his superiors. They tried to oust me as they could never get me into their coterie. I strongly believe that a revolution has taken place in the health sector of West Bengal under the leadership of madam Mamata Banerjee. But even today, proper information is not given to her at the proper time, as was in the case of Ghosh.

Are you indicating some discord within the TMC?

The CM is leaving no stone unturned for the betterment of every section of society. For those giving suggestions and guidance, I think they should be truthful to themselves and pass on factual information to our leader. **FULL INTERVIEW ON www.indianexpress.com**

DEFENDS BACKING AAP FOR DELHI POLLS

Akhilesh says INDIA grouping intact, days after Omar criticism



Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav at the party office in Lucknow on Sunday. **PTI**

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

DAYS AFTER J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah criticised the functioning of the INDIA grouping, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav Sunday maintained that it was intact.

Referring to his party's support for the AAP in the Delhi elections, he said they were simply following the alliance's strategy of backing a strong regional party against the BJP. The TMC, too, has extended support to the AAP. The Congress is contesting the Delhi elections on its own.

Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters in Lucknow on Sunday, Yadav said, "INDIA alliance is intact."

Responding to a question on the remarks of various INDIA bloc leaders regarding the role of Congress, Yadav said, "Samajwadi Party is still following the same path to strengthen INDIA alliance. Only that regional party should take on the BJP which is fighting with it already." Without naming AAP, he said that "other parties should appear to be standing with that regional party".

The remarks came after Omar expressed dismay over the lack of clarity regarding the INDIA bloc leadership and its agenda. He said the alliance "should be wound up if it was only for parliamentary polls".

What kicked up a storm after Congress and AAP decided to battle out the Delhi polls on their own was RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav reportedly saying in Buxar

district that there was nothing unusual about the Congress and AAP fighting separately in Delhi, where they had come together "only for the Lok Sabha polls".

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, SP's Delhi-based spokesperson Akhilesh Katiyar said that the SP has extended support to AAP in Delhi going by the same idea described by Akhilesh Yadav. "The way the AAP government has performed in Delhi over the past 10 years, this party has proved effective in stopping BJP. AAP has an organisational structure to connect with the public. SP believes that AAP can stop BJP."

The Shiv Sena (UBT) too has said the AAP, and not the Congress, is in a better position to take on the BJP.

In December last year, amid widening fissures within the INDIA bloc, TMC chief Mamata Banerjee had thanked the Opposition leaders who supported her after she expressed her willingness during an interview to a regional television channel to lead the alliance.

"If they cannot run the show, what can I do? If given the opportunity, I would ensure its smooth functioning. I can run it from here (Bengal)," she had said, sending ripples through the Opposition cluster.

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar appeared to endorse her leadership, saying, "She is a capable leader and has the right to say it. The MPs she has sent to Parliament are hardworking and good." The Bengal Congress however cried foul, calling the row a "BJP conspiracy".

Govt OKs exploratory drilling for oil and gas in Assam sanctuary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

THE CENTRE'S wildlife panel has approved a proposal to carry out oil and gas exploration in the eco-sensitive zone of the Hoolongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam's Jorhat district.

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife chaired by Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav, approved the proposal by Vedanta Group's Cairn Oil & Gas during its December 21 meeting, as per the minutes of the meeting. Assam's principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) and chief wildlife warden had recommended clearance for the project in August last year, citing "national interest".

The Forest Advisory Committee of the Union

Environment Ministry had also granted in-principle approval during its meeting on August 27 last year. A team of officials from the Union Environment Ministry, the Wildlife Institute of India, and the Assam Forest Department inspected the project site on Nov 15. The panel found that exploratory drilling would cause minimal damage, but said commercial drilling would not be allowed. Vedanta Group has given a written assurance that no commercial drilling will be conducted there.

A senior official in the ministry pointed out that exploratory drilling is a key step in hydrocarbon extraction, which could lead to commercial drilling. Another official said the inspection committee's report recommended no oil or gas extraction from within the eco-sensitive zone, even if reserves are discovered.

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JANUARY 12

IT WAS a case that had the CPI(M) cornered. On Friday, in a major relief for the ruling party in Kerala, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arraigned as accused the parents of two minor girls in Palakkad who allegedly killed themselves after being raped.

The CBI charged the girls' parents with abetting sexual

abuse and suicide, invoking Section 109 of IPC (abetment of a crime) and various provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The girls, aged 9 and 13, were found hanging in their house a few weeks apart in early 2017. The police found that the girls died by suicide after allegedly being subjected to sexual abuse over several months by five persons, including a juvenile.

Right from the outset, the case took a political turn, with the victims' family alleging that

the accused had the backing of the ruling party. The allegation gained traction with the circulation of photos of the accused with workers of the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the CPI(M)'s youth wing, in Palakkad.

In 2019, a POCSO court acquitted the four accused who were tried as adults, saying no scientific evidence connected them to the alleged crime. The forensic surgeon who conducted the post-mortem of the elder sister said the victim's injuries



The mother of the minor victims fought CM Vijayan in 2021 polls

could be due to a piles infection. This went in favour of the accused.

Soon afterwards, the Congress and the BJP unleashed a political storm against the CPI(M) government. They pointed out lapses in the probe.

Congress MP Kodikkunnil Suresh raised the issue in Lok Sabha, alleging that the CPI(M) government was standing with the accused.

Under pressure, the government ordered reinvestigation but the Kerala High Court, acting upon a petition from the victims' mother, handed over the probe to the CBI.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, the victims' mother contested against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the CPI(M) stronghold of Dharmadam. With

a frock as her symbol, the mother led a symbolic fight for justice for her daughters.

Reacting to the latest twist in the case, CPI(M) minister M B Rajesh, who hails from Palakkad, said: "Truth will come out one day. It has become clear that the allegations against the government as well as the police were baseless. The controversies related to the incident were politically motivated."

State Congress vice-president V T Balram, who is also from Palakkad, said: "We stood

for ensuring justice for the victims. When the CBI named the witnesses (the parents) as the accused, we feared that the other accused might benefit from it. There is no change in our stand that the accused were linked with the CPI(M). The accused benefited from their political leanings."

After CBI listed her as accused, the girls' mother on Thursday changed her stand on the state police, which had made them witnesses in the case. "Now I feel Kerala Police effec-

tively probed the case. The CBI made us accused when they could not nab the real culprits. We had shared all details with the CBI, which, however, did not probe. Our agitation will continue until the real culprits in the case are booked."

The father of the victims had deposed that he had seen one of the accused sexually abusing his eldest daughter. Besides, he came to know from two others that they had seen one of the accused, Madhu, exposing himself before his daughter.

Station House Officer Bhiwadi

Both bravehearts later succumbed to their injuries, attaining martyrdom. Their courage and sacrifice will forever inspire generations.

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40 CRORE PILGRIMS, 45 DAYS, PRAYAGRAJ READY FOR ONE OF WORLD'S BIGGEST CONGREGATIONS

War room, more ticket counters, CCTVs: Vaishnaw launches slew of Railway initiatives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

RAILWAY MINISTER Ashwini Vaishnaw Sunday launched several initiatives to enhance Railways' readiness for Maha Kumbh starting Monday in Prayagraj.

According to a press statement by the Railway Board, the initiatives include the launch of a 24x7 Kumbh War Room, CCTV cameras on all nearby stations, multilingual communication system, and additional ticket counters, among others.

"A dedicated war room at the Railway Board level has been inaugurated. It will operate 24x7, with officials from operations, commercial, RPF, mechanical, engineering, and electrical departments monitoring and coordinating the activities," Dilip Kumar, executive director for information and publicity, Railway Board, said. "A total of 1,176 CCTV cameras have been installed at nine stations in the Prayagraj region to provide live feeds for real-time monitoring," he added.

According to officials, the war room will facilitate effective coordination between the district authorities and railway officials, ensuring immediate assistance and operational efficiency.

Kumar said a 12-language announcement system has also been inaugurated at Prayagraj, Naini, Cheoki, and Subedarganj stations to assist the pilgrims.

"A facilitation booklet in 22 languages has been made for disseminating essential information to the pilgrims," Kumar added.

The Railway Board made an investment of ₹5,000 crore over three years to develop Kumbh-related projects, setting up facilities such as 48 platforms, 21 foot-over bridges, 23 permanent holding areas with a combined capacity of over 1 lakh pilgrims, 554 ticketing counters, including 151 mobile UTS counters, among others.

Adopt villages to help solve issue of migration, Dhami tells diaspora

Dehradun: Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami Sunday urged expatriates hailing from the state to adopt villages to help address the long-running migration crisis.

Inaugurating the International Uttarakhandi Diaspora Conference, the CM said there is immense potential for investment in Uttarakhand.

"Sectors such as adventure tourism, power generation, aromatic products, manufacturing, agriculture, horticulture, herbal products, AYUSH and wellness are key areas for investment. Significant policy and structural reforms have been undertaken to establish Uttarakhand as a prime investment destination," he said.

He urged the diaspora to contribute to solving the critical issue of migration by adopting and developing villages and towns in the state. He laid stress on the importance of their skills, experience and technical expertise in realising the state's aspirations.

He announced the formation of a diaspora cell for better coordination and support for expatriates.

DHEERAJ MISHRA
PRAYAGRAJ, JANUARY 12

ALL ROADS in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj lead to the Ganga, especially these days and even as the Maha Kumbh, a mela hosted here every 12 years, opens its portals on January 13.

Hundreds of boats with devotees make continuous circuits of the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. A panoramic photograph of the shore, the brightly painted boats and the sea of devotees could easily make the river pass off as a busy maritime artery.

While the Maha Kumbh is the path to moksh (salvation) for believers, for 26-year-old boatman Anil Nishad — whose life has been "intertwined" with Ganga since birth, a fact he takes immense pride in — the mela is his livelihood.

A member of the Nishad community, whose traditional occupations are centred around rivers, he casts off his freshly painted pastel green boat, with its repaired deck, tarpaulin-covered frame and life jackets, despite sailing for two straight days.

"*Aap Ganga ko humare bina paar nahi kar sakte hain. Ram ko bhi humari madad leni padi thi* (You cannot cross the Ganga without boatmen like us. Even Lord Rama needed our help to cross the river)," says Anil, referring to the story of the boatman who helped Lord Rama cross the Ganga during his exile.

Wrapping a saffron scarf around his neck to protect himself from chilly morning breeze as his boat drifts along the Allahabad Fort, built by Emperor Akbar in 1583, he adds, "Locals don't use boats very often since they see and touch the river daily. I barely make about ₹400 per day now. Once the mela starts and outsiders start arriving, I hope to earn enough to get by for the whole year. Otherwise, I will have to migrate to Delhi or Mumbai for work."

Despite the city revamped, renamed Prayagraj from Allahabad



Around 50 lakh devotees took a dip at the Sangam in Prayagraj on Sunday. Vishal Srivastav

and the grandeur of the Maha Kumbh — which has its genesis in the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas — locals say their faith remain firmly intertwined in the twists, turns and ripples of the Ganga. They cite the instance of Allahabad-born Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister and a modernist, who wanted a portion of his ashes scattered at the Triveni Sangam.

As Prayagraj prepares for the arrival of nearly 40 crore pilgrims during the 45-day mela, the city is undergoing a complete overhaul. While roads are being resurfaced and street lights installed all over, almost every wall at a prime location here either sports murals on themes of religion and women empowerment, or hoardings boasting of government achievements. For locals, the Kumbh makeover has meant that development work pending in areas for years finally got completed.

Anticipating demand, local shopkeepers have stocked up on essential religious items, including puja materials, rudraksha and tulsi garlands, and sacred texts sourced from Nepal, Banaras,

Mathura and Vrindavan.

From Shastri Bridge that spans the Ganga, as far as the eye can see, the river bank is chock-a-block with accommodations sporting tarpaulin roofs in red, blue, yellow and saffron, reminiscent of the abstract paintings made from squares and rectangles by Dutch painter and art theoretician Piet Mondrian. As religious music plays on loop, also visible from the bridge are the huge entryways erected by akharas, amusement areas for children and numerous light poles.

In the crush of saints and pilgrims looking for salvation at the Kumbh, Satyam Kumar, 23, a resident of Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur, plans to cycle to Vaishno Devi, a shrine located nearly 1,600 km away in J&K, from Prayagraj after praying to Maa Ganga.

Holding a stuffed rucksack, Satyam, who works at his family's welding shop in Jabalpur, says the mela is a stopover. "I wanted to experience the Maha Kumbh. I had only heard stories of the mela since childhood," he says.

To a query on his prayer to the venerated river, he says, "I hope to become a cyclist in future. I will

pray to Maa Ganga, like I will at Vaishno Devi, to fulfill my dream."

Unlike Satyam, Shivendra Singh, 25, a government job aspirant from Uttar Pradesh's Balia, over 250 km away, has a different reason for being at the Kumbh. Shivendra, who is preparing for the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) exams, says he arrived in Prayagraj nearly seven months back to prepare for the test. To get "different perspectives on life" while he studied for the exam, Shivendra, a farmer's son, decided to open a tea stall for the mela.

"What better place to meet everyone — from babas (saints) to adhikaris (officials) — than the Kumbh? This experience will prepare me for any uncertainty in the future. You are aware of the situation of government jobs in the country, aren't you? says Shivendra, a farmer's son.

Losses in agriculture brought Deepak Kumar, 48, a resident of Phoolpur, around 35 km away, to the Kumbh. "I faced losses in farming. Some people from my village work for this private contractor, so I decided to join them. At this age, I don't want to work

in a city," he says.

Wearing a neon green jacket, Deepak says he makes ₹416 daily for an eight-hour shift that involves keeping river banks clean for a private contractor. "Dekhiye, yeh Ganga *ki mahima hai. Yahan har kisi ko aana hi hoga. Ganga me aaye bina kahin mukti nahi hai* (This is the glory of Ganga. Everyone will have to come here. There is no salvation without coming to Ganga)," he says, before moving on to clean the next spot.

For Jitendra Giri, a sadhu associated with the Shri Panchayati Akhada Mahanirvani, the Maha Kumbh is the "biggest congregation of sadhus in the world".

Jitendra, who wears a saffron dhoti, sports red chandan (sandalwood) on his forehead and has tied his long dreadlocks on the back of head, says becoming a sadhu involves making balidaan (sacrifices). "But we don't believe in living a miserable life. We have all the facilities that you do. Babas using luxury vehicles is the norm. In fact, we all strive to get there too. I am an orphan. Without these akharas, where will people like me go?" he says.

IIT-Kharagpur student found hanging in hostel room, probe underway

SWEETY KUMARI
KOLKATA, JANUARY 12

A THIRD-YEAR BTech electrical engineering student at IIT-Kharagpur was found hanging in his hostel room on Sunday morning.

The student was identified as Shaon Malik (21) who hailed from Kasba in Kolkata.

Malik's death came to light after his parents came to meet him at the hostel Sunday morning. They found his room locked from inside and there was no response despite repeated calls. His parents forcibly entered the room and found him hanging, said a police officer.

"The body of the student has been recovered from the hostel (Azad Hall). We are looking into all the aspects," SP (Paschim Medinipur) Dhritiman Sarkar said.

Police said that the post-mortem and magistrate inquest have been completed, and the postmortem was videographed and done in the presence of the

SKM, agitating farmers to meet today, discuss 'joint struggle'

RAAKHI JAGGA
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 12

ACCEDING TO request of Punjab farmers protesting at Khanauri and Shambhu border points, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Sunday advanced from January 15 to 13 the proposed meeting for deciding on a joint fight.

The move came a day after the SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) wrote to the SKM to hold the meeting on January 12 or 13 in the wake of "deteriorating" health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal.

A six-member committee of SKM, which visited the Khanauri protest site on Friday, had invited the SKM (Non-Political) and KMM for a meeting on January 15 in Patiala for unity among farmer bodies for a joint fight against the Centre to press for farmers' demands including a legal guarantee to MSP.

In a letter to SKM (Non-Political) and the KMM on Sunday, the SKM said after considering the request of protesting farmers in a meeting of its national coordination committee, it has been decided that the meeting will now be held on January 13 at 11 am at Guru Tegh Bahadur gurdwara in Patran, Patiala.

The meeting will discuss details of how to carry out a joint struggle by all the three platforms, it said.

Surjit Singh Phul, president of BKU Krantikari, a constituent of SKM (Non Political), said, "We had requested the SKM to hold the meeting at Patran and they have agreed to it. Around 5-6 members from SKM (Non-Political) and KMM will sit for the meeting. We hope that something positive comes out of it."

SKM CALLS FOR JAN 26 TRACTOR RALLIES

New Delhi: SKM on Sunday called for countrywide tractor marches on January 26 and demanded that PM Narendra Modi hold discussions with farmers over their demands. The SKM statement said, "The farmers will parade demanding that the PM immediately convene discussions with all the Kisan organisations on the struggle and save the life of Jagjit Singh Dallewal, immediately withdraw the anti-farmer, anti-federal NPFAM, and enact a law for MSP at C2+50% with legally guaranteed procurement." PTI

Raminder Singh Patiala, member national coordination committee of SKM, said, "We had a meeting of our NCC on Saturday night in which we decided to hold the meeting with SKM (Non-Political) and KMM on Monday at 11 am at Patran town. Six members of unity committee will sit for the meeting."

P Krishna Prasad, national finance secretary of All India Kisan Sabha, a constituent of SKM, said, "The meeting will decide on modalities of how to run the protest unitedly and also to press the Centre to initiate a dialogue with farmer unions. As of now, PM Narendra Modi is refusing to budge, despite the fact Dallewal's fast-unto-death entered 48th day on Sunday." Raminder Singh Patiala, one of the six members of SKM unity committee, said, "We are working towards achieving broader unity on our shared demands so that we can raise our voices together." WITHPTI

2 days after notice, 25 owners of meat shops near Kashi Vishwanath booked

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 12

FIRS HAVE been registered against the owners of 25 meat shops located near the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi for allegedly defying official orders, police said on Sunday.

This came two days after the Varanasi Municipal Corporation issued notices to the owners of 26 meat shop operating within a 2-km radius of the temple, directing them to shut down for allegedly "violating rules".

The notices also pointed out to unsanitary conditions in the shops, including the open sale of meat, which caused public unrest and posed a risk of spreading infectious diseases. Additionally, the notices highlighted violations of FSSAI regulations.

Three FIRs were filed at the Chowk and Dashashwamedh police stations under Sections 223 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 325 (mischievous by killing or maiming animal) of BNS on the complaint of the municipal veterinary officer, DCP (Kashi Zone) Gaurav Banswal said.

Last year, the Municipal Corporation had unanimously passed a resolution to ban the sale of meat within a 2-km radius of the temple premises. Although notices were issued to shop owners at the time, no action was taken.

The meat shop owners, on the other hand, said they were being harassed through orders to close their shops without viable alternative arrangements and that no action had been taken against liquor shops operating within a two-km radius of the temple despite a resolution prohibited liquor shops in that area.

To address this issue, a delegation of meat shop owners met Varanasi Mayor Ashok. The Mayor asked them to identify alternative locations for their shops and assured them that the MC would allocate them space accordingly. The delegation is scheduled to meet the Mayor next week again.



SEA SIDE UP

Giant kites in Ahmedabad's skies on Sunday ahead of the two-day Makar Sankranti celebrations. The city will host the International Kite Festival from January 14-15. Express

Next Maharashtra BJP chief? Why Ravindra Chavan made working president

SHUBHANGI KHAPRE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 12

A FOUR-TIME MLA, Ravindra Chavan's ability to deliver results with a "no questions asked" attitude is likely to have tipped the scales in his favour as he was appointed Maharashtra BJP's working president on Saturday, taking him one step closer to becoming the state BJP chief.

"We appoint Ravindra Chavan as the working president of the Maharashtra state BJP," party chief J P Nadda said on Saturday. Highly placed sources in the BJP said the working president tag was just another step for the 54-year-old Chavan towards taking complete charge of the state BJP once the organisational poll process is complete.



