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NEW DELHI, SATURDAY DECEMBER 30, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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## Ayodhya wakes up to a new dawn

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■  
NEW DELHI

With no proper drainage system, potholed roads for commuters, and little notice of streetlights until last year, Ayodhya now boasts a mapped sewerage system, world-class street lamps, and more than five flyovers to facilitate the citizens, as well as the lakhs of floating population, to get a glimpse of Ram Lalla at the Ram Temple with ease, comfort, and palpable convenience. To convey a sense of good administration, the uniformed personnel have been trained to be polite to visitors, as the birthplace of Lord Ram will host millions and millions of people from across the world in the coming days.

In its extra effort to beautify the holy city, the facades of all homes, shops, government and private building infrastructures have been done in the same pattern, particularly those lying adjacent to the roads and streets. While the entire electrical system has gone underground, the colour of the buildings' facades is Pitambari (a yellow texture similar to the color of sandalwood). The expenses on remodeling and coloring of private properties have been undertaken by the government. Another feature added for the convenience of visitors and the citizens of Ayodhya is that very soon the city will have its own City Bus Service for commuting, as it is all set to witness unprecedented growth in all spheres, especially in the



hospitality and tourism sector. Small-time cab service operators have started augmenting their fleet.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit the city on Saturday to commission several projects ahead of the January 22 consecration of the Ram Temple.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday reviewed projects, including the ground where PM Modi will be holding a rally on Saturday. He took a selfie after inspecting the ground where Modi will be holding a rally.

The CM offered prayers at the Ram Lalla temple and at the Hanumangarhi temple in the city, which has undergone immense beautification to host the visitors next month.

As planned, the voting to select the idol of Lord Ram Lalla from the three carved idols was conducted on Friday, and the ballots have been reserved to share the final decision at an appropriate time. The idol that wins the vote will be placed in the grand Ram Temple set to be unveiled for the people next month.

The voting took place at the

meeting of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, where members voted to select one among three idols made by separate sculptors.

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra is the trust entrusted with the construction and management of the grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

"All three designs, created by separate sculptors, were placed on the table. The idol that could garner the maximum votes will be installed at the consecration of the shrine on January 22," said a committee source.

Earlier this week, Trust

secretary Champat Rai said that a 51-inch-tall idol of Lord Ram, reflecting a five-year-old Ram Lalla, would be selected from among three designs. "The one that exudes the best divineness and has a childlike look about it will be chosen," he said.

Ram Mandir Construction Committee Chairman Nripendra Misra took stock of the ongoing construction work on the Ram Janmabhoomi Path and the complex on Thursday, along with the top official of the district, where Prime Minister Modi will be visiting on

Saturday, December 30.

## Assam Peace Accord inked in historic breakthrough

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After two failed attempts since 1992, the Centre and the Assam Government signed the long elusive peace accord on Friday, here, with a major faction of one of the biggest separatist groups in the region, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). This pro-talks faction of the ULFA has agreed to renounce violence and join the mainstream. The tripartite Memorandum of Settlement was inked in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The agreement comes after 12 years of unconditional negotiations between the ULFA faction led by Arabinda Rajkhowa and the government, according to officials.

Shah told reporters that the Centre will ensure all the reasonable demands by ULFA are met in a time-bound manner, and ULFA as an organisation will be disbanded. "We want to assure the ULFA leadership that their trust in the Centre to ensure the success of the peace process will be honored," Shah said, and credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bringing peace and stability to the northeast.

Shah said the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from many areas of Assam and other Northeast States is proof that insurgency is nearly extinct in the region. Sarma, who sat beside Shah, said the peace deal with ULFA will solve the problem of insurgency in the region to a large extent.

The Modi Government has signed many peace deals with insurgent groups in the Northeast after they agreed to lay down arms. In November, Manipur's oldest valley-



Union Home Minister Amit Shah with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during signing of a peace accord between ULFA and the Central and Assam Governments in New Delhi on Friday PTI

based armed group, UNLF, also signed a tripartite peace agreement with the Centre and the state government."

The peace pact is expected to put an end to decades-old insurgency in Assam. However, the hardline faction of the ULFA, headed by Paresh Baruah, is not part of the agreement. Baruah is believed to be residing in a location along the China-Myanmar border. The ULFA was formed in 1979 with the demand for a sovereign Assam.

Since then, it has been involved in subversive activities that led to the central government declaring it a banned outfit in 1990. The Rajkhowa faction joined peace talks with the government on September 3, 2011, after an agreement for the Suspension of Operations (SoO) was signed between it and the central and state governments. The accord addresses a host of long-standing political, economic, and social issues concerning Assam, besides providing cultural safeguards and land rights to the indigenous people, according to officials.

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## Blast near Israel Embassy: Cops find critical evidence, FIR likely soon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After three days of investigation into the blast near the Israeli Embassy, the Delhi Police is planning to register an FIR as they have found "crucial evidence" pointing to a conspiracy to threaten the envoy, sources said on Friday. The Delhi Police has recorded the statements of some people who claimed to have heard the explosion near the Israeli embassy. Delhi Police sources said security officials are contemplating the charges under which the FIR would be registered. They are also analysing if the investigation can be handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Officials of the Delhi Police, who are investigating the case, have scanned multiple CCTV footage around the site of the low-intensity blast and spotted a suspect who had come from Jamia Nagar in an autorickshaw. They have questioned multiple auto-rickshaw drivers, including the one who brought that suspect to the spot before the blast occurred on December 26.

"We found some crucial evidence suggesting a blast at Prithviraj Road. The way the letter was put at the spot also suggests that there was a conspiracy to threaten the Israeli envoys because of the Israel-Hamas conflict," a police officer privy to the investigations said. Although no one was injured in the low-intensity blast, an "abusive" letter addressed to the Israeli ambassador was found near the site, officials had said.

According to them, Tuesday's blast and the recovery of the letter are a grim reminder of the 2021 blast near the embassy in which some cars were damaged. The NIA had probed the case.

Investigating officials are awaiting reports from the National Security Group's laboratory where samples have been sent to ascertain the components used in the explosion that occurred in the area between the boundary walls of the house on plot number 4 — Nanda's House — and the Central Hindi Training Institute on plot number 2A on Prithviraj Road. The NSG has a dedicated forensic lab that is trying to find out the components and chemicals used in the blast. "It may take a few more days to submit the final report," a source said.