Ravindra Chavan's Maratha roots would send out a message to the community

A senior leader said Chavan's Maratha roots would also send out a strong message to the community, which has been in the limelight over the past three years due to the quota agitation led by Manoj Jarange-Patil.

Seen to be a close associate of Maharashtra CM Devendra

Fadnavis, the Dombivali MLA's elevation came as a surprise to many within the party who believed he would be inducted into the Cabinet. Speculation about Chavan being entrusted with an important organisational role had gained momentum after he missed out on a ministerial berth while state BJP chief Chandrashekar Bawankule made the cut.

Chavan has also received praise from Bawankule. "He is a loyal and committed karyakarta and does whatever work is assigned to him wholeheartedly and with no questions. This makes him acceptable to all within the organisation as well as party leaders," he said.

Chavan forayed into local body

politics during his student days and rose up the ranks. He served as a corporator in Kalyan-Dombivali Municipal Corporation in 2000 and was also chairperson of the standing committee. In 2009, he first contested Assembly polls from Dombivali, a seat he has retained since.

He also served as a minister in the first Fadnavis government between 2016 and 2019 and held key portfolios such as Ports, Medical Education, Information Technology, and Food and Civil Supplies. In the Mahayuti government, he was the minister of the Public Works Department (excluding public undertakings) between 2022 and 2024.

Chavan ruffled feathers during his stint as PWD Minister when Khed MLA Ramdas Kadam

of ally Shiv Sena termed him as a "useless minister" to highlight the non-completion of the Mumbai-Goa highway. "Even Lord Ram returned after 14 years in exile but the highway is showing no signs of completion," Kadam had said.

Seen to be a streetsmart politician who knows when and when not to take up a fight against rivals, last December Chavan was entrusted with responsibility of the party's enrolment drive in the state, where he achieved the target of bringing 1.5 crore people into BJP's fold. "When the party is in power, organisational roles become very important due to the need for perfect coordination," a senior BJP leader said, adding that Chavan's style of working would ensure it happened.

With Chavan being entrusted with the party's affairs in the 39

Assembly seats of the Konkan region, seen to be the stronghold of Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray, another leader pointed out his elevation signals the BJP's intent to make deep inroads in the region. "It also sends out a subtle message to Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, who has been exerting upmanship across Thane, Kalyan, Dombivali and Navi Mumbai," the leader said.

Chavan was also one of the BJP leaders who had opposed the candidature of Shrikant Shinde, Kalyan MP and Deputy CM Shinde's son, during last year's Lok Sabha polls citing the junior Shinde's "high handedness".

In his new role, Chavan is likely to have his task cut out and will need to play a key role in rebuilding the party across the 355 talukas and 36 districts of the state.



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SARKAR & CAMPUS

Liberalising V-C eligibility is a good step forward. Letting Raj Bhavan — or CMO — choose them is many steps back

MORE THAN THREE-AND-A-HALF years after the government announced that it would implement a new National Education Policy (NEP), the task of reforming higher education institutions remains a work in progress. The challenge is to remove persisting deficits and enable universities to cater to the demands of the modern knowledge economy. Addressing these imperatives requires the higher education regulator, UGC, to not just set standards but also act as an enabler. In the past, the agency has attracted criticism for its tendency to over-regulate. The draft UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges) Regulations 2025 signal a welcome change in the regulator's approach, but only to an extent. Stringent rules that made undergraduate and postgraduate degrees the qualifying criteria to teach a discipline have been relaxed. This flexibility in recruitment aligns with the NEP's effort to break disciplinary silos. Equally significant are the provisions that allow senior industry experts and public administrators to apply for a VC's post. Lifting the cap on contract jobs, one hopes, will be used to attract diverse talent and not keep the talented insecure and beholden to their bosses. However, by strengthening the role of state governors in appointing university heads, the draft rules mark a disappointing departure from the NEP's thrust on institutional autonomy. Worse, they signal once again that the sarkar, in this case, the Centre, is the arbiter of excellence.

Opening the VC's post to professionals outside academia could increase the pool of experts required to helm higher education institutions. The move creates possibilities for collaboration between academia and industry — key at a time the contours of higher education are being reshaped by technology. The salience of this cannot be overstated when the higher education system, barring select institutions, has been impervious to the imperatives of an aspiring society, especially the skill deficits in the young. Realising the potency of these liberalising initiatives, will, however, require unshackling the university ecosystem from the centralising tendencies of the past, when several VCs were treated as political appointees. That universities are caught in the crossfire between governors and state governments — especially in non-BJP-ruled states such as Kerala, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu — shows that academic freedom in the country's higher educational institutions continues to be a fraught issue. In the draft rules, the clause empowering state governors, as chancellors, to constitute a search committee to find VCs undermines the university's autonomy. Raj Bhavan and the UGC will have one nominee each in this three-member panel, while the university will have just one representative.

Opposition-ruled governments are upset at the prospect of what's tantamount to a Central veto in the appointment of VCs. To get the best person to lead a campus needs a process that insulates the campus from political pressure — from the Centre as well as from state governments. A TMC loyalist chosen as a VC in West Bengal or a CPM member in Kerala could be as damaging to a campus as one imposed by Raj Bhavan. The UGC would do well to study how some of the more progressive institutions in the world give a say to participants in the system — faculty bodies, domain experts, even student associations — in choosing heads of institutions. The draft rules will be in the public domain for about a month. The government must reach out to invite a range of ideas and voices; give greater thought to designing rigorous appointment procedures that are insulated from party politics and, most importantly, resist the temptation of believing that a good rubber-stamp makes for a good academic leader.

A RECURRING TRAGEDY

Deaths of rat-hole miners in Assam's coal mine, 10 years after NGT ban, raise urgent questions governments must address

CRAWLING THROUGH A narrow hole as the water gushed in, clinging to the box that lifts coal from the pit, Rajeev Barman found his way out of the coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district on January 6. But nine of his coworkers, working as rat-hole miners, couldn't make it. After six days of rescue operations, the team has recovered four bodies and is continuing its search for five missing workers. This is not the first time, however, that rat-hole mining has led to disaster and death. In 2018, 15 rat-hole miners died after being trapped for two weeks in a coal mine in Meghalaya. Rat-hole miners dying due to mudslides, leakage of poisonous gas, and rising water levels have often been reported from the northeastern states. And yet the political will required to prevent this recurring tragedy is still missing.

In 2014, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned rat-hole mining. However, the political establishment seemed unwilling to accept this order. On September 24, 2015, the Congress government of Meghalaya, led by the then CM Conrad Sangma, passed a resolution in the legislative assembly requesting the Centre to invoke paragraph 12 A (b) of the sixth schedule to exempt the state from the purview of central mining laws. According to Meghalaya police records, between April 2014 and November 2018, there were at least 477 violations of the NGT order. On March 16, 2022, responding to a question in Parliament on whether the government had taken cognisance of the rat-hole mining incident in the North Eastern Region (NER), the minister of mines, Pralhad Joshi, said, "As per the Section 23C of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, the State Governments are empowered to make rules for preventing illegal mining, transportation and storage of minerals."

Passing the buck to the state government may be a politically viable option to avoid responsibility, but it is not going to stop the dangerous practice. In the northeastern states, where the layers of coal are thin and rat-hole mining offers much higher wages than MGN-REGA and other government-run schemes, this illegal activity gets a free run. This is especially so when the politician-bureaucracy nexus turns an unseeing eye. The implementation of the NGT order, in letter and spirit, needs an acknowledgement of the problem and the political will to address it. This must begin, before any more lives are lost, urgently.

FREEZE FRAME



E P UNNY

A crack in the MAGA edifice



BHASKAR CHAKRAVORTI

Scuffle inside the Trump tent on H-1B visas is symptomatic of a larger failure of policy and imagination

WITH NO INSURRECTIONISTS invading the US Capitol in Washington, DC, this January 6, America has been robbed of a juicy fight, something we have come to expect after a US presidential election. But all is not lost. Mercifully, there are enough reckless individuals within the extreme MAGA wing of the Donald J Trump coalition who are unreasonable in a different enough way from the reckless individuals in the coalition's tech wing. So, we have a fight.

Laura Loomer, self-anointed MAGA high-priestess, took issue with the nomination of a harmless enough chap called Sriram Krishnan to the harmless enough position of "senior AI advisor" to Trump. Neither Loomer nor Krishnan is particularly consequential, but her warning that Krishnan's nomination signalled a threat to America from "third-world invaders from India" became a call to arms for the extreme MAGA — exactly the outcome a professional conspiracist hopes for. Krishnan, an otherwise chatty tech podcast host, has remained mum and it was left to invaders from a different third-world country (South Africa), techies Elon Musk and David Sacks, to speak up in support of invaders from everywhere. It is also sweet that both Musk and Sacks are White — and have roles in the upcoming administration. Now, techies are up in arms as well. US-born Vivek Ramaswamy bashed his home country for venerating mediocrity.

In the meantime, a demoralised Trump opposition finally has something to cling to: A crack in the MAGA edifice. Finally, a civil war to celebrate. The commander-in-chief-in-waiting came out in favour of H-1B invaders, giving the techies an early win. Trump may have been a bit confused about the distinction between an H-1B visa holder and an immigrant he hires to mow the grass on one of his golf courses, but for now, the visa programme is safe. But you can never be too sure with Trump. In his first term, he had issued an executive order temporarily banning H-1B visas, which a federal court had struck down. This time, Trump's bro-mance with the techies may have caused a change of heart, but all things to do with the heart are ephemeral for the president-elect. Indians are in the eye of the storm. It was

Firms with H-1B visa holders have a higher rate of patents and patent citations. Immigrants are twice as likely to start a business as native-born Americans. The US system of higher education would come apart without foreign-born students, researchers and faculty. The Darwinian process of immigrating (beginning with the visa hurdles at US embassies or slipping through the border with Mexico) brings a certain degree of can-do-itness, which accounts for the accomplishments of the displaced. Contrary to the misinformation spread by Trump himself, immigrants, both legal and illegal, commit far fewer crimes than US citizens.

an Indian-born, Krishnan, whose nomination set off the row; Indians are the majority of H-1B visa holders; Indians clearly aren't White Europeans, who according to Loomer "built" America. But let's put this incident in perspective with three wider contextual issues.

Issue one: The H-1B visa programme — the largest temporary work visa for foreigners in the US — is beset with problems. Complaints come from those who want it banned as well as those who want it expanded. The H-1B programme allows employers to hire foreign workers "in speciality occupations or as fashion models of distinguished merit and ability," when US workers of equivalent skills cannot be found. (Who am I to question why "fashion models" deserve the special call-out?). Populist politics is in vogue in the US, so politicians are complaining about the programme being misused to hire cheap — as opposed to American — labour. Since the visa is tied to the sponsoring organisation, it could bond the worker leading to further exploitation. Others worry that US workers are overlooked and as a result, fewer Americans study STEM subjects and the US education system is failing them, creating a vicious cycle.

Champions of the programme argue that the demand for such visas vastly exceeds the annual cap and argue against the caps for each country. Moreover, the electronic registration is abused by companies gaming the system through multiple filings, which leads to delays and a lottery creating uncertainty for everyone. Musk claims the programme is essential to retain the top 0.1 per cent of engineering talent, but not everyone in the programme is highly skilled and many outstanding applicants are denied.

The flawed H-1B is part of an overall flawed immigration policy system in the US. Recent administrations have all promised to fix it and have failed. Don't expect Trump's second coming to find a fair solution.

Issue two: Trump wants to out-compete China and America badly needs that foreign-born talent. A recent US Department of Energy commissioned report found that the US is losing its competitive advantage in STEM to

China. Immigrants have been critical to building artificial intelligence models as well as to installing artificial turf on a Trump property. It has kept the country younger than its European counterparts with a vibrant workforce. Firms with H-1B visa holders have a higher rate of patents and patent citations. Immigrants are twice as likely to start a business as native-born Americans. The US system of higher education would come apart without foreign-born students, researchers and faculty. The Darwinian process of immigrating (beginning with the visa hurdles at US embassies or slipping through the border with Mexico) brings a certain degree of can-do-itness, which accounts for the accomplishments of the displaced. Contrary to the misinformation spread by Trump himself, immigrants, both legal and illegal, commit far fewer crimes than US citizens.

Issue three: The H-1B storm is larger than the teacup in which it is brewing. It is part of a larger war over who can cosy up to the Big Boss. The techies see opportunities for money-making in business-building without pesky regulatory guardrails and installing technocratic "efficiency" solutions and the conspiracists see opportunities for money-making from large digital followerships and selling conspiracies. The Boss, in the meantime, thrives on the attention.

While our focus is on immigration, the real issue is a much wider scuffle inside the Trump circus tent, which at some point will explode beyond it. As opposed to the false fears of invasion of America, the ill effects of that explosion will invade every other part of the world. Worsening the broken immigration policy or failures on other pressing matters: Reversing action on climate change, uncontrolled rush into crypto or to Mars, worsening the misery in conflict zones in the Middle East, Africa or Ukraine, unpreparedness for the next pandemic. Who needs invaders from the third world? America has invaded itself.

The writer is dean of Global Business at The Fletcher School at Tufts University and senior (non-resident) fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress

No, Mr SUBRAHMANYAN

CEO's prescriptions against work-life balance are jarring and insensitive



DEEPIKA SINGH

IT IS A brand new week and a brand new CEO type telling us how many hours we should be spending in our workplaces. If Narayana Murthy's repeated batting for a 70-hour workweek was triggering for you, I suggest you sit down and sip a glass of water before hearing the latest one. Larsen & Toubro (L&T) chairman S N Subrahmanyam, in an annual meeting with employees, emphasised that they should work, wait for it, 90 hours a week — including Sundays.

"How long can you stare at your wife, how long can the wife stare at the husband?" he asks. Within a few hours of surfacing, the video went viral, sparking angry reactions, retorts, and condemnation, a notable one being from actor Deepika Padukone who called the statement "shocking" in an Instagram story.

To be sure, unlike Murthy, Subrahmanyam's advice was not doled out on a social media platform for the general public. But thanks to a purportedly leaked video, we got a glimpse of what happens behind closed (glass) doors in many corporate houses.

One may blame the era Murthy and Subramanyam come from for the mentality but our younger corporate dude-bros are no different. Not long ago, Bombay Shaving Company's CEO Shantanu Deshpande was panned for advising 22-year-olds to "put in the 18-hour days for at least 4-5 years". More recently, an old video of Ola's Bhavish Aggarwal went viral in which he could be seen terming work-life balance a "Western construct".

One thread that binds these young and old CEOs is the assertion that "I work on

Subrahmanyam and those of his ilk conveniently seem to be skipping one point of note: They are the CEOs, raking in millions in salary, apart from other bonuses, perks, ESOPs and what have you. The employee that they are expecting to selectively emulate them, on the other hand, is mostly an average paid worker arriving at the office on a bike taxi after finishing off all the household chores because she can't afford a battery of domestic workers that makes ignoring the home a little bit easier.

JANUARY 13, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON INDIA'S NEEDS

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi said that he had come to the conclusion that what the country needed most was discipline. Gandhi said discipline was wanting "on the streets, on the road, in public life, in the Central government, the various departments and the state governments." He said, "If there is no discipline, we cannot progress at all."

INDO-PAK RESUME TALKS

THE FOREIGN SECRETARIES of India and Pakistan are to meet in Maldives where they are bound to discuss steps to pull Indo-Pakistan

Sundays, too".

But Subrahmanyam and those of his ilk conveniently seem to be skipping one point of note: They are the CEOs, raking in millions in salary, apart from other bonuses, perks, ESOPs and what have you. The employee that they are expecting to selectively emulate them, on the other hand, is mostly an average paid worker arriving at the office on a bike taxi after finishing off all the household chores because she can't afford a battery of domestic workers that makes ignoring the home a little bit easier.

The advice given by Subramanyam to his employees is untenable under any circumstances but is particularly jarring since it comes close on the heels of news of a few young CEOs succumbing to cardiac arrest and other stress-induced diseases in the recent past. Amid this, asking employees to come even on sick days is likely to trigger a wave of backlash.

To press his point, Subrahmanyam goes on to share an anecdote about a Chinese person he met who asserted that China could surpass the United States "any day" since Chinese workers put in 90 hours a week, whereas Americans only work 50.

But here is the thing: There is little evidence of China surpassing the US as of now. There is something for which there is solid evidence, however — the four-day workweek.

In pilot programmes run by the non-profit 4 Day Week Global in 2022, almost half (49 per cent) of the participating UK organisations said that a shorter workweek led to improved productivity. A survey by Gartner Inc found a

shorter week to be a favoured recruitment and retention strategy.

More recently, Tokyo set a new precedent in workplace reform by introducing a four-day work-week for government employees in a move to support working mothers with the governor emphasising that they would ensure "no one has to give up their career due to life events such as childbirth or childcare."

Subrahmanyam and others' insensitive remarks on personal relationships undermine the importance of family time; they trivialise familial bonds. They are particularly uncharitable towards women who continue to shoulder a majority of household responsibilities, not to mention the emotional burden.

So, here is a small list of things that people do when they are not in the office, or not staring at their wife/husband: Spend time with their children and parents, nurture a hobby, meet friends, attend events around town, cook, clean, work out, rest, unwind. All these activities help increase their happiness quotient, which ultimately leads to honest and fruitful work in the office.

So, instead of pressing them to work 90 hours a week, the question Subrahmanyam needs to ask his employees is: "Why do you need 90 hours to finish your task? Please take a break. Relax and unwind. And instead of staring at your wife, why not help her around the house?"

As the aphorism goes, work smarter, not harder.

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relations out of logjam. Even if the two governments do not appear near taking a policy decision to resume the dialogue on these drafts, the foreign secretaries' meeting might turn out to be significant because of the opportunity it will provide to establish fresh high-level contacts.

TULF DEMANDS ACTION

THE THREE-MEMBER Tamil United Liberation Front delegation, headed by its president, Sivasithamparam, has urged the Indian government to take "effective action" to stop killings of innocent Tamils in Sri Lanka. The delegation impressed upon the Ministry of External Affairs, with whom they had a four-

hour discussion, the urgent need for such action to prevent further killings. They said that the Sri Lankan government was bent upon a military solution to the ethnic problem rather than a negotiated settlement.

CHARAN SINGH ON PM

CHARAN SINGH, THE Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party president, called Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on January 12. Before he met with the PM, Singh issued a statement praising the new government and pledging his party's cooperation to it "in making a serious effort to preserve and strengthen national unity, remove unemployment, etc."

THE IDEAS PAGE

The leaders our universities need

Draft UGC regulations remove ambiguities in processes to select VCs, instil flexibility. But resisting external interference, raising research standards, will pose challenges



ASHOK THAKUR AND
S S MANTHA

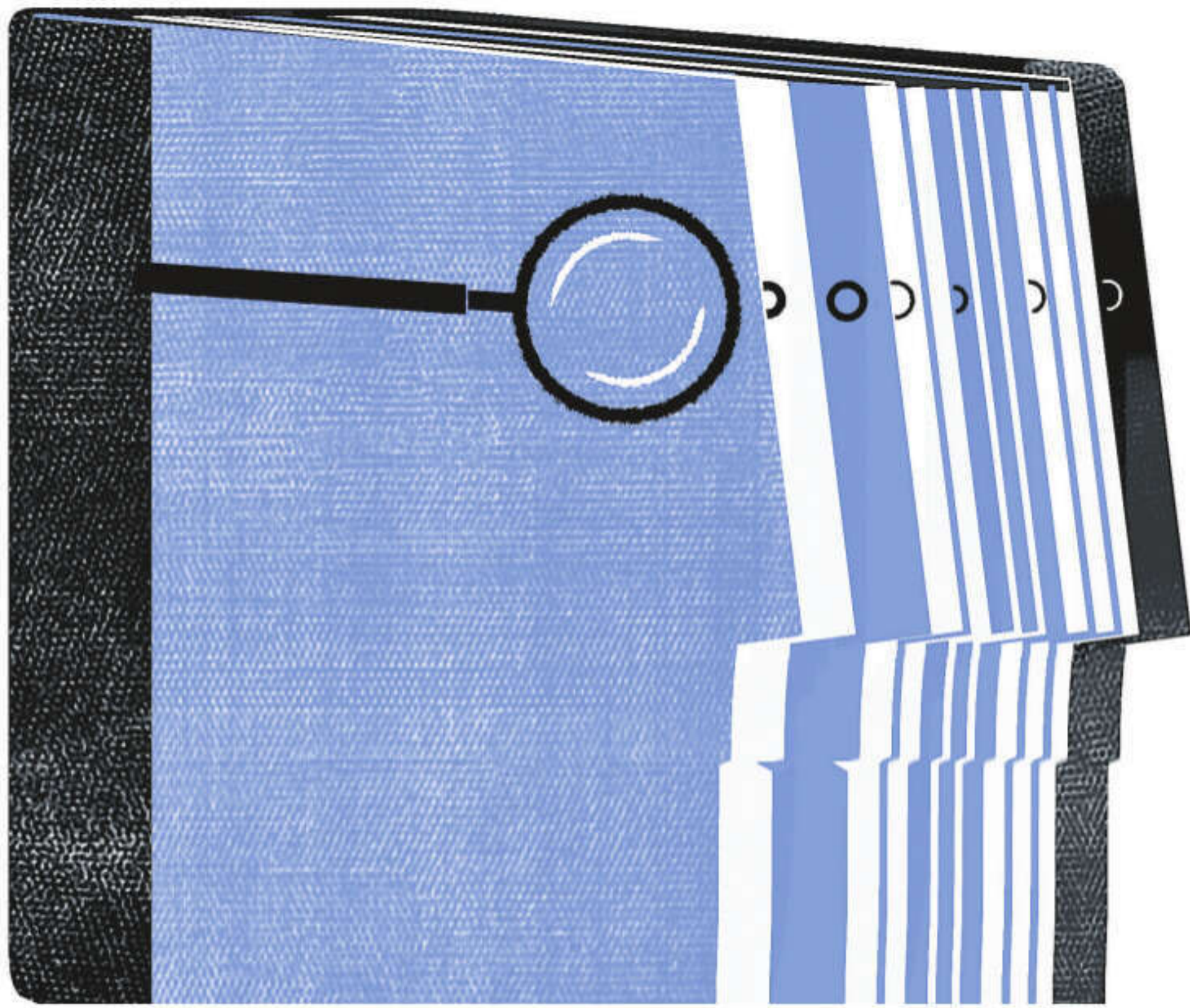
THE UGC'S RECENT draft regulations — Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education — attempt to represent the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP). They also seek to remove ambiguities in the selection process for the post of Vice-Chancellor (VC) as well as open up the position for non-academics.

The VC's post is central to the functioning of a university. As the academic and administrative head of the university, he/she chairs the council of the university, the board of faculties and the finance committee of the university. The VC represents the university externally, both within and overseas. He/she is also responsible for securing the university's financial base and making it robust enough to allow the delivery of the institution's mission, aims and objectives. The mandate of this post is the creation of knowledge for humanity/universe — the term "university" derives from this objective. Peter Mathieson, VC, University of Edinburgh, once summed up this imperative aptly: "Universities are not just about learning. They are about creating knowledge, questioning the status quo, and making the world a better place through research and education."

The regulation clears ambiguities in the formation of the search-cum-selection committee to appoint VCs. Such powers are now vested in the Governor-Chancellors or Visitors. Earlier, the government would seek the nominee of the Governor-Chancellor from a list of three names it supplied. The Governor-Chancellor will now nominate his representative. A UGC nominee was always a part of the search panel which is as it should be, since the maintenance of the quality/academic standards is its mandate. The third member will be nominated by the apex body of the university like the Management Council or Senate. These bodies may have representatives with affiliations to the ruling party in the state. However, state governments have been complaining that they are left with no voice in the selection of the VC.

In recent times, the VC's post has attracted controversy in some states. Some state governments have tried to replace the Governor-Chancellor with a Chief Minister-Chancellor. This turn of events is ironic because the President of India and the Governors were given this role to keep politics out.

Regarding the opening up of the post of VC to non-academics, one cannot but be reminded of the *Kalyani Mathivanan vs State* (2015) case in which the Madras High Court famously remarked: "Today, Albert Einstein cannot be appointed as the Vice Chancellor of any University in India, unless he fulfils the qualifications prescribed by the regulator". Flexibility in appointment processes is there-



C R Sasikumar

fore an imperative. At the same time, this should not lead to a scenario where the "eminence" of the post may be contested. To avoid such situations, the draft proposes that industry experts, public sector veterans, and senior administrators or experienced professionals can be directly appointed as VCs. This is a bold move. However, resisting interference by vested interests could be a challenge.

A search committee for the selection of a VC in a US university consists of participants in the university's processes — senior administrators like provosts, deans, faculty representatives, staff members, even students (occasionally) and trustees or board members. In the UK, a search committee typically has university governors/trustees, senior university leaders, such as Pro-VCs, Deputy VCs, faculty representatives and external advisors or search firms. Faculty and even students are a part of the search committee paving the way for a most inclusive and transparent search mechanism.

Institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or Stanford University are multifaceted and deeply impactful, though it's worth noting that these universities primarily use the title of Chancellor or President to refer to the highest executive leadership. Here, the board of trustees form a search committee that engages with various university constituencies to develop a list of qualifications and desired qualities in a new president, then consults with all stakeholders, and identifies suitable candidates. This involves formal interviews conducting background checks and making

Our universities are starved of funds today. Eminent people from systems outside the universities, such as representatives of industry bodies or the services sector, may need to understand the ethos of a university before they deliver on its objectives. At the same time, they could help bring in a professional perspective and facilitate the creation of endowments. The challenge for vice-chancellors today — in whatever way he/she is selected — is to help raise the research bar and help in internationalisation.

assessments. It's also worth noting that in the US or the UK, there are no regulators who set standards for such appointments.

Some other provisions of the draft regulations are forward-looking. Waiving the requirement of clearing the UGC-NET examination for an entry-level assistant professor's post in technical institutions for instance. A ME or Mtech degree with at least 55 per cent marks would suffice. Removing the cap on contract teacher appointments is in line with the NEP's objectives and must be welcomed. This could help fill up the large number of vacancies in several of the country's universities.

As members of a progressive society, we share the education minister's optimism on these regulations. However, we may need to pause and ponder if we are in sync with the best practices in the world. Our universities are starved of funds today. Eminent people from systems outside the universities, such as representatives of industry bodies or the services sector, may need to understand the ethos of a university before they deliver on its objectives. At the same time, they could help bring in a professional perspective and facilitate the creation of endowments. The challenge for vice-chancellors today — in whatever way he/she is selected — is to help raise the research bar and help in internationalisation. That could help raise the position of our universities and place them among the best in the world. We hope these regulations will help in that pursuit.

Thakur is former Secretary Education GoI and Mantha is former Chairman, AICTE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"E-governance is the future. It is also not a novel idea. Our state's stumbling progress towards it underlines that the country needs proven experts leading all IT-related affairs instead of retired military personnel or professional paper-pushers drawn from the nation's burgeoning bureaucracy." — **DAWN, PAKISTAN**

An ill-judged speech

Justice Shekhar Yadav's remarks do a disservice to his office, and institution. They point to a challenge that cannot be ignored



SATVIK VARMA

A JUDGE OF a constitutional court is the last person one would expect to be espousing divisive ideas of "us versus them." Hence, the remarks by Justice Shekhar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court have drawn unnecessary attention towards our judiciary. Judges swear an oath to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution and to uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India. Justice without fear or favour, affection, or ill will is cardinal to our constitutional values and judicial functioning. Justice Yadav's comments clearly strayed away from that.

Of course, our judiciary is robust enough to withstand isolated statements even by one of its own. Regrettably, these are no longer solitary utterances and in recent times, the Supreme Court (SC) has had to intervene, on more than a few occasions, and admonish sitting judges for remarks both on and off the bench. Judges do not merely comprise an institution whose sole task is to dispense justice, but they act as the primary line of defence against any assault on the Constitution. As a senior SC judge recently said: "High Courts are guardians of fundamental rights and our Constitution." Thus, when brazen words stem from constitutional functionaries, it wounds the spirit of our Constitution.

In a country founded on the ideals of religious syncretism, communal remarks cannot be passed down as inconsequential. It was, therefore, comforting that the SC Collegium summoned Justice Yadav for a sit-down and, as reported, both counselled and cautioned him. The judge is believed to have blamed the media for selective quoting and distorting his words. However, one can't overlook that the learned judge was mindful of media presence and even quipped that he didn't have the slightest hesitation in sharing his views despite whatever the media may publish.

Justice Yadav's remarks were made not in his judicial capacity — for judges speak only through their judgments — but as comments at a seemingly private seminar, despite being held inside the court premises. During his speech, Justice Yadav shared that his colleagues on the bench had quizzed him about what he may say on the topic, "Constitutional Necessity of Uniform Civil Code," and had even reminded him that he was a sitting High Court judge. Considering all of this, there can be no doubt that Justice Yadav was aware that his remarks would evoke the reaction they did. It is in this context that his words have been termed as "hate speech" and an "incitement to communal disharmony."

Our Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression saddled only with "reasonable restrictions." However, there are areas where the caveat of reasonable restrictions does not come in the way of speech, inflammatory, or otherwise. A pertinent example of such un-cur-

tailed speech would be remarks made in Parliament, which are covered by privilege as provided under our Constitution. This ensures that no parliamentarian should operate under a looming threat of legal action for their utterances during parliamentary discourse. Still, such immunity from legal action does not extend to these members outside Parliament. We may remember that parliamentarians and even sitting chief ministers and Union ministers have tendered unconditional apologies before the Supreme Court for their public comments. In a system governed by the rule of law, whilst remarks made by judges discharging their judicial functions are entitled to absolute privilege, such protection cannot extend to incendiary public speeches made outside the courtroom. Hence, reports that the Supreme Court collegium has asked Justice Yadav to apologise are in keeping with what the Court has sought from others, including our elected representatives. In the past three weeks, the apology has not been forthcoming and there are now reports that the Chief Justice of India has sought a fresh report from Justice Yadav's parent High Court.

A Private Member's bill — the Hate Crimes and Hate Speech (Combat, Prevention and Punishment) Bill, 2022 — was introduced in the Rajya Sabha, but other than sparking sporadic debates, it yielded no constructive action, let alone promulgation. Perhaps it's time to revisit the need for such legislation.

At moments like this, one is reminded of the principles from the "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life," which were adopted by the full court of the SC in the late 1990s. It resolved that "a judge, like any other citizen, is entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association, and assembly, but in exercising such rights, a judge shall always conduct himself or herself in such a manner as to preserve the dignity of the judicial office and the impartiality and independence of the judiciary." As the eloquent Justice E S Venkataramiah wrote, "The life of a judge does not really call for great acts of self-sacrifice; but it does insist upon small acts of self-denial almost every day." His illustrious daughter, who is a sitting SC judge, reminded us of his words recently.

The framers of our Constitution were entrusted with the seemingly difficult responsibility of stitching together a civic society in a country, which at the time, had witnessed the extremities of religious divides. They succeeded in creating a constitution based on the ideals of liberty and fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual. They created a pluralistic society where religious identities, views and ideas varied, but we were bound together by the virtues of unity in diversity. The Constitution did not seek to create a country for any religious denomination but built a nation for Indians who came in different colours and with varying religious beliefs. The members of the Constituent Assembly chose the opening words to our Constitution's preamble carefully, "We the People of India." This leaves no room for any conversations about us versus them, for we are one.

The writer is a Senior Advocate based in New Delhi



VISHWAS CHITALE

Planning for a hotter world

Climate resilience must move to mainstream of financial priorities

ON THE FIRST day of January 2025, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) announced that 2024 was the hottest year on record since the agency started recording temperature data back in 1901. Even Brazil, China, Indonesia, Germany and Mali declared 2024 as the hottest year on record. However, considering the way India's complex climatic landscape is evolving and the additional burden rising global temperatures will pose, both on public health and the economy, India must prioritise adaptation alongside its emission mitigation plan.

A study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) shows that nearly eight out of 10 Indians live in a district that faces the risk of either a flood, a drought or a cyclone. What's more, there are hotspots where either two or all three of the above-mentioned disasters occur together, such as parts of Odisha and Telangana on the eastern coast and parts of Gujarat on the western coast. There is no denying that climate extremes are now being felt across the calendar year and in almost every part of the country.

There may be a biting chill in many parts of India now, but the record-breaking heat waves of 2024 are not forgotten. The ruling party returned to power with temperatures almost touching 50 degree Celsius in the Indian capital last year. This increasing heat stress remains a major challenge across most states. Nearly 23 states in India are heatwave-prone. In the summer of 2024, India recorded more than 44,000 heatstroke cases and more

than 300 heat-related mortalities, as per the bulletin of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This affects public health and economic productivity. Water reservoirs and the energy demand that keeps India powered are impacted too. In June 2024, while suffering from a 10-day long heatwave, Delhi's peak power demand of 8,647 MW was higher by 16 per cent than that of the previous year.

Monsoons are becoming uneven too, and with significant consequences. According to our research, between 2012-22, various districts in the agriculturally important Indo-Gangetic plains reported a decline of up to 20 per cent in southwest monsoon rainfall. Currently, the average annual crop losses owing to extreme weather events account for 0.25 per cent of India's GDP. Moreover, the Arabian Sea — with a higher rate of increasing sea surface temperatures compared to the Bay of Bengal — experienced a nearly 52 per cent increase in tropical storm cyclones in the last two decades. But while India's cyclone early warning system provides coverage to 100 per cent of the cyclone-prone population, its flood early warning system only provides coverage to one-third of the flood-prone population.

In 2024, various states, including Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the south and Delhi, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh in the north, saw severe flooding, including cloudbursts and flash floods. Following the trend of increased heavy rainfall events in the past decade, we must brace for severely impacted monsoons in 2025

and beyond. The recently announced Mission Mausam and the granular-scale data that will be acquired across various cities under it could enhance urban flood preparedness.

India is currently developing its national adaptation plan and has a golden opportunity to get its priorities right to account for the complex and rapidly evolving climate challenges.

First, there needs to be a detailed risk assessment of the impacts of observed and predicted heat stress at a minute scale, and across sectors. Heat does not impact everyone and everything in the same way. Therefore, identifying vulnerable populations within heatwave-prone cities, such as those with chronic health conditions, senior citizens, and children below six years of age, is crucial to prioritise targeted actions. In addition, the dairy and livestock sector, which accounts for five per cent of India's GDP, has seen a decline of up to 20 per cent in milk productivity owing to heat stress. This calls for robust adaptation actions for the dairy sector, where the heat challenge could be addressed by low-cost and decentralised renewable energy-based livelihood solutions such as solar chillers.

Second, nearly half of India's agriculture is rainfed, with the majority of it distributed across the central and southern states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka. Any minor change in the rainfall pattern causes large-scale impacts in the agriculture sector. Therefore, we must revamp crop weather

calendars for rainfed crops to account for the recent changes in the southwest monsoon. This requires contextualisation of local cropping practices to suit the changes in the availability of water and moisture. In the last 10 years, the Indian Council on Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed more than 2,500 varieties of flood- and drought-resistant crops. With the revision of cropping calendars and the incorporation of resilient seeds, climate change-induced crop losses could be reduced significantly.

Third, the disaster risk financing landscape in India must be enhanced, especially for cities. The recently passed Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 empowers states to strengthen city-level resilience by forming Urban Disaster Management Authorities. This will be crucial in ensuring that necessary infrastructure and finance are made available for cities to mainstream climate resilience. City resilience bonds and green municipal bonds could further help cities mobilise the finance needed for adaptation.

With the 2025 Budget a few weeks away, climate resilience must move from the margins to the mainstream of our financial planning and priorities. It's a good economic investment — from crops to cities — not just an environmental one.

The writer is Senior Programme Lead at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WOMEN & TALIBAN

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Where daughters can't play' (IE, January 11). The state of women's rights in Afghanistan is appalling. Speeches in the United Nations chambers about gender equity sound hollow when the world is silent as authoritarianism in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime expands. What is happening in Afghanistan requires major international intervention. Concerning sports in Afghanistan, organisations like the ICC should speak out.

Saras Anand, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Where daughters can't play' (IE, January 11). The Taliban has repeatedly reneged on promises to restore women's rights in Afghanistan. The regime has continued placing restrictions on women's workforce participation, representation in the media and education. This regressive rule has witnessed the disappearance of women activists and an increase in gender-based violence and human trafficking. The cowardice of the international community cannot be tolerated any longer and the women in Afghanistan deserve freedom.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

WORK TOGETHER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Crumbling foretold' (IE, January 11). The INDIA bloc

was formed to provide a national alternative to the dominant BJP and in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Congress doubled its tally to 99 seats and BJP was restricted to 240. After that, Congress showed little regard for the aspirations of the regional parties. Congress was adamant and uncompromising while negotiating seat sharing in the assembly elections. The INDIA bloc started crumbling because of Congress' hubris. Under Rahul Gandhi, there have been ego clashes, haphazard campaigning and incoherent party ideologies. To effectively challenge the BJP, the opposition parties must stick and work together.

Atul Thakre, Nagpur

MYTH OF EFFICIENCY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'CEO can't see' (IE, January 11). Putting in more hours might seem equal to greater productivity, but this is rarely true. Humans are creative and comparing their work ethic to mechanical efficiency is flawed and damaging, especially when disguised as a path to success. Many people are enamoured by this false notion and fail to see the harsh reality behind it, often blinded by financial pressures and societal expectations. This conditioning not only undermines mental well-being but also leads to eventual physical exhaustion and breakdown.

Shaswat Jena, Ghaziabad

Torres ponzi scheme: Names of 6 more foreign nationals crop up in EOW probe, LOCs issued

VIJAY KUMAR YADAV
MUMBAI, JANUARY 12

NAMES OF six more foreigners, mostly Ukrainians, have cropped up in the ongoing investigation of the Mumbai police Economic Offences Wing (EOW) into the Torres investment fraud, wherein around 1.25 lakh investors are suspected to have lost ₹1,000

crore. The EOW has now issued Look Out Circulars against them. Police sources said that while recording statements of witnesses, office staff, agents, and other functionaries of Torres, names of these foreign nationals surfaced. They escaped the country before Christmas (year end) as per their plan, sources said. Among the foreigners allegedly wanted by the investigators

are the director of Platinum Hern Pvt Ltd, which runs the Torres jewellery brand, Victoria Kovalenko; former director of the company, Olena Stoian; Oleksandra Brunkivska and another Ukrainian associate of the two, Artem (full name not revealed yet). On January 6, thousands of investors in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, and Mira Road gathered outside the showrooms of

Torres' jewellery stores in Dadar, Mira Road, and APMC Navi Mumbai, staging protests after they stopped receiving their due interest in December last week. On January 6, Shivaji police filed an FIR mentioning the fraud amount as ₹13.48 crore from 66 different investors. Later, the case was transferred to the EOW. Besides this, FIRs were filed by Navghar police in Mira Bhayander,

Rabodi police in Thane, and APMC police in Navi Mumbai. The Torres brand, run by Platinum Hern Pvt Ltd, has allegedly floated multiple schemes offering weekly interests, considered 'too good to be true' with around 500K annual interest on investments. Initially investors, who were lured with incentives like iPhones, jewellery, and other expensive gifts like branded bags,

cars, and apartments, were promised returns regularly, but in December last week they began defaulting. So far three accused have been arrested: the company's general manager, Taniya Xasatova, alias Tazagul Karaxanova Xasatova, 52; director Sarvesh Ashok Surve, 30; and store in-charge Valentina Ganesh Kumar, 44.

Lankesh case: Evidence witness recounts finding bullets from shooter's training site in forest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, JANUARY 11

A WITNESS to the collection of evidence in the murder of journalist Gauri Lankesh, 55, has recounted, during the trial, the finding of 12 cartridges and bullets in the Kineye forest near Belagavi where the alleged shooter of the journalist was trained by a radical right-wing group ahead of the September 5, 2017, shooting in Bengaluru.