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## MP cruise connections: Statue of Oneness to Statue of Unity



ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the New Year rings in, tourists' wait to enjoy a much-touted inter-State cruise on the Narmada River, from the Statue of Oneness in Omkareshwar, Madhya Pradesh, to the Statue of Unity in Kevadia, Gujarat, covering nearly 130 km, is all set to end. "Floating jetties are already being put in place for this," said Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary of Culture and Tourism. The Madhya Pradesh Government is banking heavily on this innovative project, hoping to bolster the economy of the region and introduce a fresh tourism product to attract inbound tourists, particularly those seeking religious and adventure trips.

"The multi-option, multi-destination cruises will be punctuated with rural experiences between the two destinations," added Shukla.

There is more on the platter, much to the delight of adventure and thrill-seeking tourists, whose numbers are on the rise. Elaborating on other cruise projects lined up for 2024 in the state, also known as the Incredible Heart of India, Shukla mentioned that plans are afoot to link the Rajhat Dam near Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh to

Deogarh in Uttar Pradesh. "Long-distance, intra-State cruises will be a new attraction for 2024," he added as he enlisted new projects.

Intra-State cruises, from Miakal Resort in Bargi near Jabalpur to Tindini in Mandla district and from Dharaji in Dewas to Sailani Tapu east of Omkareshwar, as well as from Sanjit village to the tent city of Gandhi Sagar, are also in the works. The Tawa-Madhai cruise will be revamped with new experiences.

The MPTB has outlined an innovative strategy for 2024, aiming to make it more holistic, inclusive, sustainable, eco-friendly, and adventure-packed. Identifying and developing new trekking trails in various buffer zones of National Parks/Sanctuaries will be part of the 2024 tourism strategy.

The State will be promoted through different biking trails and car rallies. Additionally, a special attraction "The Queens on the Wheel," an all-women seven-day biking event slated for February 2024, will take riders on an adventurous journey from Bhopal to Orchha, passing through Chanderi, Kuno, Gwalior, Mitawali, Padavali, Bateshwar, Orchha, and Khajuraho.

"We have elaborate plans to develop many new off-beat destinations, thereby leveraging the unique selling proposition of our State," said the Principal Secretary of Culture and Tourism. In an effort to enhance connectivity between various destinations, the tourism department is working to reintroduce small aircraft under a Public-Private Partnership.

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## Nitish is JD(U) chief as Lalan quits

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was elected as the president of Janata Dal (United) on Friday during the party's national executive meeting. The meeting applauded his role in uniting Opposition parties and leading the demand for a caste census. The party's chief spokesperson, KC Tyagi, said Kumar has accepted the responsibility, taking over from Lalan Singh.

Sources reveal that Lalan Singh was removed due to perceived proximity to the JD(U)'s alliance partner in Bihar, Lalu Yadav's RJD, where Tejaswi Yadav serves as the Deputy CM. Speculation of a rift emerged when Union Minister Giriraj Singh claimed that Lalu Prasad once told him, "JD(U) will merge with RJD soon."

Nitish Kumar is a man who harbours suspicions about everyone. He was under the impression that his party would split into two factions, with one aligning with the BJP and the other with the RJD, ultimately making the RJD the largest party in Bihar. Nitish had severed ties with the BJP when he suspected that another confidante, RCP Singh, who was then a Union Minister in the Modi cabinet, was collaborating with the BJP to break the JD(U), similar to what happened in Maharashtra with the Shiv



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and JD(U) leader Lalan Singh arrive at the party office in New Delhi on Friday Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Sena's division," revealed a senior JDU Member of Parliament to *The Pioneer*.

Nitish Kumar's appointment as the JDU boss also grants him greater control over the party's stance on seat-sharing across India for the Lok Sabha elections, a topic he has frequently emphasised. He aspires to be the Prime Ministerial candidate of the coalition. In the 2019 elections, the JDU secured 16 of the State's 40 seats, while the BJP won 17.

At the closed-door meeting, Singh stepped down and proposed Kumar's name, emphasising that Kumar's leadership is crucial in the

lead-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, especially as Singh will be occupied with his own election campaign. Singh currently represents the Munger constituency in the Lok Sabha.

Sources indicate that a majority of key leaders within the party believed that Kumar, as its most prominent figure, should assume leadership at this crucial juncture. The party is part of the Opposition INDIA bloc. Criticism of Singh's leadership style by several party leaders in recent interactions with Kumar has been cited as a factor. Amid reports of a rift within the party, the Chief

Minister has actively worked to project an image of unity, keeping Singh by his side. Party sources have dismissed claims that Singh's perceived proximity to the RJD was the reason for his ouster, highlighting his decades-long close alliance with Kumar. During the executive meeting, Kumar expressed that he personally was not eager to assume the role of the party's president but would respect the decision of the national executive members who wholeheartedly endorsed the development, according to sources.

At the venue, many enthusiastic party members raised slogans, projecting their leader as a prime ministerial candidate. Among the various proposals discussed in the meeting was Kumar's leadership in advocating for a caste census and conducting a "caste survey" in Bihar. This effort led to the State Government increasing the reservation from the existing 60 per cent to 75 per cent, with support from every party.

Amid the JD(U)'s perceived dissatisfaction with leading members of the INDIA bloc for not assigning a formal role to its most prominent leader in the alliance, one proposal highlighted Kumar's role in reaching out to different Opposition parties to unite them after he severed ties with the BJP in August 2022.

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## Delhi, NCR set to experience prolonged cold day spell

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In light of worsening weather conditions in the northern region of the country, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for dense fog in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Jammu and Kashmir, with winter chill. Delhi and NCR recorded 17 straight hours of dense fog from 7 pm on Thursday and 11.30 am on Friday, marking the longest dense fog spell of the season.

Issuing a "cold day" alert, IMD said "dense to very dense fog" is likely to be witnessed in Delhi and NCR for the next two days. "Cold day conditions are very

likely in some to many parts of Delhi on December 30 and 31," the IMD reported.

INSAT imagery released by the Met department showed that nearly 30 per cent of India's population is experiencing visibility under 50 metres due to a dense fog layer over north India, affecting regions in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and northwest Madhya Pradesh. Experts have advised people not to venture out in their vehicles between 4 am and 10 am unless it is unavoidable.

In an advisory on Friday, the IMD urged people to use fog lights while driving and to stay in touch with airlines, railways, and state transport for schedule updates, as dense fog may affect rail, air, and



Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

highway routes. The impact of dense fog was evident through low visibility conditions leading to traffic disruptions and accidents. Several trains and flights have

been delayed due to obstructed visibility, with the IMD recording the lowest visibility of 50 m at Palam in Delhi between 5.30 am and 7.30 am on Friday, improving to 150m

by 8 am. Despite low visibility, no flight diversions or cancellations were reported at Delhi's Indra Gandhi International airport, though over 100 international and domestic flights faced delays, owing to low visibility. Airports classify a flight as "delayed" when it is late by more than 15 minutes. The Runway Visual Range (RVR) is currently within the range of 400 metres to 800 metres, according to the India Meteorological Department. Amid dense fog disrupting flight operations at the Delhi airport in the last few days, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said the Ministry is coordinating with the airport and airlines, and putting in place measures to deal with the

issue. Terming the fog issue as a "transitory phenomenon," the minister also said this year the situation has been slightly unprecedented in terms of the density of fog. Many flights were diverted and scores were delayed at the Delhi airport due to dense fog.

"Fog issue is an issue that we encounter 15-20 days every year... This year, there has been unprecedented fog for the last three or four days. We are coordinating with all the airlines to make sure that they have CAT II and CAT III-trained pilots during fog hours, thereby easing congestion," Scindia said. CAT II and III requirements pertain to operating flights in low visibility conditions.

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# Suspend health secretary: Bharadwaj

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj has recommended immediate suspension of Delhi's health secretary SB Deepak Kumar by the Lieutenant Governor and Central Government on the issue of irregularity in purchase of medicines supplied in Delhi government hospitals to ensure fair inquiry in the case. The minister has also demanded strict action against the then Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) Dr Nutan Mundeja in the matter.



The Delhi government's Directorate of Vigilance on Thursday wrote to the home ministry, requesting it to assign the probe into the supply of "sub-standard" drugs to state-run hospitals to the CBI. Saxena last week recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the alleged supply of drugs that "failed quality standard tests" and had the "potential of endangering lives" to hospitals run by the city government.

Addressing a press conference at the Delhi Secretariat, Bharadwaj, expressed displeasure over the continuous circulation of news through newspapers and news channels that certain samples of medicines and other products used in Delhi government hospitals have not met the prescribed standards. "Despite such incidents, Delhi's Lieutenant Governor (LG) has not taken any firm action against the officials concerned," said Bharadwaj, demanding immediate suspension and strict actions by the LG and Central Govt against Delhi's Health Secretary, S.B. Deepak Kumar and then DGHS Dr Nutan Mundeja on this issue. Bharadwaj said that upon assuming ministership in March 2023, he ordered an

audit of medicines, equipment, and consumables on 21.03.2023 to the Health Secretary then DGHS. Despite his repeated reminders to the Health Secretary regarding the audit, no action was taken. In October, a complaint was lodged with the L.G. against the Health Secretary and then DGHS due to their obstructionist approach, but no action was taken. The Health Minister stated that after the disapproval from the LG's office, we knocked on the doors of the Supreme Court to initiate action on this sensitive issue. He informed the LG that these officers are deliberately trying

to obstruct the essential policies of the Delhi Government, especially schemes like the 'Farishtey Scheme' and other initiatives of the Health Department. These officers have withheld funds for other such schemes. Bharadwaj stated that he has issued orders several times to the Health Secretary to conduct an audit regarding the procurement of medicines. However, Health Secretary S.B. Deepak Kumar has not conducted any audit, nor has any report been submitted to the Health Minister's office. "If there are irregularities in the procurement of medicines, he wants them to be exposed, and action to be taken against the guilty officials. However, it appears that Health Secretary S.B. Deepak Kumar was unwilling to conduct an audit of medicines procurement, and if there were any irregularities in the procurement, he did not want them to come to light," he said.

# Minor stabs cab driver to death in road rage brawl

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



In a road rage case, a cab driver was allegedly stabbed to death in South Delhi's Mehrauli area by one of the three minors on a motorcycle following a verbal spat in the midst of a traffic jam, the police said. The deceased has been identified as Manoj Kumar who worked with a private firm in Gurgaon and was driving its employees back home when the incident took place on Thursday night. All the three accused have been identified and the minor has been apprehended, they said.

"Manoj Kumar (34) worked as a cab driver for a Gurugram-based BPO. On Thursday evening, he picked up five BPO employees from the Malviya Nagar area and then one from Mehrauli. Later, the cab got stuck in a traffic jam in Mehrauli," a senior police officer said. "Around 8:40 pm, three boys on a scooter came from behind and started honking at Kumar, asking for space to

move ahead. The cab driver was unable to make way for them as there was no room. "Soon, a verbal spat ensued between the two sides. One of the scooter riders stabbed Kumar in the chest with a knife before fleeing from the spot with his accomplices," the police officer said. Kumar was rushed to Safdarjung Hospital, where doctors

declared him dead on arrival, police said. A case of murder has been registered in the matter, they said. The minor has been apprehended. The remaining accused have been identified and will be arrested soon," said the officer. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination, police said.

# Parliament security breach: Lucknow Police help sought to trace cyclist cobbler

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has sought the help of its Lucknow counterparts to trace a "cyclist cobbler" who created cavities in the shoes of Parliament security breach case accused Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D to fit smoke canisters in them, sources said. Police want to make the cobbler a witness in the case, they said. Sagar first tried to modify the shoes himself but approached the cobbler, who visited Alambagh in Lucknow on a bicycle, after he was unsuccessful, the Delhi Police sources said.

They gained entry into the Parliament using visitors' passes facilitated by two-term Lok Sabha member from Mysuru Pratap Simha. During interrogation, Sagar revealed that he tried to design shoes with a cavity after he found out that they were not checked during entry into the Parliament, the sources said. "When he did not succeed in his attempts, he went to a cobbler in Alambagh. He has told the interrogators that he bought two pairs of shoes for Rs 595 each from a shop near his house and approached the cobbler, who visited Alambagh on a bicycle," a source said. "The cavity was found created by cutting the inside sole of the left shoe. The thickness of the sole of shoes is also found increased by affixing additional rubber sole at the bottom to support the cavity. The inside sole of the right foot shoe was also found partly cut," according to the FIR.

A team of the Delhi Police Special Cell visited Lucknow earlier this month to search for the cobbler but was unable to trace him. The team also questioned several cobblers in Alambagh based on disclosures made by Sagar during his interrogation, the sources said. Delhi Police wants to make the cobbler a witness in the case and is now taking the help of its Lucknow counterparts to find him, they said. During its visit, the team recovered a pair of shoes, shoe soles and a ruler for measuring shoe size from Sagar's house in Ramnagar in Lucknow's Alambagh, according to the sources. A diary and some books on freedom fighter Bhagat Singh were also recovered from his house. Sagar's family has told the investigators that he admires Bhagat Singh. His social media profile also showed that he used to share content related to Bhagat Singh and Cuban Marxist revolutionary leader Che Guevara.