During the trial earlier this week, the mahazar witness also identified a member of the right-wing crime syndicate, Sharad Kalaskar, 28, as the person who led the witnesses and the police to a spot in the Kineye forest where firearm training was provided to Parashuram Waghmare, 30, the alleged shooter.

Waghmare, a former member of right-wing outfit Sri Rama Sene, and Kalaskar who was associated with the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti and was convicted recently for 2013 murder of Narendra Dabholkar, 69, are among 17 people arrested by a Karnataka Police SIT in connection with the Lankesh murder case.

Kalaskar, the alleged shooter, along with Sachin Andhure, in the 2013 murder of Dabholkar, is alleged to have provided a round of training to a set of shooters identified for the Gauri Lankesh murder, including Waghmare, a few months before the murder.

During the trial, the mahazar witness described his enlistment as an independent witness in September 2018 and the visit to the Kineye forest to find evidence.

The witness told the court that experts divided the region in the forest – indicated by Kalaskar as the place where the arms training occurred – into grades, and searched for metal objects using metal detectors

around trees that were used as targets. The witness authenticated finding of seven empty cartridges and five fired bullets during search operation in Kineye forest in September 2018.

The witness was also taken to a farm near Belagavi where Kalaskar reported that the right-wing group had conducted explosives training camp with the use of circuit bombs a few months earlier but no remnant evidence was found at the spot indicated by Kalaskar.

Earlier in the trial, a ballistics expert from the Karnataka Forensic Science Laboratory had reported the finding of empty cartridges and bullets of the 7.65 mm calibre in the Kineye forest region in Belagavi.

The expert also reported that the ballistic analysis of the cartridges and bullets found at the training site matched with some of the bullets and cartridges found at the crime scene of the murder of Lankesh.

The forensic report by ballistics expert helped SIT establish the fact that a 7.65-mm pistol used to gun down Lankesh was in the possession of the right-wing group at the training sessions conducted a few months prior to the murder.

The bullets and cartridges found at the forest training site when analysed at the Karnataka Forensic Science lab revealed that one bullet and one cartridge have the same features found on four bullets fired at Lankesh outside her home, indicating that the same 7.65 mm country-made pistol was fired at the two sites.

Following Lankesh's murder, the police seized three bullets that hit her, one that missed, and four empty cartridges. Those involved in Lankesh murder are also allegedly linked to the murders of leftist thinker Govind Pansare in Maharashtra and scholar M M Kalburgi in Karnataka, besides that of Dabholkar. **FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com**

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I,No-9097726X,Hav Mohd Amin Laway, R/O-Chehlan, PO- Hawand Chawalgam, Tehsil/District- Kulgam. In my service records the name of my daughter has been wrongly mentioned as Nazima Jan instead of Nazima Amin as mentioned in Matriculation certificates. It needs correction. Objections be filled to JAKLI Record office within seven days.

0020486985-1

I,Sumit Arora S/o Shri Subhash Chand Arora R/o House No. 1/1879, Moti Ram Road, Near Durga Mandir, East Ram Nagar, Shahdara Delhi-110032 have changed my minor son's name from Pranshu Arora to Vivaan Arora for all purposes.

0040768306-1

I,Sumit Arora S/o Shri Subhash Chand Arora R/o House No. 1/1879, Moti Ram Road, Near Durga Mandir, East Ram Nagar, Shahdara Delhi-110032 have changed my minor son's name from Pranshu Arora to Vivaan Arora for all purposes.

0040768095-1

The order issued by the health department stated, "All Heads of Departments are kindly requested to cease the administration of the above-mentioned fluids/infusion in their designated areas without delay. Any requests for the same should be directed to the Office of the Medical Superintendent and Vice Principal with effect from today, the 11th of January 2025..."

The nine intravenous fluids are Ringer's Lactate – 500 ml, Ringer's Solution – 500 ml, Dextrose 10%- 500 ml, Mannitol Infusion – 100 ml, Paracetamol Infusion – 100 ml, Ofloxacin 100 ml, Levofloxacin – 100 ml, 1/2 DNS – 500 ml 9, and Normal Saline – 3 L. Chief Secretary Manoj Pant also sought a detailed report from Principal Secretary, Health, by Sunday night.

According to reports, while the condition of the three women is stable, their haemoglobin count has decreased and are undergoing dialysis. "The saline came to the hospital store from Tamluk Drs," said Dr. Mausumi Nandy, principal, Midnapore MCH.

Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D, Bulandshahr E- Procurement Tender Notice									
Letter No. 81/1A						Dated: 03.01.2025			
On behalf of Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Executive Engineer, Provincial Division, U.P.P.W.D., Bulandshahr invites following percentage rate bids online through http://etender.up.nic.in from the eligible and approved Contractors registered with P.W.D. class as per column no. 10 below Road work Category as applied from Date 15.01.2025 to 22.01.2025 upto 12:00 Noon as per the prescribed T-1 of Govt. of U.P. The technical bid will be opened online on dated 22.01.2025 at 12:30 P.M. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bid as specified, the bid will be opened online on the next working day, at the same time any validity of bid will be considered from the original date. The date and time of opening of the financial bid shall be notified on the website.									
Sl. No	Name of Work	Estimated cost (Rs. In Lac)	Bid Security (Rs. In Lac)	Time of Completion work including rainy season	Tender Cost (In Rs.)	Address of Executive Engineer	Address of Superintending Engineer	Address of Chief Engineer	Category
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
In anticipation of Sanction									
Under Renewal Year 2025-26									
1	Renewal work from PC of Dunga to Chacharai link road in Km 1, 2, 3(250)	31.00	3.10	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
2	Renewal work from PC of Jahangirabad feeder bypass road to Gutchawali link road in Km 1(600)	6.50	0.65	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
3	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Jahangirabad Shikarpur via Binor Devi road in Km 1, 2(600)	17.60	1.76	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
4	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Shekhpur Rora link road in Km 1(900)	9.90	0.99	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
5	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Jonipur link road in Km 1(900)	9.90	0.99	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
6	Renewal work from PC of Khanpura to Navingranh link road in Km 1, 2, 3(800)	31.00	3.10	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
7	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Dugra link road in Km 1(420)	4.60	0.46	03 Months	150+500+18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
8	Renewal work from PC of Hasanpur Bangar link road in Km 1, 2(130)	12.40	1.24	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
9	Renewal work from PC of Budhana to Salangarh link road in Km 1, 2(400)	15.40	1.54	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
10	Renewal work from PC of Shivali-Salampur road to Nibhedra link road in Km 1(100)	1.10	0.11	03 Months	75+500+18% GST 104.00 = Rs.679.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
11	Renewal work of PC from Km 9 of Bulandshahr-Anupshahr road to Sikri link road in Km 1(700)	7.70	0.77	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
12	Renewal work from PC of Shivali-Salampur road to Sannaut link road in Km 1(250)	2.70	0.27	03 Months	150+500+18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
13	Renewal work from PC of Jinai DharamShala to Birauli link road in Km 1, 2(500)	16.50	1.65	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
14	Renewal work from PC of Dharamshala Jinai to Salagawan via Shivnagla link road in Km 1(970)	10.70	1.07	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
15	Renewal work from PC of Khalaar to Gyasundri's house in Aabadi CC part in Km 1, 2, 3(200)	24.20	2.42	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
16	Renewal work from PC of Khalaar Minor link road in Km 1, 2(500)	16.50	1.65	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
17	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Dunga jogi link road in Km 1(940)	10.30	1.03	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
18	Renewal work from PC of Salagawan to Bajhedra link road in Km 1(360), 2(590)	10.40	1.04	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
19	Renewal work from PC of Shikoi Bamanpur road to Pachdevara link road in Km 1(520)	7.10	0.71	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
20	Renewal work from PC of Hishwati to Bichauala link road in Km 1, 2(600)	17.60	1.76	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
21	Renewal work from PC of Khalaar to Gangawas Kali Sadak road in Km 1, 2(850)	20.40	2.04	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
22	Renewal work from PC of Mirpur to Bakaura link road in Km 1, 2(850)	20.40	2.04	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
23	Renewal work from PC of Bungla Poothri to Chidda to Kheda link road in Km 1, 2	22.00	2.20	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
24	Renewal work from PC of Khalaar road Km-3 to Kalara's Madhaiya link road in Km 1(600)	8.20	0.82	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
25	Renewal work from PC of Choti Sarai to Agarpur link road in Km 1, 2(400)	15.40	1.54	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
26	Renewal work from PC of Sahkari Nagar to Agarpur link road in Km 1, 2, 3(325)	32.00	3.20	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
27	Renewal work from PC of Khalaar to Tauli link road in Km 1(680)	7.50	0.75	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
28	Renewal work from PC of Jahangirabad Daulatpur road Km 4.15 to Karonji link road in Km 1(225), 2(275)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
29	Renewal work from PC of village Kishanpur's Aabadi Saini ki madhaiya link road in Km 1(870), 2(165)	14.20	1.42	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
30	Renewal work from PC of Aurangabad Bihra Jamalpur to Bondra link road in Km 1, 2(700)	18.70	1.87	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
31	Renewal work from PC of Pipala Khedi to Ekhlaspur link road in Km 1(600)	6.60	0.66	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
32	Renewal work from PC of BSG to Mudhakapur link road in Km 1, 2(500)	16.50	1.65	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
33	Renewal work from PC of BSG road Km 21 to Alava Shamshan Bhumi link road in Km 1, 2(500)	16.50	1.65	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
34	Renewal work from PC of Ramgarh link road in Km 1(500)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
35	Renewal work from PC of Aurangabad Bihra Jamalpur to Pipala Ekhlaspur link road in Km 1(655)	9.00	0.90	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
36	Renewal work from PC of Bulandshahr-Syana-Garh road Satsang Bhawan to Mudihakapur link road in Km 1, 2(400)	19.30	1.93	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
37	Renewal work from PC of Bulandshahr-Syana-Garh road Km-12 to Pali Begpur Aulina Jehra road in Km 4	13.70	1.37	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
38	Renewal work from PC of Bulandshahr-Syana-Garh road to Kenalki via Saidpura link road in Km 1(700), 2(300)	13.70	1.37	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)

39	Renewal work from BC of Jahangirabad-Aurangabad road to Jahangirabad Block road in Km 1(275)	9.60	0.96	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
40	Renewal work from PC of Jiroli to Malakpur link road in Km 1(400)	4.40	0.44	03 Months	150+500+18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
41	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Paenth Malakpur link road in Km 1, 2,3(620)	28.90	2.89	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
42	Renewal work from PC of BSG road to Charaura Musfabad link road in Km 1(540)	5.90	0.59	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
43	Renewal work from PC of Lakhwati-Saidpur to Pasauli to Lodho ki madhaiya road in Km 1(400)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
44	Renewal work from PC of Syana-Unchagaon-Bhaddau-Narsena Nahar Patri road in Km 31 to Amarpur link road in Km 1.2	22.00	2.20	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
45	Renewal work from PC of Amarpur to Shikoi link road in Km 1, 2(250)	13.80	1.38	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
46	Renewal work from PC of Amarpur to Maupur link road in Km 1(600)	6.60	0.66	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
47	Renewal work from PC of Pagona to Dugra link road in Km 1(800)	8.80	0.88	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
48	Renewal work from PC of Rajwana Pali road to Bhawsi via Aurangabad Chauraha road in Km 1, 2, 3(850)	31.40	3.14	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
49	Renewal work from PC of BSG road to Mathina Jagapur link road in Km 1, 2(650)	22.70	2.27	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
50	Renewal work from PC of Dhakoli to Tibra link road in Km 1, 2(100)	12.10	1.21	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
51	Renewal work from PC of Barkatpur link road in Km 1(580)	6.40	0.64	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
52	Renewal work from PC of BB Nagar babughar road Km-3 to Sehra link road in Km 1(400)	4.40	0.44	03 Months	150+500+18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
53	Renewal work from PC of BB Nagar Kutchesar to Tibra link road in Km 1, 2(275)	14.00	1.40	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
54	Renewal work from PC of BB Nagar Ladpur to Benipur link road in Km 1(500)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
55	Renewal work from PC of Neemapati to Fatehpur link road in Km 1, 2(100)	12.10	1.21	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
56	Renewal work from PC of BB Nagar to Madhaiya Tibra partial part link road in Km 1(500)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
57	Renewal work from PC of Sehra to Saidpur Bhainsakhur link road in Km 1, 2(100)	12.10	1.21	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
58	Renewal work from PC of Walipura to Eklandi link road in Km 1, 2, 3(200)	24.20	2.42	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
59	Renewal work from PC of BSG to Ishanpur link road in Km 1(300, 2, 3(950)	31.00	3.10	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
60	Renewal work from PC of LPK to Daultabad link road in Km 1(610)	6.70	0.67	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
61	Renewal work from PC of Gujaro's Madhaiya link road in Km 1, 2(730)	23.80	2.38	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
62	Renewal work from PC of Dhimro's Madhaiya link road in Km 1, 2(600)	22.00	2.20	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
63	Renewal work from PC of Khushlagh to Enchaura link road in Km 1(600), 2(100)	7.70	0.77	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
64	Renewal work from PC of Bulandshahr-Anoopshahr road to Talaiya Nagla link road in Km 1(650)	7.10	0.71	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
65	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Makhaina link road in Km 1(430)	4.70	0.47	03 Months	150+500+18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
66	Renewal work from PC of BA road to Chhaturia link road in Km 1, 2(600)	17.60	1.76	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
67	Renewal work from PC of Dharpa to Acheja Ghat link road in Km 1(250, 4, 5(500)	23.40	2.34	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
68	Renewal work from PC of Kauslena link road in Km 1, 2(150)	12.70	1.27	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
69	Renewal work from PC of Jamapur to Babupur link road in Km 1, 2(400)	15.40	1.54	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
70	Renewal work from PC of Jasawalai Kalan link road in Km 1, 2(460)	16.10	1.61	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
71	Renewal work from PC of Raipur Talab link road in Km 1(700)	7.70	0.77	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
72	Renewal work from PC of Kazampur Devli link road in Km 1	11.00	1.10	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
73	Renewal work from PC of Anhedha link road in Km 1(500)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
74	Renewal work from PC of Jollygarh Bisundhara link road to Barari link road in Km 1(650)	7.10	0.71	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
75	Renewal work from PC of Kisoli-Ashavar to Sihi link road in Km 1, 2(450)	16.00	1.60	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
76	Renewal work from PC of Kisoli to Ashwar link road in Km 1, 2, 3, 4(50)	33.60	3.36	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
77	Renewal work from PC of Karimnagar Banbol road to Gola Kuan link road in Km 1	11.00	1.10	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
78	Renewal work from PC of Banbol link road in Km 1(643)	7.10	0.71	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
79	Renewal work from PC of Dudupur to Maman Kalan link road in Km 1, 2	22.00	2.20	03 Months	300+500+18% GST 144.00 = Rs.944.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
80	Renewal work from PC of Maman Kalan link road in Km 1(600)	6.60	0.66	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
81	Renewal work from PC of Basendua link road in Km 1(500)	5.50	0.55	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)
82	Renewal work from PC of Kishanpur to Kumharo ki madhaiya link road in Km 1(643)	9.70	0.97	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer PD, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer, BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A,B,C,D (Road work)

13ECONOMY

I-TO-I PASSENGERS ACCOUNT FOR 10% OF AIR INDIA'S LONG-HAUL TRAFFIC

AI looks to double int'l connecting traffic in 3 years, bets big on premium classes

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

AIR INDIA views international-to-international (I-to-I) transit passenger traffic—or connecting at Indian airports passengers flying from one foreign country to another—as a huge growth opportunity and has been actively strategising and taking steps to attract more transit passengers on its international flights. According to airline's chief commercial officer Nipun Aggarwal, the efforts, which include network expansion and realignment at the Air India group level and tweaking flight schedules to facilitate better flight connections, have started bearing fruit.

“Almost 10 per cent of the traffic that we carry on our long-haul, wide-body aircraft is now I-to-I traffic... (when the Tata group took over Air India in January 2022) this must have been very low,” Aggarwal said in a recent interaction with reporters, adding that he expects the I-to-I traffic share to double to 20 per cent in three years.

Aggarwal also said that Air India has seen growing demand and revenue in premium seats—business and premium economy classes—and has decided to double premium seats on its legacy wide-body aircraft that will start going for retrofitting later this year. Air India is already adding premium economy seats to its legacy narrow-body aircraft,



File

which so far had a standard two-class cabin. The airline is also developing a first-class product for some of its future Airbus A350-1000 wide-body jets for select long-haul routes.

I-to-I opportunity

According to Aggarwal, the I-to-I market size overflying India was estimated at 130 million passengers as of 2023-24, but India's largest airport—Delhi—accounted for less than 1 per cent of this, while mega hubs Dubai and Doha accounted for 10 per cent and 7.5 per cent, respectively. Key international corridors that overfly India include Australia and New Zealand to Europe, Europe-Southeast Asia and South Asia, North America-Southeast Asia, and Middle East-South Asia.

This I-to-I opportunity is a key consideration in the Air India group's network development. In the overseas routes, Air India will focus on medium- and long-haul routes, along with a few short-haul routes that have enough demand for a premium product. Air India Express will service other

short-haul routes.

“Even for Air India Express, the first objective when they fly overseas is to see how they can feed our network as a priority,” Aggarwal said.

The airlines' short-haul network, earlier focussed more on the India-Middle East routes, is now being rebalanced by adding more flights to the east of India.

“We want to bring traffic from Southeast Asia and Far East and SAARC, and aggregate that traffic at our hubs, and then take them to Europe, US, Canada and those markets. So, we will focus on building strong I-to-I corridors at our hubs, and all other point-to-point opportunities which are there will be served by Air India Express,” Aggarwal said.

The airline has also been realigning its international flight schedule to facilitate better and more connection opportunities for international flyers at its hubs—Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru—with Delhi being the foremost.

“If you see this Europe to Australia corridor, which is called

the kangaroo corridor, it's one of the largest corridors globally, and it compares with the transatlantic corridor. We were hardly able to capitalise on this corridor, even though we have flights going to Australia and to Europe and the US...we have tried to align the flight timings that were going to Australia with the flights which were going to Europe. And now we will be able to connect the flights which are coming in from Frankfurt, Paris, London with the flights which are going to Melbourne, Sydney, and vice versa,” Aggarwal said.

Air India is doing similar realignments between Southeast Asia and Europe, South Asia and Europe, Southeast Asia and South Asia and North America.

“So SAARC (South Asia), Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, all the big markets to the east of India are slowly being connected with the markets that we fly to on the west of India. And that is a conscious strategy we are working on,” Aggarwal said.

Betting big on premium classes

Air India's decision to double premium seats on its wide-body aircraft is not without reason. As compared to the pre-pandemic period, the airline has seen front cabin (premium classes) revenue grow 2.3 times, while the back cabin, or economy class, revenue has expanded 1.6 times.

“I feel the front cabin gives more revenue, especially in the

case of full-service airlines, and the back cabin basically helps you to fill the plane, particularly on long-haul flights...in all the aircraft that we are adding in Air India, whether narrow-body or wide-body, we are putting a three-class product—premium economy, business, and economy,” Aggarwal said.

“The premium segment has been a big focus for Air India. We are a full-service airline. We want to be a world-class airline, and this is a segment that we are very focussed on, we very much like, and see huge opportunity in,” he added.

On being asked why Air India has decided to have a first-class on some of its yet-to-be delivered A350-1000 aircraft, Aggarwal said: “We are building an aspirational and world-class airline...most of the top airlines still have a very niche first-class product on some of their large and prominent routes...if you want to compete with the best airlines that are out there, you need to have a first-class product. It is an aspirational product. It defines how you run and build an airline.”

While Aggarwal did not indicate when the new first-class product will be launched, he said that it is likely to be deployed on routes to global megacities like New York and London, which do have demand for such a top-end cabin class. Some of Air India's Boeing 777 aircraft have a first-class cabin, but it is seen as far inferior to first-class products offered by top international airlines.