# BJP, AAP spar over rejection of Delhi, Punjab tableaux in upcoming Republic Day parade

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

War of words continued between AAP and BJP over the rejection of Delhi and Punjab tableaux of the upcoming Republic Day parade. Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Friday alleged the Delhi and Punjab tableaux have been left out of the upcoming Republic Day parade due to the BJP's "dirty politics" to exact revenge on the AAP which is in power in the capital and the border state. The BJP hit back, terming it shameful that the AAP, which is in power in both States, was politicising a decision taken by a special committee. BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa said the real reason for the rejection of the tableau was that it had the photographs of the chief minister and Arvind Kejriwal. "The real reason for rejection of Punjab Tableau is that it prominently showed pictures of Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann rather than Mai Bhago Ji or martyrs! Mann Sahab is shamelessly lying; and worst is he has surrendered Punjab's



sovereignty in the feet of Kejriwal. You made Punjab the slave of Kejriwal in the name of change," Sirsa said. Earlier, addressing a press conference, Bharadwaj said the Centre has rejected Delhi's tableaux for three years now. The last time Delhi's tableau featured in the Republic Day parade was in 2021. It showcased the Shahjahanabad redevelopment project, according to officials. Bharadwaj said Delhi's tableau this year would have showcased schools in the city and the

Mohalla Clinic model. "The tableau of Delhi, which is the capital of the country, was rejected by the Centre. Its tableau was rejected for the 2022 parade and then for the 2023 parade and now it has been rejected again for the 2024 parade," the minister said. The theme of the Republic Day parade was 'Nari Shakti' in 2023 and it is 'Viksit Bharat' for the 2024 parade, he said. "No one can say it's a design competition. The Centre had given us some suggestions and we had incorporated them

(into our tableau proposal) and if it would have given us more suggestions, we would have included them too. Our tableau would have showcased schools and the Mohalla Clinic model," he added. Bharadwaj said it's not a coincidence that Punjab's tableau proposal was also rejected. "The Centre is doing this to exact revenge on the AAP," he charged. On Wednesday, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had attacked the Centre over the non-inclusion of his state's tableau in the parade and accused it of discrimination. Eighty per cent of the selected states are the ones ruled by the BJP, he alleged. In response, Delhi BJP secretary Bansuri Swaraj said that a highly specialised committee of specialists had taken decisions on the proposals for the Republic Day parade tableaux received from State governments and departments. "It is shameful that without telling reasons for rejection of their tableau proposals the AAP leaders are politicising the decision of a

specialist committee," Ms. Swaraj said. "All that the AAP governments have to show are stories of liquor scam, fake medicines scam, bungalow scam, drug sale in Punjab or ministers of Punjab and Delhi going to jail," she added. Meanwhile, officials aware of the matter said there is a well-established system for the selection of tableaux for participation in the parade. "The tableaux proposals are evaluated in series of meetings of the expert committee comprising of eminent persons in the field of art, culture, painting, sculpture, music, architecture, choreography, etc... Due to time allotted for tableaux in the overall duration of the parade, shortlisting of tableaux is done by the expert committee which leads to participation of the best tableau in the parade," an official said, declining to be named. "Moreover, the states/UTs not being selected for the parade are being invited to showcase their tableaux at the Bharat Parv at Red Fort from January 23-31, 2024," the official added.

# LG okays amendment to compensation scheme for mob violence victims

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved amendment in the Delhi Victims Compensation Scheme 2018, enabling the payment of ex gratia to the victims of mob violence and lynching. The definition of 'victim' has been amended to include guardian or legal heir of a person who has suffered loss or injury or death as a result of the offence including the offence of mob violence and mob lynching. According to Raj Niwas official, in case of mob violence mob lynching, the interim relief to the victim, including the interim compensation shall be provided within 30 days from the date of offence and the limit of Rs. 50,000/- for interim compensation shall not be applicable to the cases of such victims but the upper limits of compensation provided under the schedule to the scheme shall continue to apply. The Supreme Court had in 2018 directed state governments to prepare such a scheme within a month but the Delhi government took five years to submit a proposal, they added. According to the changes in the scheme, the definition of 'victim' has been amended to include the guardian or legal heir of a person who has suffered loss or injury or death as a result of mob violence and mob lynching. Interim relief has been proposed to be paid to the vic-



tim(s) or the next of the kin of the deceased within 30 days of the incident, the official said. The Delhi Victims Compensation Scheme, 2018 was notified with the approval of the then LG vide notification dated 27.06.2019, but the issue of compensation for lynching and mob violence was not covered in it. The apex court had directed on July 17, 2018 that state governments will prepare within one month of the judgement a lynching/mob violence compensation scheme under the provisions of Section 357A of the CrPC. The court had given the guidelines that in the scheme for computation of compensation, the state governments shall give due regard to the nature of bodily injury, psychological injury and loss of earnings. In terms of loss of earnings, it shall also take into account loss of opportunities of employment and education and expenses incurred on account of legal, medical and other sufferings due to mob lynching/mob violence, the official said.

# Trial runs of Namo Bharat between Duhai, Meerut South begins



The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) has commenced the trial runs of Namo Bharat trains between Duhai to Meerut South, an additional 25 km long section ahead of the Priority Section within a mere 80 days of beginning operations in the Priority Section. This is a significant milestone as it marks a major step towards the operationalization of the entire 42 km of Delhi - Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor in near future ahead of target. According to a statement issued by the NCRTC, to commence the trial run, the Overhead Equipment (OHE) was charged with a from the Murad Nagar Receiving Sub Station (RSS). The electric traction, previously charged up to Modinagar South station, has now been extended up to Meerut South station. The trials were already ongoing up to Modi Nagar South station. "During the trial runs, Namo Bharat trains are undergoing testing to assess the fitness of all sub systems and equip-

# Atishi interacts with 30 MBA students from Wharton School

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Education Minister Atishi on Friday interacted with 30 MBA students from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. The focus of the interaction centered on the unique governance model employed by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi, under the leadership of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. The Wharton School students met Education Minister Atishi under the Global Immersion Program, designed to provide them with an understanding of the economic, cultural, and geopolitical dynamics shaping the global economy. Atishi provided a captivating insight into the evolution of AAP and elaborated on the transformative journey of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, capturing the attention of the Wharton students. During the interaction, Education Minister Atishi shared the profound impact of AAP's unyielding political will to enhance the lives of the common man. She cited AAP as a compelling example that reaffirms the idea that even 'a common man' can alter the course of the world with an unwavering commitment to public welfare. She said, "Despite various struggles and hindrances in governance, the welfare of people who voted for the government has always been the priority of Kejriwal Government. Over the past 9 years, the Delhi Government has ensured