MARKET WATCH

MCAP OF 5 OF TOP-10 VALUED COS DROPS

The combined market valuation of five of the top-10 most-valued firms tumbled Rs 1,85,952.31 crore last week, with HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit. Last week, the BSE benchmark slumped 1,844.2 points or 2.32 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 573.25 points or 2.38 per cent. **PTI**

‘Targeted interventions in labour-intensive sectors, MSMEs needed to take growth to the next level’

AN IMPETUS to manufacturing and targeted interventions in labour-intensive sectors such as footwear, apparel, tourism, and furniture are required to take growth to the next level, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) president **SANJIV PURI** said. In an interview with AGGAM WALIA and AANCHAL MAGAZINE, Puri, who is chairman and managing director of ITC Ltd, also spoke about continuing government schemes for MSMEs which serve as a large employment base. Edited excerpts:

India's GDP growth is seen slowing to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY25

It's 6.4 (per cent) in a situation where the whole world is in stress. Of course, we would like to see it better but it's still a decent number...the first half is 6 (per cent), second half is 6.7 (per cent). So it is showing that it will pick up. There were transient factors in the first half — the elections, weather etc. We must recognise that it is achieved in a situation where merchandise export is depressed, China has been dumping stock in the globe and in India also. We've also gone through a period where food inflation has been sticky, which impacts the capacity to spend. So, in this situation, the fact that we're growing 6.4 per cent and 6.7 per cent in the second half, it kind of reinforces that we are on a strong foundation. Reinforces that policy interventions over several years have certainly helped to take us this far. We should really be discussing that having come so far, what needs to be done to go to the next level? 6.7 or 7 per cent to 7.5 per cent and 8 per cent.

What measures can be taken for higher growth?

There are several areas where there are opportunities to do things. After a long time, we have seen the resurgence in manufacturing. Certain sectors have really done well. Now, the question would be how can we take the learnings to some other sectors, particularly from an export perspective. How can we provide impetus to labour intensive sectors like footwear, apparel, tourism, furniture, and so on and so forth. Targeted interventions in each one of these sectors is what we've recommended.

Second, MSMEs have a large employment base. What is it that can be done to take the MSMEs forward? We believe that the ECLGS (Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme) has worked well, so that needs to be strengthened and continued. Second, the government has done a very good job in terms of digitisation of the economy and a lot of digital platforms are available for MSMEs, given that many of them have small establishments. So, can we look at a single platform? There are many right now, like Udyam, TReDS, GeM, and ONDC is also coming in. So, a seamless solution to all of them.

Third, to provide impetus to manufacturing, how do we get more and more sectors to integrate with global value chains. A targeted approach with an inte-



grated view as far as investments, trade, infrastructure, and skilling is concerned would be helpful. It would also mean that in these areas where impetus is being provided, the duty structure has to be aligned so that the cost of inputs do not make us uncompetitive. CII is suggesting that at some point in time, we should be looking at three tiers with very moderate rates in each one of them.

Do you think the bigger corporates have somewhere failed in stepping up investment as much as it was required, especially on the back of corporate tax cuts?

No, I don't think so. As far as corporate investment is concerned, if you look at the period after the rate cut, it has been a very turbulent period. There was Covid, then there was a pickup, and then the global turmoil. Despite all these situations, private capex as a percentage of GDP in 2022-23 was higher than pre-Covid. It's materially higher than pre-Covid. Now, there might have been some transient factors in the recent past where certain activity slowed down. But if you look at it today, CMIE has said that the announcements of capex have seen a segment jump in Q2. There is also data to show that the order books of industries to do with plant and equipment of capital goods is also good. Third, 35 per cent of our members are saying they will be investing more this year, 45 per cent are saying they will be investing more next year.

Now, what is coming in the way? One is this huge issue of China dumping. That does impact investment and two, the growth in consumption — ultimately capacity is invested to meet certain demands, so consumption impacts. And as the public capex on its own also crowds in private investment, that is also starting to pick up and will also provide some impetus going forward.

Wage growth has been a concern lately. There was a

recent FICCI-Quess study on stagnant growth in salaries between 2019 and 2023.

I don't know what data was used there. I haven't read the report. There are specialised agencies that actually provide data on how wages are moving in industry. It's a fact that private sector companies do annual reviews to retain talent based on inflation and this is also based on data that the experts publish. So, wages do go up and it is not that when profits go down, wages go down. It doesn't happen that way. The velocity of increase may get a little moderated, but it still increases. To senior and mid-level people, where there is a component of variable pay, that will of course have its impact, but it's not that the wages go down per se. It's very important for companies because otherwise they will not be able to retain talent. I think the larger issue may be on disaggregating the data to figure out which sectors and so on and so forth. I don't have that kind of information. But from an economy perspective, the larger issue is how to create more good quality jobs and which are the sectors that can provide impetus to employment.

You have stressed on the need to create good quality jobs. We have seen a rise in employment in agriculture, which is a reversal of the trend we were seeing earlier and not the ideal way of transition. What is urgently required for the creation of good quality jobs?

As far as agriculture is concerned, it will always remain important. It's about 45 or 46 per cent of the workforce. Even if it goes down, it will still be substantial. We have to bring in agricultural reforms to improve farmer incomes. There's no doubt about it. There are good schemes that the government is pursuing with FPOs (farmers producer organisations) and bringing in technology into agriculture. The journey has to continue and we have to provide impetus to take it forward. Agriculture has to improve.

As far as creating good jobs is concerned, providing impetus to labour intensive sectors, MSMEs, and integrating into global value chains — all these will create good quality jobs. The other opportunity we have in India is on the services side, which is really thriving, like GCCs (global capability centers) and IT. There's a lot of demographic dividend in rural areas given the better physical and digital connectivity. We can create integrated rural hubs, which have components of health care, skilling, education, career management, and so on and so forth. Some of it can be in public-private partnership. It can be around clusters of villages given that connectivity is better, you can travel to that place, do your training and go back. Because if a person has to come to the city, then there are a lot of expenses like lodging. Skilling and human capital development also becomes important to benefit from all of this.

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BRIEFLY

FinMin to meet heads of banks on Wednesday

New Delhi: Finance Ministry has called a meeting of heads of public sector banks (PSBs) on Wednesday to review progress of various financial inclusion schemes, including Jan Suraksha and Mudra Yojana. The meeting is scheduled to be chaired by Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju. **PTI**

'Import of certain dairy products: Nepal to consider request'

New Delhi: India has flagged concerns over the problems faced by its milk exporters in Nepal, with the neighbouring country agreeing to explore the possibility of facilitating imports of specific products like whey and cheese, an official statement said on Sunday. The matter came up for discussions during the meeting of the India-Nepal Inter-Governmental Committee on Trade, Transit, and Cooperation to Combat Unauthorised Trade, which was held in Kathmandu from January 10-11. “The Indian side highlighted the problems faced in milk exports to Nepal. The Nepali side agreed to consider the request of the Indian side positively for milk products not adequately produced in Nepal such as whey and cheese,” the Commerce Ministry said. **PTI**

Banks likely to face earnings pressure in Q3 on muted loan growth, higher credit costs

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, JANUARY 12

BANKS ARE likely to report subdued earnings in the third quarter ended December 2024 amid muted loan growth, challenges around deposit mobilisation and pressure on net interest margins.

Some of the lenders may see some worsening of asset quality driven by a rise in slippages in the agriculture sector and unsecured loans, including credit cards.

“Q3FY25 has been a tough quarter with higher credit cost, decelerating loan growth, shortage of deposits even amidst slowing loan growth, moderate pressure on NIM and lower trading gains. Asset quality is the over-

whelming theme,” Nuvama Institutional Equities said in a note.

Microfinance loans (MFI) and unsecured loans will continue to see elevated stress. Lenders such as ICICI Bank, Federal Bank and state banks are likely to face less stress while MFI lenders would see a sharp deterioration, it said.

“Apart from banks with a higher exposure to unsecured segments, particularly MFI and credit cards, we expect most banks to report under-control slippages and steady to improving asset quality trends,” Axis Securities said. Lenders' commentary around stress in the microfinance segment peaking-out would be keenly eyed, especially for small finance banks (SFBs) and banks with a prominent presence in the seg-

Lenders' commentary around stress in the microfinance segment peaking-out would be keenly eyed

ment. Axis Securities expects credit costs during the quarter to jump up significantly around 10 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) for its coverage banks, thereby weighing on earnings.

“We do not see any respite on earnings for banks, which is likely to de-grow by nearly 6 per cent QoQ in Q3FY25 estimate,” Axis Securities said.

The credit growth of banks tapered to around 11.12 per cent (as

of December 27) as against 15-16 per cent in the recent past. This is primarily driven by a significant slowdown in the unsecured loans alongside banks, mainly private banks intending to bring down their loan-to-deposits ratio (LDRs) to a balanced level, Axis Securities said. LDR is used to calculate the percentage of loans issued by a bank in comparison to its deposits. A higher LDR means that a bank is taking more risk by offering loans more than its deposits and low percentage means a bank is not using its deposits effectively.

Amidst concerns around asset quality in certain segments (majorly unsecured lending), weaker-than-expected macro data and constraints around LDR (for certain banks), banks have been cau-

tious towards chasing aggressive growth, Axis Securities said. The brokerage expects banks under its coverage to deliver around 12 per cent year-on-year (YoY) credit growth in Q3FY25, in-line with industry growth. The systemic growth rate for FY25 is expected to hover around 11-12 per cent, it said. According to Geojit Financial Services' fund manager Pawan Parakh, stock prices of banks are close to the bottom.

“Going ahead, as interest rates reduce, the fight for deposits should ease. Low interest rate environment augurs well for asset quality as well,” he said.

Over the next one to two quarters, investors should gradually build up exposure in this segment, he said.

TOPOF THE WORLD



Incumbent President Zoran Milanovic

Croatians vote for president, incumbent ahead in surveys

Zagreb: Croatians were voting on Sunday in a presidential runoff election, with opinion polls giving incumbent Zoran Milanovic a lead over Dragan Primorac, the ruling party's challenger for the largely ceremonial position. Polling stations opened at 0600 GMT and will close at 1800 GMT, with exit polls expected minutes later. Preliminary results will be known by about 1900 GMT and full, official results are expected in the following days. Around 3.8 million people in the NATO and European Union member are eligible to vote in Sunday's second round. The state poll panel said turnout by 11.30 am was 13.8%. **REUTERS**

SRI LANKA
Eight Indian fishermen held for 'poaching'

Islamabad: The Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday said it has arrested eight Indian fishermen for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters and seized two fishing trawlers. The arrests took place on Saturday night "during a special operation conducted in the sea area north of Mannar", it said in a press statement. With this arrest, so far this year 18 Indian fishermen have been arrested and three trawlers confiscated, the Navy statement said. **PTI**

FRANCE
Mayotte isles hit by new tropical storm

Cape Town: The French territory of Mayotte was battered by a new tropical storm Sunday, just weeks after the worst cyclone to hit the islands in nearly a century laid waste to entire neighbourhoods and villages and forced a huge recovery effort by authorities. Mayotte's people were ordered to stay indoors or find a solid shelter if they didn't have one, and store food and water, as Tropical Storm Dikeledi brought heavy rains to the island. Mayotte had only just begun the process of rebuilding after the devastation of Cyclone Chido last month. **AP**



An air tanker drops fire retardant at the Palisades fire, as seen from Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, Saturday, Reuters

Winds likely to strengthen, firefighters try to prevent spread of LA fire to east

REUTERS
LOS ANGELES, JANUARY 12

AIRCRAFT DROPPED water and fire retardant on steep hills to stem the eastward spread of the Palisades wildfire in Los Angeles on Saturday as on-the-ground firefighting intensified amid warnings of wind of up to 70 mph that could make matters worse. Over the past 24 hours, the Palisades Fire spread over an additional 1,000 acres, consuming more homes, officials reported. Six simultaneous blazes that have ripped across Los Angeles County neighborhoods since Tuesday have killed at least 16 people as of late Saturday, the

Washington Post and other media reported, citing the Los Angeles County medical examiner's office. Reuters could not immediately reach the coroner. The blazes have damaged or destroyed 12,000 structures, fire officials said. At least 13 people are estimated to be missing. The death toll is expected to mount when firefighters are able to conduct house-to-house searches. Cal Fire official Todd Hopkins told a press conference that while 11% of the Palisades Fire was now contained, it has burned over 22,000 acres. Evacuation orders throughout the Los Angeles area now cover 153,000 residents, putting 57,000 structures at risk.

Another 166,000 residents have been warned that they may have to evacuate.

Incompetent officials handling fires: Trump

Meanwhile, President-elect Donald Trump criticized local and state officials he believed had handled the situation badly. "The fires are still raging in L.A. The incompetent pols have no idea how to put them out. Thousands of magnificent houses are gone, and many more will soon be lost. There is death all over the place... they just can't put out the fires. What's wrong with them?" he said on his Truth Social feed.

RISK MAY RISE TO 'EXTREME'

PALISADES FIRE
— 11% contained

EATON FIRE
— 27% contained

LIDIA FIRE
— 76% contained

HURST FIRE
— 89% contained

KENNETH, SUNSET FIRES — fully contained

Source: The New York Times

S Korea's Yoon won't attend 1st impeachment trial hearing: Lawyer

REUTERS
JANUARY 12

SOUTH KOREA'S impeached president, Yoon Suk Yeol, will not attend the first hearing of the trial to determine whether he is removed from office or reinstated, due to concerns about his safety, *Yonhap* News reported Sunday, citing his lawyer. "The officials in the Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) and the police are trying to execute illegal and invalid arrest warrants through illegal methods, raising concerns about personal safety and mishaps," lawyer Yoon Kabkeun was quoted as saying. "In order for the president to appear for



Impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol

the trial, the issue of personal safety and security must be resolved." The Constitutional Court hearing is scheduled for Tuesday. The anti-graft office plans a second attempt to arrest Yoon in a probe over his failed attempt to impose martial law in early December. An arrest bid on Jan 3 failed after a 6-hour standoff with security personnel in Seoul. Yoon's lawyer did not respond to Reuters calls seeking comment.

Russia forms task force as Kerch Strait oil spill spreads

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, JANUARY 12

AN EMERGENCY task force arrived in Russia's southern Krasnodar region on Sunday as an oil spill in the Kerch Strait from two storm-stricken tankers continues to spread a month after it was first detected, officials said.

The task force, which includes Emergency Situations Minister Alexander Kurenkov,



Cleaning ops in Russia's Krasnodar region, Saturday

Zelenskyy urges Nato to honour promises, send air defences soon

REUTERS
KYIV, JANUARY 12

UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on allies on Sunday to honour all promises to supply Ukraine with weapons, including those to counter Russian air attacks. Ukrainian air defences downed 60 out of 94 drones launched by Russia overnight, the air force said on Sunday. It said that 34 drones were "lost", in reference to Ukraine's use of electronic warfare to redirect Russian drones. "Every week, the Russian war continues only because the Russian army retains its ability to terrorise Ukraine and exploit its superiority in the sky," Zelenskyy said on the Telegram app. He



Ukrainian servicemen at a position in Zaporizhzhia, Saturday

called on Ukraine's allies to fulfil agreements already made. "The decisions made at the NATO summit in Washington, as well as

those adopted during Ramstein meetings regarding air defences for Ukraine, have still not been fully implemented," he said.

In response to Putin's call for action, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry spokesman Heorhii Tykhyi accused Russia of "beginning to demonstrate its alleged concern" after the scale of the disaster became too obvious to conceal its terrible consequences. "Russia's practice of first ignoring the problem, then admitting its inability to solve it, and ultimately leaving the entire Black Sea region alone with the consequences is proof of its irresponsibility," Tykhyi said Friday.

abused his power in the conflict over the house. Yang, 67, described what he called a pattern of persecution by the Singapore government in recent years. In 2020, his son was charged with contempt of court for criticizing Singapore's courts in a private Facebook post. That year, his wife, a lawyer who had arranged for the witnesses at the signing of the patriarch's will, was barred from practicing law for 15 months. In 2022, they left Singapore. Loong, 72, who now holds the title of senior minister, declined to comment. Yang acknowledged that his father had detained opposition politicians and union leaders, but said that he "had the best interests of the country at heart."

Lee Kuan Yew transformed a colonial outpost into an economic powerhouse in a generation. He made no bones about intervening in the lives of Singaporeans and prioritized the community over the individual — a notion that some observers say points to the irony of the family feud.

Months after Lee's death, the government formed a committee to explore options for the house. That marked the start of Yang's troubles with the state. Loong told the panel that he was "very concerned" that the demolition clause in the will was "reinserted under dubious circumstances."

To the younger siblings, it appeared that the committee was "conducting an inquisition" into their father's will, Yang said, pointing out that a court had declared it as binding.

For Yang, the People's Action Party had lost its way. He joined the Progress Singapore Party, a new opposition group, and considered running for president, a ceremonial post. In 2022, police asked to interview him and his wife, saying they had lied in the misconduct proceedings. The couple agreed to be questioned at a later date, but soon left Singapore. It was not until 2023 that a minister revealed in parliament that they were being investigated by authorities. **NYT**

FIRST AWARD 'WITH DISTINCTION' IN FOUR YEARS

POPE AWARDED MEDAL OF FREEDOM WITH DISTINCTION

U.S. President Joe Biden spoke with Pope Francis on Saturday and awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction, the nation's highest civilian honor, the White House said. It was the first time during his four years in office that Biden awarded the medal "with distinction," it said. **REUTERS**

FIRST SUCH MEETING AFTER ASSAD'S FALL

Saudi hosts Western & regional leaders, urges lifting of Syria sanctions

Meet discusses steps to support new govt; EU ministers will meet at end of month to discuss easing sanctions

PESHA MAGID
RIYADH, JANUARY 12

EUROPEAN FOREIGN ministers will meet at the end of January to discuss the lifting of sanctions on Syria, the EU foreign policy chief said on Sunday in Riyadh ahead of a meeting of top Middle Eastern and Western diplomats and Syria's new foreign minister. Kaja Kallas, the EU foreign policy chief, said the foreign ministers would convene in Brussels on January 27 to decide how the 27-nation bloc would relax sanctions on Syria. After 13 years of civil war, Syria's President Bashar al-Assad was ousted in a lightning offensive by insurgent forces led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham a month ago. Any European decision to ease sanctions would be conditional on the new Syrian administration's approach to governing, which must include "different groups" and women and "no radicalisation", Kallas said, without elaborating. Sunday's conference was the first meeting of Western and regional leaders hosted by regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia since Assad ouster. Saudi foreign minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said he stressed "lifting the unilateral and UN sanctions imposed on Syria as continuing ... sanctions will hinder the aspirations of the Syrian



Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani and his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in Riyadh, Sunday, Reuters

people to achieve development." Germany on Sunday proposed allowing relief for the Syrian population, but retaining sanctions on Assad allies who "committed serious crimes" during Syria's war. "Syrians now need a quick dividend from the transition of power, and we continue to help those in Syria who have nothing," German Foreign minister Annalena Baerbock said. British foreign minister David Lammy joined the Riyadh talks along with ministers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as the UN special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen. **REUTERS**

EXPLAINED
Likely hurdles for inclusive transfer

UN SPECIAL envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen had told the Security Council that crises like a lack of transparency over the militias who had not yet folded into the new defence ministry and the actions of the Israeli military inside the Syrian territory could raise doubts about an inclusive and peaceful formation of a transitional government.

Top Israeli security team in Doha for Gaza truce talks

REUTERS
JERUSALEM, JANUARY 12

A TOP level Israeli security delegation arrived in Qatar on Sunday for talks on a Gaza hostage and ceasefire deal, a spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, in a possible sign of so-far elusive agreements nearing. Qatar and fellow mediators Egypt and the United States are making renewed efforts to reach a deal to halt the fighting in the enclave and free the remaining 98 hostages held there before President-elect Donald Trump takes office on January 20. Netanyahu's office said on Saturday that the delegation includes Mossad Head David Barnea, the head of the Shin Bet domestic security service Ronen Bar and the military's head of the hostage brief, Nitzan Alon. Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, met Saturday with Netanyahu, after having met Friday with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Israeli and Palestinian officials have said since Thursday that some progress has been made in the indirect talks between Israel and militant group Hamas but did not elaborate. The sides have been keeping a tight lid on the details being worked out.

RIFT BETWEEN HIS THREE CHILDREN REFLECTS AN INTENSIFYING DEBATE OVER SINGAPORE'S SEMI-AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Lee Kuan Yew's will has casued a bitter feud in his family — over his mansion

SUI-LEE WEE
SINGAPORE, JANUARY 12

THE BUNGALOW was built for a Dutch trader in colonial times, but it has become part of modern Singaporean lore. It was where Lee Kuan Yew lived for decades, where he started his political party, and where he began building Singapore into one of the richest countries in the world. Lee had said that he wanted the house to be demolished after he died rather than preserved as a museum, with the public "trampling" through his private quarters. But the wording of his will has left the property's fate in limbo

and caused a rift among his three children — one that reflects an intensifying debate over Singapore's semi-authoritarian political system. Now, an extraordinary voice has joined those who complain that the city-state's prosperity has come at the cost of a government that lacks accountability: one of Lee's own children. "The idea that one good man at the center can control this, and you just rely on his benevolence to ensure that everything is right, doesn't work," Lee Hsien Yang, the youngest child, who wants to honor his father's wishes for the house, said in a recent interview with *The New York Times*. After Lee Kuan Yew's death in

2015, the elder child, by then Singapore's prime minister, argued that his father's instructions for the bungalow were ambiguous. His siblings wanted it demolished, though one continued to live in the house, and as long as she did, its fate remained unresolved. Then, after her death in October, the dispute resurfaced — and escalated sharply. Lee Hsien Yang, called Yang by his parents and siblings, announced that he had obtained political asylum in Britain because he feared being unfairly imprisoned in Singapore over the disagreement. Yang said his brother — Lee Hsien Loong, who stepped down in May as prime minister — had



Lee Hsien Yang, Lee Kuan Yew's youngest child has lashed out at the country's political system over its 'lack of accountability'

15 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

ON URBAN VS RURAL INNOVATION

We had an independent assessment of the first 1,000 labs which are the most mature. The number of innovations, on an average, from a rural school is higher as compared to that in an urban school

Soumyarendra Barik: In the four years since you took over the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), the number of tinkering labs increased from 6,000 to more than 10,000. What's your assessment of the entire programme? What have you learned through the process about the Indian society's appetite for innovation, and what are some of the challenges?

When I came, all the mandates that AIM had for its first phase (AIM 1.0), were met. We were to make 10,000 Atal tinkering labs in schools for children from Class six to 12. We were to make 101 Atal incubation centres — business incubators which take an idea to a startup and provide services. We were to make 50 community innovation centres. And then we were to run Atal 'New India challenges' for 200 ministries. The first three got done. In the 'New India challenge', we still have a balance of 50 or so. But by and large, the targets were met. In terms of the appetite, there are 10,000 Atal tinkering labs across 722 districts. About 66 per cent of them are rural. And about 95 per cent are in schools. There's a lot of hunger.

What it took to get here is quite simple — maker spaces, a 3D printer, vinyl cutter, mechanical tools, electronic tools and entrepreneurship tools. There's a lot of excitement. This is also, interestingly, the only space in India's schools where there's no exam, where a student can explore, look around a problem and work on a solution which is exactly the opposite from the rest of the education ecosystem, where a teacher teaches you a solution. Obviously, in real life the problems come before solutions. We had an independent assessment of the first 1,000 labs which are the most mature. The number of innovations, on an average, from a rural school is higher as compared to that in an urban school. Sixty per cent of these are in government schools.

The greatest challenge for innovation and entrepreneurship to soar in our nation are cultural. Families want their children to be safe and not take risks. For an academic to trust a business person is a challenge. For a business person to believe that an academic can also be interested in practical problems is a challenge. For the government to think that the private sector can as efficiently deliver on some of the tasks is a challenge. For the private sector to think that the government can also be progressive and fast-moving is a challenge. These cultural chasms are the biggest challenge. It is a mindset thing. It has nothing to do with our capability.

Soumyarendra Barik: Could you cite some examples where the region, socio-economic background, literacy level of parents has not mattered and their experience in the societal system has shaped their problem-solving abilities?

The discovery of problems is the most fascinating part for me. For instance, Sivakasi is known for manufacturing fireworks. We have an Atal Tinkering Lab there. These are children of parents who are labourers in these factories. For these children sometimes the factory is their home. The greatest hazard in this process of making firecrackers is when you have to mix chemicals. And if your proportions and processes are not right, there can be an explosion and then it can really burn down a bunch of huts. We all have seen cement mixers on highways which continuously rotate a drum on a truck. They have taken inspiration from that and tried a mechanical drum to work with these chemicals to make that particular step safer. The fascinating part is that later, we built an Atal Community Innovation Centre in Kalasalingam, which also has a university, which is near Sivakasi. One of the things that happens at these centres is that they do these events. So people from around can come and know what is happening and exhibit what's happening. These kids came and they put up their project. Kalasalingam faculty walked by and a chemical engineering person, a physics person, and one from mechanical engineering said that this was quite interesting because now you can even model this. You can say that these are chemicals to be mixed. These are their properties. These are their time constants, catalytic energy. This is how it should be mixed. This is the angle and the velocity of rotation, angular momentum of the drum. The life of this family is now a mathematical problem. Kids absolutely love it because now they see why they have to learn physics and why they have to learn engineering. If we can give such experiences to children, then we don't have to tell them to study this or that. They will do it.

Soumyarendra Barik: While we have a vibrant startup ecosystem, our key

WHY CHINTAN VAISHNAV



Dr Chintan Vaishnav was the Mission Director for Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), a Government of India initiative to encourage grassroot innovation across the length and breadth of the country, for close to four years. Before that, over the past decade, he split his time between teaching and research at MIT

and living and working with rural communities in India. As a teacher, innovator and entrepreneur, he has first-hand experience of the various parts of the innovation ecosystem, both in India and the US. He also served as the Chair for the Startup 20 engagement group during India's G20 Presidency



ON INNOVATION IN POLICYMAKING

In science, technology and innovation, the policy processes, which are always consensus based, have the danger of diluting the outcome. We have to be bold enough to follow that one right way

'Greatest challenge for innovation in India is cultural. Families want their children to be safe, not take risks'

Chintan Vaishnav, former Mission Director, Atal Innovation Mission, on AI putting us in an unknown paradigm, need for startups to benchmark themselves and how we have lost a generation. The conversation was moderated by Soumyarendra Barik, Special Correspondent, *The Indian Express*



Chintan Vaishnav, former Mission Director, Atal Innovation Mission (right) in conversation with Soumyarendra Barik, Special Correspondent, *The Indian Express* Tashi Tobgyal

competitors, the US and China, are much ahead in terms of creating original work. Even our big businesses spend very little on R&D. Will that not hinder innovation and prevent us from being competitive?

It is true, it is a problem. We'll have to come at it from multiple angles. My theory of change is that hopefully there will be a tipping point beyond which there will be enough examples that more would want to do it. But, at the moment, the scenario is very conservative. For instance, when I came to AIM, I would meet large corporations and ask them, 'when do you increase your R&D spending?' Or alternatively, 'when do you work with a startup that has done the research that you would have wanted to do?' Their answer would boil down to: if we see a clear connection to our top line or we see a clear connection to the bottom line. And I want either my top line to improve or my bottom line to improve. In other words, I want my portion of the pie to be expanded. But then there are sectors after sectors, with AI, where the pie is disappearing. Then what do you do? The disappearing pie conversation is not happening. That's what we need.

Ravi Dutt Mishra: A heated debate on H1B visa is on and it is a part of a bigger problem. Since the politics of the US and Europe is changing, what should we be doing differently?

The picture is as hazy for me as it is to everybody else. I don't think there is a lot of strategising to be done. It's just the basic value proposition that we are useful to each other or not and in what ways. The United States ecosystem understands which startups to leverage. Zoho, for instance, has gone across the world.

Anil Sasi: There is still a considerable gap between risk takers and risk funding in startups. A lot of the initial funding still comes in from family. To what extent do you see this gap narrowing and how crucial is funding beyond the non-traditional means?

As to reducing the gap in the future, there are fairly large swaths of our economy that we have not yet tapped into. So a very large fraction of India's GDP is vernacular businesses. These are not businesses that are in the startup land at all. They understand business very well. They don't consider startups as an asset class. By one

measure, 60 per cent of India's GDP is in vernacular businesses. We'll have to engage with them; with small amounts of risk. If you want to put a lot of money, that's a late-stage game. But if you want to put some money in, it's an early-stage game. The government has given a lot of early stage grant money. Our experience with that has been that the return is pretty handsome. This is government money, so it is not really saying that only if you give me my return will I invest in your risky idea. This is more risk-loving capital. The one challenge is that the quality of ideas is still variable.

Anil Sasi: How important is it for startups to benchmark themselves to what's happening in developed markets? Also, in this new AI space, which is still uncertain about monetisation, do you see Indian firms having an opportunity?

This sort of theory about thinking global from the get-go is now at least known to people. So they will strive in that direction. In certain sectors which are leading, say FinTech, e-commerce, there's also know-how. But that knowledge is still in limited spheres and not widely available. As it does become more available, there'll be more of it. At the same time, there could be an over-fascination with unicorns and global ideas. In some sense, you can have a very healthy market in our country and that would be fine. But in neither cases can you really compromise the fundamentals of business.



Harish Damodaran: Why is it that most of our innovations are coming in services? Why are we not able to bring this innovation into manufacturing?

For young people doing startups, and for investors too, doing a startup in services, SaaS (Software as a Service) and e-commerce, it is a practical choice. Most of our young entrepreneurs do not have deep pockets. They are choosing something with a fast clock speed to build a software, where the return is in three years, say best case, five years, worst case, 10 years. There is nothing wrong with it. That trend will go on and we should keep an eye on the other trend, but we should never expect our people to be more impractical because this person is already taking risks against their family's wishes. We have to embrace them. When somebody sells their first startup and has a little deeper pocket, then they will do something in bio manufacturing among others. There are many examples of this. Capability is there, but weaving it together, taking it together, it takes its years of work.

Soumyarendra Barik: We are now exploring cutting-edge sectors like semiconductors. The change and money is being driven by the bigger firms but the suppliers are often from China or Taiwan. We are going towards Taiwan plus one or China plus one in smartphones. How can that change?

So China plus one or Taiwan plus one is not our achievement? It just happens to be there? How will we get into this sphere of

ON LACK OF INNOVATION IN MANUFACTURING

Most of our young entrepreneurs do not have deep pockets. They are choosing something with a fast clock speed and faster returns. It is a practical choice and there is nothing wrong with it

vision and have a bigger picture and a strategy to make, to become globally competitive? I think that will have to start in education. Why is it not happening or scaling across the world? Because it takes teachers to do a lot more work. Maybe AI will help. We will have to teach. The children will then create something new because they have those skills and a perspective.

Raj Kamal Jha: If Kota and JEE remain the gateways, how do you link Atal Labs to this? Do IITs have a role to play in outreach to schools?

It's experimentation all along. Some of the IITs, BITS Pilani among others, have begun to reserve two seats for somebody coming on the basis of innovation. That's a great start. The tension of the JEEs versus tinkering is going to remain, because again, an average parent wants a secure path, a prestigious path. They don't link this to science and mathematics at all. One of the things that we are trying to do is to bring parents into the fold and invite them into these exhibits. But, on a very small scale, the Atal Tinkering Labs with 10,000 labs are still only in five per cent of our schools. So we're not transforming the country. But you step back and look at what is happening to our human capital. For every 100 that enter school, 28 go to college, 72 don't. What about those 72? The present battle is to open Atal Tinkering Labs to everybody and not only somebody who is good at mathematics and physics. We have the potential to do a lot. There are a lot of people who can do so much. We still don't have a pathway. All of those institutions will have to change. And this new pathway will have to be there. JEEs will do JEEs. We need scientists. Nothing wrong with it.

Yashee: We talk of involving parents, but is there an element of involving teachers in these tinkering labs? In schools, teachers are not really thinking about innovation. They have a syllabus to complete.

Teachers are, of course, the linchpin. In Jammu Kashmir, we said that we will not restrict tinkering lab training to only those schools that have tinkering lab, nor to only those teachers who are in charge. We said we will get into the state departments training programme, and we will train everybody, all teachers. The results are phenomenal. Last year, in the Atal Tinkering marathon, where there were

20,000 teams. The national average was 3.2 per cent. Jammu Kashmir was 36 per cent.

Soumyarendra Barik: In your four years working closely with the government, do you see a scope for innovation?

In science, technology and innovation, the policy processes, which are largely consensus based, have the danger of diluting the outcome. Because you're trying to cater to a diversity of opinions and in science, we have to be bold enough to follow that one right way. We have to drive towards people who have spent a long time with some of these subjects, like quantum and semiconductors, sophisticated subjects that a person working their entire life is still struggling to understand. The second thing is that something is fundamentally changing. AI, as its influence grows, is for the first time putting us in a paradigm after the industrial revolution, where the clock speed of technological change is faster than the clock speed of institutional decision making. This is not a paradigm we have had. Even with the fastest growing technologies like say mobile phones, it took 20 years before it reached saturation. So we had time to catch up. We won't have that time. We are in a non-deterministic paradigm. You have an input and a predictable output. Here, the thing in between is learning. So, you may not have a predictable output. As a result, decision-makers who are very well-meaning simply don't have the tools to grapple with this.

Raj Kamal Jha: Then you also have lakhs of young men and women, out of school or college, preparing for a few thousand government jobs. How do you see your roadmap for innovation making a difference to this? Have we lost a generation?

Yes. And I don't know how long it will take. I feel that the innovation ecosystem work will take 40 years. It has taken that much time for other nations. There's more technology and globalisation, so it may shorten it a little bit. But building those institutions will take time. And we are disruptors. The incumbent is the exam only. And in the classic Christiansonian sense, the incumbent is going to ignore all of this until this trend gets to a point where somebody from this trend can marry easily, and can have a better retired life.



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What draft rules on VC appointments say, why states are upset

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

SEVERAL STATES have objected to provisions in The UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025, that could give the Chancellor — who is typically the state Governor — a bigger role in appointing Vice Chancellors (VCs) of state universities.

How VCs are appointed

Regulations notified by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2018 said a search-cum-selection committee comprising eminent persons in higher education shall shortlist 3-5 candidates by public notification, nomination, a “talent search process”, or a combination of these processes.

The Chancellor — or Visitor in a central university — appoints the VC from among the recommended names.

In the case of state and private universities, one member of the committee is nomi-

inated by the UGC Chairman. For state universities, the rest of the committee is constituted in accordance with state law.

The Kerala University Act, 1974, for example, says the VC will be appointed by the Chancellor “on the unanimous recommendation of a committee appointed by him consisting of three members”, one elected by the university Senate, and one each nominated by the UGC Chairman and the Chancellor (Governor).

Central universities are established under an Act of Parliament, and are administered by the Centre. The Visitor, their ceremonial head, is the President of India.

The composition of the committee to appoint the VC of a central university is determined by the Act that governs the university. For the University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University, for example, the committee has two nominees of the university Executive Council, and one of the Visitor.

States vs Centre over VCs

Over the past several years, non-BJP governments in states have clashed with the Governor, who is a nominee of the Centre, over the appointment of VCs.

KERALA: The tussle began in 2021, when then Governor Arif Mohammad Khan claimed he had been forced to act against his conscience by the LDF government in the reappointment of Gopinath Ravindran as VC of Kannur University. In 2023, the Assembly passed a Bill to replace the Governor with eminent educationists as Chancellors of universities in the state. The Bill is yet to receive the assent of the President.

WEST BENGAL: The Supreme Court is seized of the matter arising out of the state government’s challenge to a June 2023 order of the Calcutta High Court upholding the unilateral appointment of interim VCs in 13 universities by Governor CV Ananda Bose.

In July 2024, the SC appointed former Chief Justice of India U U Lalit to head separate search-selection committees to shortlist candidates for the positions. There has been some progress in this process since.

Earlier, the West Bengal Assembly passed The University Laws (Amendment) Bill 2023 to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as Chancellor of state-aided univer-

sities. It is yet to receive the Governor’s nod.

KARNATAKA: In December 2024, the Assembly passed a Bill to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as Chancellor of Karnataka State Rural Development and Panchayati Raj University. The Bill is yet to receive the Governor’s assent.

In November, the Karnataka Cabinet had decided to do the same for other state universities as well. The state Higher Education Minister had said a draft Bill was in the works to amend the Karnataka State Universities Act to bring in critical administrative reforms for the

42 universities under the state government.

MAHARASHTRA: In 2021, when Uddhav Thackeray’s Maha Vikas Aghadi government was in power, the legislature passed a Bill that restricted the Governor’s power to only approving VC candidates recommended by the state government, and gave greater authority to the state’s Higher and Technical Education Minister instead.

The Bill remained pending with then Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari. After Eknath Shinde became Chief Minister in

2022, the new government withdrew the Bill and the original process, in which the Governor had the final say in the appointment of VCs, was restored.

TAMIL NADU: In 2022, the DMK-led government passed two Bills to allow the state government to pick VCs for state universities, but these Bills were not approved by the Governor. Last year, Governor R N Ravi asked the government to recall the notifications to set up search committees for VCs of several state universities on the grounds that they did not include the nominee of the UGC chairman. The appointments remain pending.

New UGC regulations

■ The draft rules say “the Chancellor/ Visitor shall constitute the Search-cum-Selection Committee comprising three experts.” The 2018 regulations did not specify who would constitute the committee.

■ The new regulations specify the composition of the committee: a member each nominated by the Visitor/ Chancellor, the UGC Chairman, and the apex body of the university (Senate/ Syndicate/ Executive Council). This gives nominees of the Centre the majority.

■ Besides professors, individuals at senior levels in industry, public policy, public administration, or public sector undertakings, can also become VCs, says the draft.

Question of federalism

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan said the draft regulations “undermine federalism by stripping states of their rights to appoint” VCs, and “vest unchecked power in the Chancellor”.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly has asked the Centre to withdraw the draft regulations. Chief Minister M K Stalin has said giving Governors broader control over VC appointments is a “direct assault on federalism and state rights”, and an attempt to “undermine democratically elected state governments”.

However, UGC chairman M Jagadesh Kumar has said the draft regulations seek to provide a “robust process” for selecting VCs, “aligning with the overarching goals of quality and transparency in higher education”. The 2025 draft removes the ambiguities of the 2018 regulations, he said. It is aligned with the National Education Policy 2020, he said. **(WITH SHAJU PHILIP, SANATH PRASAD, SWEETY KUMARI, PALLAVISMART)**

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

WHAT IS PINK FIRE RETARDANT, BEING USED AGAINST CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES?

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

AS MULTIPLE wildfires blaze in Southern California, authorities are using planes to drop a large amount of bright pink fire retardant. While its use is not new in the United States, growing research has raised questions about its effectiveness and potential environmental impact.



A tanker drops fire retardant during a wildfire in California. *The New York Times*

What is the fire retardant?

Fire retardant is a mix of chemicals used to extinguish or slow the spread of fires. To tackle wildfires in the US, authorities commonly use a brand known as Phos-Chek, which mostly contains an ammonium phosphate-based slurry. Salts like ammonium polyphosphate do not evaporate easily like water, and stay for longer.

Stanton Florea, a spokesman for the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, told *The New York Times* that the retardant is sprayed ahead of the fire to coat vegetation and prevent oxygen from allowing it to burn.

Colour is usually added to the fire retardant to ensure that firefighters can see it against the landscape. This helps them create fire lines, potentially saving lives and property. Phos-Chek is pink because the colour is “by far the most visible. And, it is pretty,” Melissa Kim, vice president of research and development at Perimeter Solutions, which manufactures Phos-Chek, told *NBC Los Angeles*.