# BSES to energise 1,000 rooftop solar installations in 2024-25

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Electricity provider BSES has energised 6,000 rooftop solar installations so far and the discom plans to energise over 1,000 more connections in the 2024-25 financial year. The highest number of rooftop solar connections are in the domestic segment (3,650), followed by commercial (1,087), educational (939), industrial (85) and others (129). According to BSES officials, more than 100 residential societies have opted for rooftop solar connections, helping consumers save over Rs 110 crore annually. BSES plans to energise 1000+ rooftop solar connections with a connected load of around 17-20 MW. "The response to roof top solar net metering has been very encouraging in the BSES area. Consumers across categories, including residential, educational (and schools) and commercial establishments have warmed up to roof top solar net metering in big-way," a BSES statement said. The highest energised load is in the commercial segment with 57 Megawatt peak (MWP), followed by the educational segment with 45 MWP, industrial with 6 MWP and others with 11 MWP. "If we analyse the annual savings accruing to the consumers, savings are over Rs 110 crore annually. By opting for roof-top solar, consumers are estimated to save around Rs 49 crore annually, followed by educational institutions



that children in the national capital get the best of the best education, people get hassle-free access to high-quality healthcare, free water and power supply round the clock. These are basic rights of people to lead a dignified life." The Education Minister added, "These successful transformations were made possible due to the unshakable political will of the government, which aimed to bring about change in Delhi. As a result, Delhi's government schools have become a source of inspiration for numerous global reforms in the education system. The Mohalla Clinics are trusted as a highly impactful healthcare system, ensuring the accessibility of quality healthcare to people for free." Minister Atishi further emphasized that major global transformation is possible when a surge of educated individuals enters politics with a resolute dedication to serving the people. This, she asserted, is the key to unlocking a new era of political leadership on a global scale. During the interaction, Atishi also shared her journey from a party volunteer to the only woman minister in the Delhi Cabinet with the students.

# Trial runs of Namo Bharat between Duhai, Meerut South begins

ment's. In this phase, the train will be operated in the entire length at various speeds gradually. Initially, manual operation is carried out under the Train Control Management System. As the process advances, tests will be conducted to evaluate the integrated performance of the train and verify its coordination with different subsystems such as Signalling, Platform Screen Doors (PSDs) and Overhead supply system, it said. The 25 km stretch between Duhai and Meerut South Rapid Rail Transit System (RRTS) station is the next segment of the RRTS corridor set to be operationalized for the public after the Priority Section. This section encompasses a total of 4 stations: Murad Nagar, Modi Nagar North, Modi Nagar South, and Meerut South. In June, the construction of the viaduct up to Meerut South was completed with the installation of the last span. Subsequently, various construction works, including track laying, OHE installation, signaling and telecom, and electrical, have been advancing rapidly in this section.

(Rs 30 crore), residential consumers (Rs 26 crore), Other (Rs 7 crore) and Industrial (Rs 5 crore)," BSES said. BSES has energised 'roof-top net metering' connections ranging from a sanctioned load of 1 KW to over 4,000 KW. Consumers have begun to see the benefits of roof top solar net metering and how it reduces their electricity bills," the statement said. Rooftop solar net metering is an ideal method to reduce electricity bills and contribute to the betterment of the environment. Every KW of rooftop solar generates about 100 to 120 units of electricity every month and the cost of the system can be recovered in around four years. A typical 10 KW of rooftop solar connection with a monthly consumption of 1,200 units every month can save around Rs 82,000 annually, the officials said. "Besides helping BSES in meeting its renewable purchase obligation (RPO), the pioneering initiative will help the discom minimise overloading issues in congested areas, especially during the peak summer months," the BSES said. "For consumers, roof top solar net metering is an ideal method to reduce electricity bills and do their bit for the environment," they said. On the other hand, Tata Power-DDL energised 2,412 rooftop solar connections and the solar load touches 63.3 MWP, helping consumers save approximately Rs 45-50 crore annually.







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## In God, we trust!

### Modi's Ayodhya visit today is a prelude to Ram temple inauguration and has electoral significance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is visiting Ayodhya today, ahead of the inauguration of the Ram temple, and the moment carries profound cultural, religious and political significance. The visit is also about the various projects to be inaugurated in keeping with the Prime Minister's vision to modernise the infrastructure in Ayodhya to place it on the national tourist map. The visit will involve a series of significant inaugurations and dedications. Modi will inaugurate the redeveloped Ayodhya railway station, launching new Amrit Bharat trains and Vande Bharat trains. He will also inaugurate the newly constructed Ayodhya airport. Besides, the foundation stones for a few more infrastructure projects will contribute to the beautification and enhancement of civic facilities in and around the ancient city. Though it sounds like a regular PM visit, it is not. The visit comes ahead of the inauguration of the Ram temple on January 22. Basically, the Prime Minister's visit serves as a symbolic tribute to the temple. It would be pertinent to add that the temple, which has been constructed at the site where the Babri mosque once stood, has been a contentious issue for decades and has been a polarising factor. In fact, the BJP owes its meteoric political rise to the demolition of the Babri mosque and subsequent campaign to construct the Ram temple there. The Supreme Court's verdict in November 2019 paved the way for the construction of the Ram temple, bringing an end to a protracted legal battle and giving way to the fulfilment of a significant promise made by the BJP. Ironically, Lal Krishna Advani, the man who spearheaded the campaign, may not be in attendance at the inaugural event.



Indeed, the inauguration of the Ram temple holds immense cultural and religious significance for the majority Hindu population in India. Ayodhya is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, a revered figure in Hinduism, and the construction of his temple there has been a longstanding dream for millions of Hindus. The Prime Minister's presence in Ayodhya reiterates the Government's commitment to fulfilling the cultural and religious aspirations of people, besides underscoring the BJP's alignment with the sentiments of a significant percentage of the electorate. It would be naive to believe that PM Modi's visit to Ayodhya is all about the physical redevelopment of Ayodhya. The timing of the visit, subsequent inauguration coming ahead of the 2024 general elections and amidst ongoing political developments is strategic. The BJP has historically aligned itself with Hindu nationalist sentiments, and the fulfilment of the Ram temple promise is likely to resonate positively with a large section of the electorate, particularly in the Hindi heartland where the party seeks to consolidate its support. The Ram temple issue has been a key element in the BJP's political narrative, and the party has consistently portrayed itself as the guardian of Hindu interests. PM Modi's visit reinforces the BJP's commitment to these ideals and may consolidate its votes in the Lok Sabha elections.

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## PICTALK



People from different parts of West Bengal take part in the All Bengal Bratachari Training camp, in Kolkata

## Children with disabilities face considerable challenges

### Children with disabilities in underserved communities face a multitude of societal and economic challenges

In India, children with disabilities face considerable challenges, often amplified by socio-economic factors. Recent data suggests that a significant number of these children do not receive the necessary medical and educational support. These children are also less likely to attend school compared to their non-disabled peers. Moreover, access to specialised healthcare and rehabilitation services can be limited, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. Parents often struggle to identify developmental issues in their children due to a lack of awareness and information. Recognising signs of disabilities like autism, hearing impairments, or cognitive delays can be challenging without proper knowledge or access to healthcare professionals. Additionally, cultural stigma and misconceptions about disabilities can lead to denial or reluctance to seek help. This delay in identification hinders early intervention, which is crucial for better outcomes. The limited availability of specialised healthcare services in many regions



further exacerbates these challenges. Children with disabilities in underserved communities face a multitude of societal and economic challenges. These include limited access to healthcare, educational opportunities, and rehabilitation services. Financial constraints often prevent families from seeking or continuing treatment, leading to inadequate care. Stigma and lack of awareness in these communities further contribute to social isolation and discrimination, impeding the children's development and integration into society. These challenges not only affect the immediate health and well-being of these children but also limit their prospects in terms of education, employment, and social inclusion, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and marginalization.

To meet these challenges head-on early identification and providing comprehensive support throughout life is essential. Initiatives like the Cochlear Implant Program have helped over 1200 hearing-impaired children since 2013, while the Little Hearts Program of the Hans Foundation (THF) tackles children suffering from congenital heart defects. Collaborations of NGOs with government healthcare systems ensure broader access to essential medical treatments. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Neuro-Rehabilitation, established in collaboration with AIIMS, aims to centralise services for children with disabilities, ensuring more accessible and effective care. Indeed, philanthropy can play a pivotal role in elevating pediatric care for children with disabilities and fostering enduring positive impacts. By investing in specialized pediatric care centres, supporting research and innovation, and promoting early intervention programs, philanthropic efforts can significantly enhance the quality

of care provided to children facing disabilities. Financial assistance to families, training healthcare professionals, and constructing accessible facilities are additional avenues through which philanthropy can actively contribute. Advocacy and awareness campaigns serve to educate various stakeholders, while collaboration with government agencies and NGOs ensures a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to pediatric care. Supporting community-based initiatives and fostering long-term partnerships with healthcare institutions and advocacy groups further strengthens the impact of philanthropy. Through these initiatives, philanthropy not only addresses immediate healthcare needs but also works towards creating inclusive environments that empower children with disabilities and their families, ultimately shaping a more equitable and supportive future. *(The writer is the Founder and Chairperson, of The Hans Foundation; views are personal)*



SHWETA RAWAT

# Ensure more women in technology



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

### Women's participation in the technology sector presents a mixed scenario. While some women have been important players, general progress has been disappointing

With the Lok Sabha elections not so far away, and political parties gearing up to select candidates to contest on their behalf, one needs to remember that women's representation in the National Parliament, state legislatures, as well as the corridors of power, has been rather poor. Things are, doubtless, no better—and, in some cases, much worse—in most other countries, including the much-vaunted western democracies. Nor is politics the only sector in India and the world where women suffer a raw deal. Between 1901, when it was first awarded, and 2023, 965 individuals and 27 organisations received the Nobel Prize, some twice. Of them only 64 were women, with one of them, Marie Curie receiving it twice—in 1903 and 1911. The gender disparity has been particularly staggering in some areas. Women, for example, have accounted for only five out of the 225 recipients in physics, 13 out of 214 in medicine, eight out of 186 in chemistry and three out of 90 in economics. Even in areas where more women have been recipients, the figures are 19 out of 92 in peace and 17 out of 103 in literature. There has, of course, been of late, an upward trend, but women still have miles to traverse to achieve something even close to parity with men in this area. It is not just the case of the Nobel Prize. Compared to men, women are grossly under-represented in every domain of human activity outside the confines of domesticity. It is not possible to examine the situation in all of these in a column. Given, however, the fact that these multiple disciplines have many common parameters and function in the same defining environment, it will be useful to focus on any one of them for a picture roughly indicative of how things generally are. In this context, it would be both interesting and instructive to look at the technology sector, the cutting edge of civilisational progress both globally and nationally. Gitanjali Singh, global head of strategy and new business growth of a transnational IT company,



cites a survey by womenintech.co.uk as stating that women accounted for 26 per cent of the workforce in the technology sector globally. While this marked an improvement over the figure of 19 per cent in 2019, it has by no means been enough for uncorking champagne bottles. Turning to the US, Singh refers to a Forbes magazine report stating that women held a mere 26.7 per cent of the technology jobs. She further points out that, even in the case of women committed to building careers, it was "harder for them to pitch their ideas, get equal wages and timely promotions, access mentoring, and networking opportunities, and earn a seat at the boardroom table." She refers to a report by the global management consultancy firm, McKinsey and Company, as stating in 2022 that for every 100 men promoted to managerial positions across all industries, 86 women were promoted. The number was lower in the technology industry—52 women promoted for every 100 men. In India, women's participation in the technology sector presents a mixed scenario. While some of them have been



OVER 100 WOMEN SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE CHANDRAYAAN 3 MISSION LANDING A LUNAR ROVER ON THE MOON

important players at the highest level, general progress has been disappointing. According to a report by Deutsche Welle published in *Frontline* (August 29, 2023), over 100 women scientists and engineers contributed to the Chandrayaan 3 mission landing a lunar rover on the moon. Not only that, India became, in the process, the first country to place a spacecraft near the moon's south pole. The report mentions S. Somanath, chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which is in overall charge of India's space programme including projects like Chandrayaan 3, talking about how women were involved in conceptualising, designing and executing the mission, and adding, "Some of them played a significant role in navigation during the lander's critical descent." All this could, doubtless, happen because there were women with adequate qualifications and leadership capabilities. The Deutsche Welle report cited above, mentions World Bank data indicating that women made up nearly 43 per cent of the total STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) graduates in India, one of the

highest in the world. Further, Gitanjali Singh refers to NASSCOM's 'Strategic Review 2023', stating that out of 5.4 million IT workers in India, 30 per cent were women. Other figures project a dismal picture. According to the Deutsche Welle report, a nationwide survey found that women made up only 13 per cent of scientists and science faculty at Indian higher education and research institutions. Even at ISRO, women employees accounted for 20 to 25 per cent of its total workforce of over 16,000 persons. Finally, the inevitable question: what is to be done? The exhortation that government and research institutions, and business undertakings, need to make a special effort has acquired the status of venerable cliché. Nevertheless, it has its kernel of truth. What one needs are specific and carefully calibrated measures. The main thrust has to come from the political arena. Hence the importance of having more women Members of Parliament, and their actively pursuing the cause of gender equality and justice. *(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SEAMLESS TRAFFIC