What are the concerns?

Environmental experts have argued that spraying fire retardants using planes is ineffective, expensive and a growing source of pollution for rivers and streams.

A 2024 study by researchers at the University of Southern California found that Phos-Chek “is laden with toxic metals”, and estimates retardant use has released “850,000 pounds of these chemicals into the environment since 2009,” as per a report by the *Los Angeles Times*.

These toxic metals include chromium

and cadmium, which can cause cancer, and kidney and liver diseases in humans. However, their adverse environmental impact is potentially bigger in scale, especially when retardants enter waterways and kill aquatic life.

The effectiveness of Phos-Chek also remains unclear because it is one of the numerous firefighting tactics deployed in a major fire. After the flames are extinguished, it is difficult to assign credit.

Studies have found that the effectiveness of aerial retardants also depends on factors like slope, fuel type, terrain and weather. Timothy Ingalsbee, a former wildland firefighter and executive director of the nonprofit Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology, told *LA Times*, “Aerial retardant is effective over a narrow range of conditions, and the windows of opportunity for those conditions are narrowing each year due to climate change.”

As global temperatures continue soaring, wildfires are expected to become more frequent and intense. This will only increase the use of aerial fire retardants.

Data show that more than 440 million gallons of retardant were unleashed between 2009 and 2021 in the US. The USC study estimated that as a result, more than 400 tonnes of heavy metals were released into the environment, *The NYT* reported.

EXPLAINED CULTURE

Kumbh origin, history, appeal

The Kumbh Mela begins in Prayagraj today. Why is it held in four cities periodically? What are Ardh and Maha Kumbh? And why do millions flock to the Mela, making it the largest gathering of devotees on Earth?

YASHEE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12

IT IS cold in Prayagraj, foggy with a chance of rain. Yet, on Monday, hundreds of thousands are expected to arrive in the city, to camp on the banks of the Ganga. During their visit, they will stay in tents and bathe in the river, and the most devout will take a dip before dawn when the stars are still twinkling.

Prayagraj is hosting the Maha Kumbh — or Poorna Kumbh — which is held every 12 years. Many myths are prevalent around the Kumbh Mela, there are many theories about its origin. Some say the festival finds mention in the Vedas and Puranas. Some say it does not go back more than two centuries. What is certain is only that it is the largest gathering of religious devotees on Earth.

What is the Kumbh Mela, and why is it held in four cities by turns? What is Ardh Kumbh and Maha Kumbh? What do the millions who attend it seek? The answers lie in a mix of myths, history, and the enduring faith of an ancient people who trust as much in the munificence of invisible deities as in tangible life-givers like rivers.

Mythological origins of Kumbh

The Sanskrit word *kumbh* means pitcher. The story goes that when *devas* (gods) and *asuras* (loosely translated as demons) churned the ocean, Dhanvantri emerged carrying a pitcher of *amrit*, or the elixir of immortality. To make sure the asuras did not get it, Indra’s son, Jayant, ran off with the pot. The Sun, his son Shani, Brihaspati (Jupiter), and the Moon went along to protect him and the pot.

As Jayant ran, the *amrit* spilled at four places: Haridwar, Prayagraj, Ujjain, and Nashik-Trimbakeshwar. He ran for 12 days — and as one day of the *devas* is equal to a year of humans, Kumbh Mela is celebrated at these locations every 12 years, based on the relative positions of the Sun, the Moon, and Jupiter.

Prayagraj and Haridwar also hold the Ardh (half) Kumbh every six years. The festival held after 12 years is called Poorna Kumbh or the Maha Kumbh.

All four places are on the banks of rivers — Haridwar has the Ganga; Prayagraj is the *sangam* (meeting point) of Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati; Ujjain has the Kshipra, and Nashik-Trimbakeshwar the Godavari.

It is believed that taking a dip in these rivers during Kumbh, amid the specific alignment of the heavenly bodies, washes away



Devotees make their way to the banks of the Ganga in Prayagraj on Sunday, a day before the Maha Kumbh begins. *Vishal Srivastav*

one’s sins and accrues *punya* (spiritual merit). *Sadhus* and other holy men gather at Kumbh Melas, and regular people can meet them.

“While the importance of the Ganga in Hindu religion is well known, the Kshipra is believed to have emerged from the heart of Vishnu in his Varah (boar) *avatar*. The Godavari is often called the Ganga of *Dakshin* (south),” Dr Dipakbhai Jyotishacharya, who runs the Parashar Jyotishalaya in Gujarat’s Vapi, told *The Indian Express*.

Deciding the site

According to the Kumbh Mela website, when Jupiter — which takes 12 years to complete a revolution around the Sun — is in Aquarius or Kumbh *rashi* (whose symbol is the water bearer), and Sun and Moon are in Aries and Sagittarius respectively, Kumbh is held at Haridwar.

When Jupiter is in Taurus, and the Sun and Moon are in Capricorn or Makar (thus, Makar Sankranti is also in this period) the Kumbh is held at Prayag.

When Jupiter is in Leo or Simha, and the Sun and Moon in Cancer, the Kumbh is held at Nashik and Trimbakeshwar, which is why it is called Simhastha Kumbh.

Debate over Kumbh’s antiquity

Reference to the Kumbh in the Skanda Purana is sometimes cited as evidence of its antiquity.

Girija Shankar Shastri, head of the Department of Jyotish at Banaras Hindu University, said, “The Skanda Purana is widely cited to explain the origins of the Kumbh Mela, but those references have not survived in the extant versions of the Purana.” In fact, Prof Shastri said, “No scripture can be definitively said to contain a reference to the Kumbh Mela as we know it today. While the Samudra Manthan is described in many books, the spilling of *amrit* at four places is not.”

Dipakbhai Jyotishacharya said that a book published by Gorakhpur’s Gita Press, called *Maha Kumbh Parva*, claims that the Rig Veda has *shlokas* that mention the benefits of participating in the Kumbh Mela.

Many believe that the periodic fairs were started by the 8th-century Hindu philosopher Adi Shankaracharya as a place where Hindu ascetics and scholars could meet, discuss and disseminate ideas, and guide lay people.

The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) described a fair in Prayag in the seventh century. However, the Indologist Kama Maclean has pointed out that while Xuanzang does mention a fair, it cannot be established that he was describing the Kumbh Mela (*Pilgrimage and Power*, 2008).

Maclean has written that an ancient bathing festival of Magh mela (fair held in the Hindu month of Magh) was held at Prayag, which the *pandits* of the city re-branded as the “timeless” Kumbh sometime

after the Revolt of 1857 to ensure the British did not meddle with it.

D P Dubey, a retired professor of ancient history at the University of Allahabad who has studied the Kumbh Mela in depth, has written that the fair at Haridwar is likely to have been the first to be called Kumbh Mela, as Brihaspati is in Kumbh *rashi* for this fair.

“The origins of the Kumbh are linked to the worship of the Ganga as the great life force of the northern plains. Fairs on the banks of sacred rivers are indeed an ancient Hindu tradition. Gradually, travelling *sadhus* spread the idea of four Kumbh Melas on the banks of sacred rivers, where lay men as well as *sanyasis* could gather. Apart from pilgrimage, such huge gatherings also presented an opportunity to earn influence and followers,” Dubey told *The Indian Express*.

In the book *Kumbh Mela, Pilgrimage to The Greatest Cosmic Fair*, Dubey, citing records from the Mughal era to those kept by *sanyasi akhadas*, writes, “The Kumbha Mela came to be organised sometime after the twelfth century CE. The tradition of holding this religious festival possibly crystallised during the heyday of the Bhakti movement, a movement of the socio-religious reforms set on foot by a series of Hindu saints and reformers.”

What pilgrims do at Kumbh

While some come for only one ritual dip in the river to wash away sins, many, termed *kalpwasi*, stay at the riverbank, to take a break from the daily fight of earning material resources and earn spiritual credit instead.

With any large crowd comes the chance of commerce, and the Mela has also served as a market crucial to local communities. Historically, there are records of Venetian coins and European toys being spotted at the Mela markets.

The various *sadhu akhadas* set up camp. They go for ritual baths, called *shahi snan*, in elaborate processions. In the past, tussle over which *sadhu akhadaa* is important enough to bathe first has led to bloody battles, so now, an order is generally pre-decided.

“The Kumbh Mela has played an important part in history by mobilising and uniting society. These days, it is easy to advertise the time and venue of the next mela, but centuries ago, it was the *sadhus* that made astrological calculations and spread the word. People travelled to the venues without trains or motorised vehicles, without the option of luxury tents, driven only by faith. During the freedom struggle, the *melas* were a venue to spread nationalist thought,” Rakesh Pandey, retired History professor at BHU, said.

John Nyberg, the director of the International Hydrographic Organisation, told *The NYT* there is “no formal international agreement or protocol in place for naming maritime areas”.



SLAM SNIPPETS



Aus Open: Lebanese Habib makes history with first round win

HADY HABIB'S history-making run at the Australian Open will continue after the first man to represent Lebanon in a Grand Slam singles tournament in the Open era became the first to win a match, defeating Bu Yunchaokete of China 7-6 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (6) on Sunday in front of a loud group of supporters. "This is probably one of the best days of my career, honestly. It's such an incredible feeling to get this win — not only for myself but for Lebanon and Lebanese tennis," said the 26-year-old Habib, who is ranked outside the top 200 on the ATP Tour. "As you guys could see there, the crowd was absolutely wild. It made it even more special to win in front of them. ... I felt the energy out there."

In between, he lived in Lebanon — where his father is from — from the ages of about 6 to 12, he explained, and picked up the sport there. He represented Lebanon at the Paris Olympics last year, losing to four-time Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz in the first round. **REUTERS**

Ponchos at premium as rain wrecks day one

THE FASTEST moving thing at the Australian Open on Sunday was not a tennis ball but a \$25 poncho at the tournament's gift shop as wet weather wreaked havoc with the action on the opening day of the Grand Slam.

Persistent rain forced the cancellation of a quarter of the scheduled singles matches and fans not lucky enough to have a ticket for the main showcourts, which have roofs, sought shelter from the elements around the Melbourne Park precinct.

The main gift shop ran out of ponchos by early afternoon and umbrellas, priced at \$35 and \$40, were selling like hot cakes forcing staff to continually restock. Thousands of fans braved the elements hoping the rain would abate but four hours after the start of the first matches on the outer courts. **REUTERS**

Vekic sends regards to wildfire-hit LA

DONNA VEKIC drew a heart and wrote "LA" on a courtside camera lens following her Australian Open victory on Sunday before turning her thoughts to her coach Pam Shriver, who is back home in California helping her family amid devastating wildfires. Six simultaneous fires that have ripped across Los Angeles County since Tuesday have killed at least 16 people as of late Saturday, several media reports said citing the Los Angeles County medical examiner's office. "It's a very difficult situation for her. She's home in Los Angeles. Her house is okay for now, but so many have lost everything and it's a horrible situation," Vekic said after beating Diane Parry 6-4 6-4 in the opening round. "We were doing our pre-season in Los Angeles this year, so we were just there two weeks ago. I really can't believe what's happening. We're very sad that she's not here with us. "We really miss her here. We're in touch daily and I hope everything will be okay." **REUTERS**

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

The favourite and the forgotten



Aryna Sabalenka breezed past Sloane Stephens 6-3, 6-2 in the 1st round of the Australian Open. Reuters

Double defending champion Sabalenka starts with a routine win while former top-five player Nishikori mounts spirited comeback

NAMIT KUMAR
JANUARY 12

IN HER first Major as World No.1 and with a target on her back being the heavy tournament favourite, a first round against a seasoned opponent could have been a potential banana skin for Aryna Sabalenka on the opening day of the 2025 Australian Open.

Instead, Sabalenka powered through the defences of 2017 US Open champion Sloane Stephens 6-3, 6-2 in the kind of dominant fashion expected of a two-time defending champion arriving in Melbourne in the form of her life.

The Belarusian picked up a routine straight-sets victory under the roof of the Rod Laver Arena, her 28th in her last 29 matches at the Australian Open. It was the kind of win that signalled a warning to the rest of the locker room, reaffirming the top seed's status as the one to beat in the women's section this Aussie summer.

Sabalenka, attempting to become the first woman since Martina Hingis in 1999 to win three successive women's singles titles in Melbourne, fashioned a 4-0 lead in the first set and looked set to dominate proceedings before suffering a mini-blip, Stephens breaking back to bring the score to 4-3.

The World No.1, now 26 and in the best physical and mental shape of her career, was touted for great things even as a teenager, given her evident talent and the easy power she enjoys. But her early career was marked by tentativeness, and she was known for frequent double faults when the pressure was on.

All that now seems a thing of the past as, when the pressure was applied on Sunday, she readily found another gear. Sabalenka broke Stephens again, took the set in the next game, and wrapped up the match in another 30 minutes. "In that moment, I would get frustrated and probably would lose the first set," Sabalenka said post-match, per Reuters. "I'm really glad that I improved my mental toughness, let's say."

Sabalenka enters the Australian Open having won three of her last five tournaments, including the tune-up event in Brisbane last week. While the next fortnight may throw up several challenges, as far as statements of intent go, this was as matter-of-fact as it gets.

Comeback win

The first comeback from a two-set deficit



in 2025 came on the very first day of Grand Slam tennis. Former World No.4 and US Open finalist **Kei Nishikori** saved two match points to mount a resurgence and beat Brazil's Thiago Monteiro 4-6, 6-7 (5), 7-5, 6-2, 6-2 in an opening-day thriller at John Cain Arena on Sunday. Injury problems have curbed Nishikori, now 35, for years, as he made several attempts to return to the elite level of men's tennis, where he spent most of the 2010s in. A strong finish to 2024 on the lower-rung Challenger Tour and a return to full fitness put him in good stead to start this season, which he began with a run to the final of the ATP 250 event in Hong Kong last week, catapulting him back into the top 100 of the rankings.

That Nishikori continues to have signs of life was evident in the vintage performance of over four hours on Sunday to make it to the second round of the Australian Open for the first time since 2015.

The Japanese player, still the only man from Asia to reach a singles Major final, saved two

Key Results

MEN'S SINGLES:

Kei Nishikori defeated Thiago Monteiro, 4-6, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-2, 6-3; Casper Ruud (6) defeated Jaume Munar 6-3, 1-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-1; Alexander Zverev (2) defeated Lucas Pouille, France, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

WOMEN'S SINGLES:

(14) Mirra Andreeva defeated Marie Bouzkova 6-3, 6-3; (1) Aryna Sabalenka defeated Sloane Stephens 6-3, 6-2; (18) Donna Vekic defeated Diane Parry 6-4 6-4; (5) Qinwen Zheng defeated Anca Todoni 7-6(3) 6-1.

match points on his serve down 4-5 in the third set before finding the baseline solidity of old and outlasting his opponent in the marathon match. Nishikori's victory was not the only five-set grind of the day. Sixth seed and three-time Grand Slam finalist Casper Ruud avoided becoming the first top name to be bundled out of Melbourne after prevailing 6-3, 1-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-1 over Spain's Jaume Munar.

Nagal loses opener

India's top-ranked singles player, Sumit Nagal was defeated in straight sets by World

No.25 Thomas Machac to end the Indian challenge this year in Melbourne.

Having been dealt a tough draw, Nagal, the only Indian player to qualify for singles action at the Australian Open, lost 3-6, 1-6, 5-7 to the promising Czech. Nagal was put under pressure early in the encounter and failed to make good of his chances, especially in the third set.

Despite the two-set deficit, he had fought back and fashioned a 3-0 lead in the third before allowing Machac back into the encounter and eventually finding.

Rain dampener

While action featuring the top players was seamless, chaos prevailed at Melbourne Park with the first half of the day disrupted by rain. Despite starting on a Sunday to ease the scheduling pressure, allowing the 128 first-round singles matches to take place across three days, rain spoiled those plans with as many as seven matches pushed to Monday.

Such was the scramble that, according to a news report in The Guardian, Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, the two best players in the world, were forced to share one half of an indoor court as both of them prepared for their opening assignments, against Nicolas Jarry and Alexander Shevchenko respectively.

Ten-time former champion Novak Djokovic, looking to bounce back after a Slamless year, will also kickstart his tournament on Monday against Indian-origin American Nishesh Basavareddy.

Casella scores wonder goal in Toofans' big win

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE
JANUARY 12

WHEN ZACH Wallace played a crossfield aerial ball from midfield, it seemed like just another attacking move. But when the ball reached Argentina's Maico Casella, it turned into one of the moments of the Hockey India League so far at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium. Casella unleashed a shot on the volley, from an acute angle, that rocketed past Krishan Pathak in the Kalinga Lancers goal. It was a goal that reminded one of an iconic football moment: Marco van Basten's famous strike for Netherlands at Euro 1998.

Casella's goal helped Hyderabad Toofans on their way to an impressive 5-1 triumph against Kalinga Lancers. For Toofans, Gonzalo Peillat (6', 30'), Casella (21'), Tim Brand (47') and Arshdeep Singh (54') scored.

Lancers got off to a dream start with Alexander Hendrickx (5') but couldn't score after that. But their joy was short-lived as the Toofans struck back within a minute with another drag flicking ace Gonzalo Piellat firing home.

The Toofans took the lead in astounding fashion in the 21st minute when Casella scored one of the top contenders for the goal of the tournament. Peillat struck his second goal via yet another delightful drag flick before half-time as Toofans bounced back from a lacklustre start, playing on consecutive days.

Tim Brand got on the scoresheet as he found the back of the net in the 47th minute to give Toofans a comfortable 4-1 lead. Despite the cushion, the Toofans didn't take their foot off the pedal and were rewarded with a fifth goal in the 54th minute. The Lancers had taken off their goalkeeper in search of goals and Arshdeep Singh made the most of that by looping the ball into an empty net. His overall play meant Arshdeep was also named player of the match.

Thierry Brinkman hit the post twice on the night but the Toofans deservedly prevailed for a comfortable win and moved up to second on the points table.



Gonzalo Peillat (6', 30'), Maico Casella, Tim Brand and Arshdeep Singh scored in the Hyderabad Toofans' 5-1 win. *HIL*

Jansen stars on opening night of Women's Hockey India League

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
JANUARY 12

IF IT was up to her, Janneke Schopman said after the Hockey India League (HIL) auction in October last year, she'd have assembled a squad with all the top Indian players she had worked with during her time as the national head coach. Indeed, from the start of the auction, she put her paddle up for a lot of the first-team Indian players, but crucially, didn't go overboard for any of them. Because she was waiting for the one name she really wanted: the Netherlands' Yibbi Jansen. When her name came up, Schopman went all out to ward off the interest from the other teams.

The FIH Player of the Year in 2024, Jansen is a superstar of the all-conquering Dutch women's team. She was the leading goalscorer at Paris 2024 as the Netherlands clinched gold.

And it was Jansen who starred on the opening night of the inaugural women's HIL as Odisha Warriors thumped Delhi SG Pipers 4-0 to confirm their pre-event status as the team to beat. Jansen (16th minute and 37'), Baljeet Kaur (42') and Freeke Moes (43') were on target, as they turned on the style in the third quarter, pumping in three goals.

"She is the best drag-flicker by far in the world," Schopman had described Jansen after the auction. "Everyone wanted her, but we made our strategy in a way that we will get her. Some of the Indians, who I'd have loved to have on our side, went for high prices. But we stuck to our plans and got Yibbi for just under what we had planned."

The Rs 29 lakh recruit proved her worth straight away. Jansen scored with the first penalty corner of the night, rifling her side into the lead after what was a closely-fought first quarter. The opening was created by another



Yibbi Jansen (16th minute and 37'), Baljeet Kaur (42') and Freeke Moes (43') were on target for Odisha. *HIL*

Dutch star, Freeke Moes, and it allowed Jansen to do what she does best.