Sir — People are amazed by Aizawl's Seamless Traffic Etiquette. Aizawl is the capital of the North-East Indian state of Mizoram. The state is located at the eastern end of India, in the remote corner between Bangladesh and Myanmar. What makes Aizawl even quieter is the fact that using horns is forbidden in the whole state of Mizoram. Aizawl was the first city in India to ban the use of horns. Can you imagine an Indian city without any honking horns? Constant honking and chaos in traffic, especially in cities, is now accepted by everyone, yet Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, sets a sterling example of good road sense and etiquette. The aerial view of the city's traffic shows cars parked on one side of the road simply following the other vehicle. There is no overtaking, rushing, or honking at all. Likewise, in the other lane, one can see two-wheelers creeping, and all the riders are wearing helmets. Interestingly, these lanes are not separated with any markings or blocks, and the commuters are seen maintaining lane traffic on their own. This seamless vehicle movement hopes that people from other cities and regions will be inspired to follow them. *CK Subramaniam | Chennai*

### RIP VIJAYAKANTH

Sir —The passing away of celebrated Tamil actor and political heavyweight Vijaykanth is sad news and an irreplaceable loss to Tamil cinema; he was affectionately called Captain Vijaykanth. He was a legend of the Tamil film world who captured the hearts of millions with his charismatic performance in films before transitioning into the realm of politics and founded Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK). His contributions to both the film industry and Tamil Nadu political landscape were truly remarkable, and his charismatic performances in films like "Captain Prabhakaran" and "Chandralekha" captured the hearts of

## COVID cases spike in Odisha



New cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the last eight days in Odisha. The Health Department stated that the two new cases originated from Cuttack, and another case was reported from Khurda district. The patients are currently in home isolation for treatment. This emerging variant is identified as JN.1, a novel sub-variant of Omicron. With an increase in COVID cases in the state, the Odisha Health and Family Welfare Department released guidelines on Saturday, placing emphasis on vulnerable and elderly individuals to wear masks and avoid crowded places. The first JN.1 variant case was identified in Kerala on November 18th of this year, and Kerala is also experiencing a higher number of Covid cases compared to other states. In the last 24 hours, India has recorded a total of 692 cases and reported

six deaths. The Odisha Government should pay attention to individuals' travel history, advising them to wear masks, particularly those in the vulnerable group. Key measures to combat the surge in cases include expanding testing and raising awareness among the public. Individuals should closely monitor symptoms and promptly report to doctors if any are observed. Dr. Bijay Mohapatra, the Director of Health Services, mentioned that samples from the three patients have been sent for genome sequencing to confirm the presence of the JN.1 variant. There is no need for panic, but everyone should remain vigilant and undergo a Covid test if symptoms develop. As of now, Odisha has not detected any new variant cases. However, cases are increasing in other states such as Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. With zero-night celebrations approaching, authorities should rigorously manage crowds in tourist places. The influx of travelers from other states during this holiday season may pose a risk of infection transmission. Travelers should adhere to the COVID-19 guidelines issued by the state government to contribute to reducing the number of COVID cases in the state. *Akankhya Rout | Dhenkanal*

millions of people. His dedication to public service as a political leader left a lasting impact on the Tamil Nadu political landscape; he was not just a mass hero on screen but off-screen, he was known for his generosity and helpful nature, who passed away without a single controversy to his name. Vijaykanth also served as MLA Tamil Nadu twice and leader of the opposition between 2011-2016. He leaves behind an irreplaceable void both in cinema and politics that will be hard to fill for time to come. *Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru*

### COAL PRODUCTION

Sir —The government is aiming to scale up coal production from underground mines to 100 MT by 2030 by deploying

mass production technology. India's coal sector is the second largest in the world. The country accounts for more than 10 per cent of the global coal production and is second after China. However, rolling out a policy to provide financial support for coal gasification projects, augmenting production, and promoting underground mining activities are among the government's priorities for the coal sector, which is key to meeting the country's rising electricity demand. Notably, for now, coal, which powers thermal power plants, is key for meeting the country's rising electricity demand. *Tauqueer Rahmani | Mumbai*

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## FIRST COLUMN

## CHILDREN NEED LOVE AND CARE TO GROW

Children are unique individuals with their own needs, rights and experiences



SAKSHI SETHI

Treat your kids with so much love that if someone mistreats them, they will know immediately. Childhood plays a big role in who we are as an individual. It is the parents who are the child's first teachers as they are the ones who teach them who they are by empowering them with the space to grow at their own pace. Not only this, it is the parents who need to fill a child's bucket of self-esteem so high that the rest of the world can't poke enough holes to drain it dry. Children of today need real love and not just material tokens that will emotionally backfire them. The generation of unconditionally loving, gentle parents changes the minds of the next generation and with that the future of the world. It is a daily affirmation of love and emphasis that at its core, gentle parenting is not just a set of techniques or strategies but a constant expression of love and compassion.

In the words of LR Knost, it's not our job as parents to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It's our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless." In a world full of challenges and unkindness, every action, interaction and decision in gentle parenting reaffirms the deep and unconditional love parents have for their child and as a result creates an environment where their child feels secure, valued and cherished, thereby contributing to the overall well-being and development. By nurturing their innate goodness, teaching them the art of understanding, caring for others and leading by example can one help create a generation that can contribute towards a more compassionate and harmonious world.



If as a parent, one wants their child to come to them and tell them the truth and also approach them when their life gets hard, then as a parent one needs to practice the art of listening well and make a space to disagree, being honest and engaging in hurtful, meaningful conversation rather than resorting to punitive measures such as yelling, smacking or time outs. The goal is to care for the child into understanding and not to scare them into obedience. Choosing the child's mental health over everything for they are not achievements but humans who deserve to be healthy, happy and loved.