At half time, the match was still in the balance as Lily Owsley and Sunelita Toppo were impressive for Delhi in attack, but Aussie vet-

The FIH Player of the Year in 2024, Jansen is a superstar of the all-conquering Dutch women's team. She was the leading goalscorer at Paris 2024 as the Netherlands clinched gold.

eran Jocelyn Bartram stood strong in goal for Odisha, with Deep Grace Ekka also solid in defence.

Schopman was pleased with the lead, and the fact that Jansen lived up to her billing, but knew the game was not over yet as the Navneet Kaur-led side held a solid attacking threat.

But in the third quarter, the floodgates opened. Michelle Fillet won Odisha their first PC of the second half and Jansen was at it again.

The Delhi goalkeeper was not even in the frame to save this time, as the ball flew past the player on the post as well.

The third goal came from the stick of Baljeet, who was among the last few young players to make their India debut under Schopman. Moes then added gloss to the scoreline shortly after. In the final quarter, Delhi threw the kitchen sink in trying to reduce the deficit but the Odisha defence held firm.

"There goes a lot of work behind the scenes; I do a lot of strength training and hockey training and then I put some extra time for my penalty corners. So yeah, it takes a lot of time, but it is something I love so it doesn't feel like work," Jansen had told Hockey India recently. "I think the HIL is going to be a big adventure and I am really looking forward to it."

And it is an adventure that has gotten off to a delightful start for the Dutch goal-scoring machine.

What makes Anahat the most promising squash player in the country?

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
JANUARY 12

AFTER THE third game of the prestigious British Junior Open U17 final, India's Anahat Singh — the top seed — was in trouble. She had dropped two games and trailed against Egyptian prodigy Malika Elkaraksy. As she came out of the court in Birmingham before the fourth game started, her mentor and Indian squash legend Saurav Ghosal was upset, not because she was losing the final but because he was certain Anahat wasn't playing to the level she was capable of.

"Initially, just nothing was working out," Anahat told *The Indian Express*. "When I came out of the court after the third game when I was 1-2 down, he was quite angry with me. That was one reason I started playing better. It motivated me because I didn't want him to get more upset (smiles). He knew I wasn't playing my best and was telling me to focus on my basics. Even if I played at 50% of my capability, I'd make sure I'd win. It was just one last push, I'm glad I got through it."

Eventually, the 16-year-old defeated 14-year-old Malika in the final, 4-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-5, 11-3, winning what is considered one of the

pinnacle age-group events on the tour, apart from the World Junior Championships. Now Anahat has won a title in three categories: U11 in 2019, U15 in 2023, and U17 in 2025.

"I know what she's capable of. Different circumstances require different approaches," Ghosal told this daily. "In the final, I just felt her intensity wasn't where it needed to be, affecting her performance. Sometimes, a wake-up call is needed to remind her to trust her abilities and produce what she can. The girl she played, a 14-year-old Egyptian, is a talented player who has a great future. So I think Anahat did well to turn it around."

Anahat saw that as a sign of the expectations on her. "If my coach isn't happy that I won a tournament, then obviously there's a lot more to do," she said, adding with a smile that Ghosal was still upset after the final. "I've only won one tournament this year; there's much more to achieve. He is right, I didn't play my best this week, and I wasn't happy with it either. So, he has the right to be angry!"

'Natural ability'

Identified by PSA as one of the five players to watch out for in 2025, Anahat's ceiling is high. On the PSA circuit last year, Anahat picked up nine titles, and that has pushed her up close



Anahat Singh is being mentored by Saurav Ghosal. *Britishjunioropen.com*

to the top 80. While her eyes are on winning medals at the Asian Games already, in the short term she hopes to enter the top 50, maybe even top 30 by the end of the year. Of course, there is LA 2028 as well, where squash has been added to the roster. But Anahat doesn't want to

think too much about it right now.

"She has a lot of natural ability, retrieves a lot of balls, and is physically good. Mentally, she's strong too. She hates to lose and is very competitive, which is essential," Ghosal said. But the team around her — Ghosal and her

coaches Grégory Gaultier and Stephane Galifi — know there are areas to work on.

"Off the court, she could be more professional in preparation. That's where Gregory (former world No 1) and I help. She is generally a laid-back person. I just think on the squash court she needs to be a little bit more intense so that she can play the game that is required at the top level." Ghosal levels of intensity? "Well, I was good. But Gregory is actually a great example, every time he stepped on court you could literally feel his intensity." The Indian ace added that all this will take time, but she has the right attitude to learn.

There is no doubting the youngster's talent and drive. "The British juniors is one of the most prestigious events there is," Indian star Joshna Chinappa, a two-time title winner there, told this daily. "The best players play in this event year after year and it's a significant achievement from Anahat to have won three titles so far. She has a lot of great strokes and also plays quite a mature game for someone so young. She has a long way to go but is on the right track."

Ghosal, however, is keen to take age out of the equation. "We are keeping her benchmarks high and putting the good kind of pressure on

her not to worry about how old or young she is, but to focus on raising her level. There is one girl in particular, Egypt's Amina Orfi, who is only 17 and already in the world's top 10. So, there's an example in front of her."

Indeed, Egypt poses the stiffest challenge in squash. Ten Egyptians are in the current women's world's top 20. Anahat herself has had her share of disappointments at the World Junior Championships quarterfinals. A medal, thus, has been elusive in the premier tournament. It is the goal that she has set for 2025. For Ghosal, it comes down to preparing with the mindset of beating them. "You can't do that by playing like them, you have to tactically know what to do. Anahat has the ability, but she has to put the work in," he said.

Anahat's response to being asked what she needs to work on to improve her game was simple: "Everything." Even before the question about her dream of a World junior medal was completed, she interjected. "I need to turn those quarterfinal finishes into a win. This time I am going into the tournament aiming to win. Not focusing on just winning a medal anymore, it doesn't seem to be working out if I am thinking like that! If I am supposed to win it, I am supposed to win it now." Ghosal approved. "I am glad she is thinking that way."

Adventure enthusiast Saikia is BCCI secretary; Prabhtej elected treasurer

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, JANUARY 12

DEVAJIT SAIKIA, an advocate and a former wicket-keeper batsman from Assam, would succeed Jay Shah as the new secretary of the Indian cricket board (BCCI). He was elected unopposed—a poll was not contested as there were no contestants, electoral officer A K Joti stated in his declaration of results—to the seat left vacant after Shah assumed the office of the International Cricket Council chairman in December last year. Saikia will remain in his post for the next ten months, until the next round of elections for the office-bearers.

Similarly, Prabhtej Singh Bhatia from Chhattisgarh State Cricket Sangh (CSCS) would be the new treasurer as he replaced Ashish Shelar, who became the Information and Technology minister in Maharashtra government. Both are relatively unfamiliar names, but come with a wealth of experience in multiple streams.

FA Cup: 10-man Utd beat Arsenal on penalties



Manchester United 'keeper Altay Bayindir saved a penalty in the second half and one during the shootout. Reuters

REUTERS
LONDON, JANUARY 12

JOSHUA ZIRKZEE scored the winning penalty for 10-man Manchester United against Arsenal after their hectic FA Cup third round tie finished 1-1 after extra time at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

Arsenal's Kai Havertz was the only one of the first four penalty takers to miss, denied by a brilliant stop from Altay Bayindir, before Zirkzee – booed off in a defeat by Newcastle United last month – stepped up to win the shootout 5-3.

After an underwhelming first half, United took the lead in the 52nd minute through Bruno Fernandes' curling effort from just inside the box after a great run by Alejandro Garnacho.

The game turned on its head 10 minutes later though, as United's Diogo Dalot – already booked for a wild challenge on Myles Lewis-Skelly – received a second yellow card for a reckless tackle on Mikel Merino.

Two minutes later, Bayindir's poor attempted punch fell at the feet of Gabriel, whose shot took a wicked deflection off Matthijs de Ligt and in to put the Gunners in charge of the tie.

Arsenal could have completed the comeback when they were awarded a questionable penalty after Havertz went down under minimal contact from Harry Maguire.

But Bayindir produced a superb save from Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard, before the Gunners spurned several chances to score a winner.

United will find out their opponent in the fourth round when the draw is made later on Sunday evening.

As a cricketer, Saikia's career lasted one season and four games, which yielded only 53 runs in six innings, eight catches and a stumping. Soon, he burned his cricketing ambitions and traded the gloves and bat for a degree in law. In 1997, six years after his last Ranji game at the age of 21, he quit his job at the Reserve Bank of India and began legal practice, specialising in criminal and insurance laws, at the Guwahati High Court.

But his ties with the game remained, as he continued participating in six-a-side tournaments and club games in the state as well Indian Lawyers' Teams. But the breakthrough moment came when he took on Assam Cricket Association (ACA), alleging that the association had misappropriated funds. After years of legal tussles and more allegations, a new regime took over the association, with Saikia as its secretary, in 2019. Two years later, he was appointed the state's youngest ever Advocate General of Assam.

A classmate of Assam's Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, he was appointed as



Prabhtej Singh (left) and Devajit Saikia (second from left) were elected as treasurer and secretary of the BCCI on Sunday. BCCI

senior standing counsel of the State in 2019 and represented the government in the High Court and Supreme Court. Apart from cricket

association, he is into administrating other sports bodies too. He is the secretary of the 115-year-old Guwahati Town Club as well as

Karun's first-class comeback with Vidarbha has spurred a rich vein of form and interest from India selectors

VENKATA KRISHNA B
CHENNAI, JANUARY 12

SCROLLING THROUGH X (formerly Twitter), one could hear the plea Karun Nair made back in December 2022.

"Dear cricket, give me one more chance," he would tweet with a fingers crossed emoji accompanying the words. In the middle of a domestic season back then, it seemed India's cricketing eco-system, except for quizzers, had forgotten one of only two triple-centurions in their Test history. Even his state team, Karnataka, had moved on from Karun, who spent the most of 2022-23 season just taking throw downs and facing amateur net bowlers. Cut to January 2025, and Karun is the story of the ongoing domestic season, as his fourth successive century and fifth of the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy put Vidarbha into the semi-finals on Sunday.

As India enter a transitional phase, with seniors Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli struggling in Tests, Karun happens to be a player that the selectors are watching with keen interest. "It was an emotional moment when I put that tweet," Karun tells *The Indian Express* shortly after his unbeaten 122 and an unbroken 200-run stand with Dhruv Shorey (118 n.o.) saw Vidarbha overcame Rajasthan by 9 wickets at the Moti Bagh Stadium in Vadodara.

"For six-seven months, when I didn't play any cricket, all I did was travel three hours a day just to have a net session. I had no other option. I wasn't considered for any format and I was really emotional at that point of time. I had to move on and work on myself. Moving on wasn't easy, I needed a couple of months to get over it and then start practising my skills and mindset. I would say, I was just preparing myself so that when I got another opportunity, I was not going to give anyone an excuse to drop me. For that, I needed to score runs and be consistent. So I just worked hard to get that back in my game," Karun says.

In the days and the months that followed, Karun would indulge in soul searching and most of it would happen at the Just Cricket academy in Bengaluru. With his coach Vijay Madyalkar by his side, Karun would get down to batting hours together with the sole focus being a return to first-class cricket. Techniques weren't changed, nor were there any tweaks. What Karun would focus on was batting for long periods. It isn't new to him. In his early days, that's what set him apart and earned him a national call-up.

Now he had to start doing it all over again, but first up, he had to find a team and



Karun Nair scored his fourth successive century and fifth ton of the Vijay Hazare Trophy in Vidarbha's nine-wicket win over Rajasthan on Sunday. KSCA

former India international and current BCCI GM Abey Kuruvilla came to his rescue.

"He was my selector during my U-19 days, and I had the freedom to walk up to him and say, 'Sir, I'm looking for a team to play, could you please help' and that's how I moved to Vidarbha. I'm really thankful for him and for the Vidarbha association because I was just looking for an opportunity and when it came, I just wanted to grab it," Karun says.

In the 2023-24 Ranji season, Karun

would tally 690 runs on the back of having a strong outing for Northamptonshire in his maiden County appearance.

Though he played only three matches and had scores of 78, 150 and 21, his hunger had stood out and in 2024, returning to County, he scored a double century as well. Having already hit a ton this Ranji season, it is during the Vijay Hazare Trophy that Karun has again made heads turn.

He started with an unbeaten 112 and has followed it up with scores of 44*, 163*,

the Guwahati Sports. An adventure enthusiast, he rode a Harley Davidson along the famous Route 66. He regularly hits the Manali-Spiti Valley route too.

In 2022, he was elected joint-secretary of the BCCI. When Shah vacated, he became the acting secretary till the board found its outgoing secretary's nomination. Now, he succeeds Shah in a crucial time for Indian cricket, when the red-ball team is in flux and the captain-coach combo of Rohit Sharma and Gautam Gambhir under intense scrutiny. As the secretary, he would oversee the team selection, apart from handling the board's day-to-day affairs.

Beer baron

Unlike Saikia, Prabhatej does not wear too many hats. Son of former CSCS president Baldev Singh Bhatia, who played an important role in the State getting full-member status in 2016, he has served as Apex Council member in BCCI's 2019-2022 tenure. He was among the three-member committee that probed into the allegation of Wriddhiman Saha receiving

threats from a journalist. The 33-year-old, though, has not held any posts since.

He is the co-founder and CEO of Simba Beer. His family has been in the liquor distribution industry for several decades, after his grandfather opened a liquor shop in Rajnandgaon, where he settled after partition, in 1948. He was doing his undergraduate degree in Economics and Finance at the Exeter University when the idea of starting a craft beer firm in India—his was one of the firsts to tap into the boom—struck him. In 2014, his dream materialised, despite his father's suggestion to open a distillery or a winery. Last financial year, it generated an annual revenue of 30.6 million dollars. His favourite brew, though, is Silver Moon, a premier green tea brand.

The two took official charge of their office during its special general body meeting in Mumbai. "The two (02) elective posts of the office-bearers - secretary and treasurer were uncontested, and it was not necessary to conduct a poll in respect of these Two (02) Posts," stated Joti in his declaration of results.

BRIEFLY

NZ name trio of young pacers for CT

Wellington: Fast bowlers Lockie Ferguson and Ben Sears were recalled to New Zealand's 15-man squad on Sunday for the Champions Trophy next month in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. Sears was a traveling reserve for last year's Twenty20 World Cup but missed New Zealand's test series in India in November and the first half of the domestic season with a knee injury. He returned from injury on Thursday in a T20 match for Wellington province. Sears, Will O'Rourke and Nathan Smith have been named to play at their first ICC tournament but Jacob Duffy, who was outstanding in the T20 and one-day international series against Sri Lanka, has been named as a traveling reserve. PTI

Guardiola says Walker wants to move abroad

Manchester: Manchester City captain Kyle Walker wants to explore a move away from the four-time defending Premier League champion, manager Pep Guardiola said Saturday. Walker, who has won six league titles and the Champions League during a trophy-laden spell at City, was left out of the team for the 8-0 rout of Salford City in the FA Cup. "So two days ago Kyle asked to explore the options to play abroad at the end of his career," Guardiola said. "He has been our right back and given us something that we didn't have and have been amazing. But now in his mind he would like to explore already, to go to another country to play the last years for many reasons." AP

B'desh omit Shakib, Litton from CT squad

Dhaka: Bangladesh on Sunday omitted former skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who has been suspended from bowling in international and domestic cricket because of an illegal action, from their Champions Trophy squad. Shakib, who failed a test of his bowling action at the Loughborough University in England last month, also could not procure a positive assessment in a second independent test conducted at the Sri Ramachandra Centre for Sports Science in Chennai recently. The omission from the 15-member Champions Trophy squad could also mark the end of the 37-year-old's ODI career. The tournament begins on February 19. PTI

Jemimah stars as India seal series vs Ireland

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JANUARY 12

AFTER JEMIMAH Rodrigues' maiden ODI century and a collective batting effort powered India to their highest-ever ODI total of 370/5, their bowlers completed the job as India took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series against Ireland in Rajkot on Sunday.

Electing to bat first in the second ODI, India skipper Smriti Mandhana, who has been having a stellar run in the format, scored 73 off 54 deliveries and out on a 156-run opening stand with Pratika Rawal (67). At her attacking best, runs flowed for Smriti, while Pratika grew in confidence at the other end. But their dismissal off successive deliveries brought Ireland back into the game.

On a day when there were plenty of bright spots on India's batting front, Harleen Deol's approach was an exception. Even though the No.3 came at a time when India had lost two quick wickets, she was too slow to get off the blocks. Against quality sides, such a timid approach can let opponents take control. Even Ireland did precisely that before Jemimah came to the rescue with frequent boundaries. Off the first 21 deliveries that Harleen faced, she



Jemimah Rodrigues' ton powered India to their highest-ever ODI total. Sportzpics

had only 5 to her name, before gradually picking up pace and ending up with 89 off 84 deliveries.

In their 183-run stand, it was Jemimah's intent that made it a match-winning effort. Her innings was a sight to behold. With a lot of overs to play with, she went about

building an innings but once she touched fifty, the Mumbai player took just 28 more deliveries to reach her first ODI century.

"It has been a long wait to get this hundred. Glad that the team gave me a role at No.4 and I could deliver," Jemimah told the broadcasters at the innings break.

"Today, the important thing for me was to be there till the 50th over. Getting runs is not a problem, I am good at that, but being there till the end was important and glad I could do that. Having Harleen there, initially we took time to assess the conditions. I know I can accelerate but while I took time, Harleen spoke to me to keep believing. We can't take any team lightly. We have followed domestic cricket here, 390 has been chased," Jemimah added.

With the steep target in front of them, Ireland put their best foot forward and for the second successive match, managed to bat the entire 50 overs.

Sarah Fobes got a good start at the top making 38 before Christina Coulter Reilly made 80 off 113 deliveries at No.3. Batting fluently like Jemimah did in the first half of the game, Reilly was all class. But the rest hardly put up a fight as Ireland ended with only 254/7 with Deepti Sharma being the pick of the Indian bowlers with three wickets.

Brief scores: India 370/5 in 50 overs (Jemimah Rodrigues 102 off 91 balls, Harleen Deol 89 off 84 balls, Smriti Mandhana 73 off 54 balls, Pratika Rawal 67 off 61 balls) beat Ireland 254/7 in 50 overs (Christina Coulter Reilly 80 in 113 balls; Deepti Sharma 3/37) by 116 runs.

Punjab Kings announce Shreyas as skipper for 2025

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JANUARY 12

SHREYAS IYER will lead the Punjab Kings in the upcoming IPL 2025 season after being roped in by the franchise during the IPL 2025 Mega Auction last November.

The 30-year-old Mumbaier expressed gratitude to the Punjab Kings management. "I am honoured that the team has reposed its faith in me. I am looking forward to working again with Coach Ponting. The team looks strong, with a great mix of potential and proven performers. I hope to repay the faith shown by the management to deliver our maiden title," Iyer said in a statement.

Last year, Iyer became the eighth captain to win the coveted IPL title as he led the Kolkata Knight Riders to their championship, beating SunRisers Hyderabad in the final. Despite three seasons with the franchise, Iyer was released by KKR, following which he became the second-most expensive IPL auction signing ever when Punjab snapped him up for Rs 26.75 crore in

the auctions.

Punjab will be Iyer's third franchise in the IPL and a third stint in a leadership role. After having started out in the IPL in 2015 with the Delhi Capitals, Iyer was raised to captaincy in the 2018 season. He also led the Capitals to their first IPL final in the 2020 season.

Despite losing out on spots in the T20I and Test teams in 2024, Iyer had a banner year. He was part of the Mumbai team that won the Ranji and Irani trophy and under his leadership, Mumbai won their second Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in December 2024. Iyer plundered 345 runs in the tournament with a 188.42 strike rate and a near-50 average while smashing a century.

Iyer will form a reunion with his former DC head coach, Ricky Ponting, with PBKS. "Shreyas has a great mind for the game. His proven capabilities as captain will enable the team to deliver. I have enjoyed my time with Iyer in the past in IPL, and I look forward to working with him again. With his leadership and the talent in the squad, I am excited about the seasons ahead," said Ponting.



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