In the face of modern challenges, material tokens fall short in nurturing emotional resilience. The need for genuine, unconditional love is paramount. A generation raised by empathetic parents can redefine societal norms, paving the way for a more compassionate future. The daily affirmations of love and the emphasis on deep connections form a shield against the unkindness prevailing in the world. It is not about toughening children to face a heartless world, but about instilling values that make the world less cruel. In a world filled with cruelty, every act of gentle parenting becomes a beacon of love. These actions create a secure space for children, fostering a sense of worth and belonging. By nurturing their inherent goodness and teaching empathy, parents contribute to a generation capable of fostering harmony and compassion. To foster open communication, parents must master the art of listening, creating a safe space for disagreement and meaningful conversations. Choosing understanding over punitive measures reinforces the importance of mental health. Children are not mere achievements but unique individuals deserving health, happiness, and love. Remember, the relationship with the kids today sets the stage for all others they will have throughout their life including the one they will have with themselves. They are not just mini versions of adults but are unique individuals with their own needs, rights and experiences that should be valued and respected.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

## Taxation as a tool of social welfare

Recognising the need for mandatory individual societal responsibility in taxation is not just a financial imperative but a moral one



VIPIN JUNEJA



SUMIT KAUSHIK



Have you ever encountered the donation option while using Zomato? Amid the swift transactions and seamless food orders, there's a subtle chance to make a meaningful impact. Imagine this: a discreet suggestion to contribute an extra ₹2 to the Feeding India program. It may seem inconspicuous, but its essence transcends mere transactions. This subtle gesture mirrors the profound spirit of every day ingrained in Indian culture. As you navigate the digital convenience of modern life, this unobtrusive act echoes India's enduring tradition of philanthropy, seamlessly integrating acts of kindness into the canvas of daily existence.

Philanthropy is deeply ingrained in the ethos of Indian culture, extending beyond mere monetary contributions. Rooted in the idea of dharma, the duty to help others is enshrined in ancient scriptures and epitomised by the practice of Zakat in Islam and Dasvandh in Sikhism. Even within Hinduism, the Vedic concept of giving without expectation aligns with the core values of social responsibility, emphasising equality and fairness.

Everyday giving in India, as quantified by Sattva Consulting's report, exceeds global standards. At ₹34,242 crore in the year 2017, everyday giving in India is at least twice the size of everyday giving in China. Everyday givers are ordinary citizens who contribute their money, time, skills, voice, and goods to four primary destinations namely - local community, religion, disaster relief, and nonprofits. The findings reveal that informal giving to the community and religion accounts for a significant portion, with community giving covering health emergencies and basic needs. The data underscores



INDIA STANDS AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY. EMBRACING THE PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. EVERYDAY GIVING CAN PAVE THE WAY FOR A MORE EQUITABLE AND PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY

that helping the poor is the most popular cause, and the practice of giving, often in cash, remains deeply rooted.

**Philosophical Basis for Mandatory Individual Social Responsibility:** Drawing inspiration from John Rawls' principles of justice, the foundation for individual social responsibility can be philosophically justified. Rawls' first principle emphasises equal basic liberties for all, while the second principle, including the difference principle, underscores the importance of social and economic inequalities benefitting the least advantaged.

Social responsibility, therefore, branching into individual and organisational realms, aligns with Rawlsian ideals. Individual Social Responsibility (ISR) entails an ethical commitment to societal welfare. ISR, being a way of living, complements Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasising the importance of individual behaviour in fueling organisational philanthropy.

The idea that one's rights and responsibilities should be balanced for sustainable development resonates with ISR. It is not an act of sporadic charity but a constant manifestation of ethical and philanthropic behaviour. ISR involves trust, loyalty, sensitivity to societal needs, and positive participation in community life, fostering a spirit of solidarity. As we navigate a world shaped by technological and scientific advances, the ethical dimensions of progress demand scrutiny. Michael Sandel's critique of lib-

eralism and the quest for perfection urges us to consider the moral implications of genetic engineering and the commodification of various aspects of life. Sandel's emphasis on communal effort, showcased in his critique of Rawls, aligns with the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of India. However, his caution against the tyranny of merit underscores the need for a nuanced approach to success, acknowledging the role of luck and fostering solidarity.

**Mandatory Individual Society Responsibility in Taxation:** In the quest for a more philanthropic India, a compelling proposal is to recognize mandatory individual societal responsibility as part of taxation. Similar to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandates, allocating 2% of the total individual tax burden to be spent on social needs could be transformative. This mandatory contribution would serve as a micro-donation on a national scale, channelling funds to address pressing issues such as healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, while solving two major issues persistent in the present system - That of CHOICE (granting taxpayers the ability to designate where their tax funds should be allocated, thereby providing them with the agency in this respect) and of RIGHT (in contrast to the limited option of charity as the sole viable means of reciprocating social assistance.).

Individuals, inspired by the spirit of everyday giving, would con-

tribute to a collective fund dedicated to the betterment of society. This approach not only aligns with cultural values but also provides a structured mechanism for societal upliftment. It further would come to address the challenge relating to untraceable informal giving by institutionalising a portion of individual contributions for impactful social causes.

In a rapidly evolving world, India stands at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Embracing the principles of justice, social responsibility, and everyday giving can pave the way for a more equitable and philanthropic society. Recognising the need for mandatory individual societal responsibility in taxation is not just a financial imperative but a moral one.

As we ponder the profound question posed by Michael Sandel - "Do we want a society where everything is up for sale?" - the proposed paradigm shift in taxation becomes a beacon of hope. It beckons India to reaffirm its commitment to dharma, justice, and the innate spirit of giving that has defined its cultural journey for centuries. Through this transformative approach, taxation can become a tool for societal well-being, ensuring that the bounty of economic progress is shared by all.

(Vipin is a senior Public Policy Consultant and Sumit is PhD candidate and a Social Impact Consultant, views are personal)

## Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen II: A revolution in making

The mission is not only making India's villages cleaner and healthier but also positioning them as potential economic centres

India's sanitation landscape is undergoing a transformative change, with the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Grameen Phase II marking a remarkable achievement: 5 lakh+ villages have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus. This milestone symbolizes the nation's commitment to creating a clean and healthy rural environment and highlights the power of community-driven initiatives. As of date, 16 States and Union Territories have achieved 100% ODF Plus Status, of which 4 have achieved ODF Plus Model Status.

Launched on October 2, 2014, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, SBM aimed to eliminate open defecation



ARUMUGAM KALIMUTHU

across India by 2019. The first phase of this ambitious mission was a success, resulting in the construction of over 100 million Individual Household Toilets (IHHs) and the transformation of 6 lakh villages into ODF villages. This accomplishment was a collective effort, with contributions from various sectors of society, including bureaucracy, public representatives, corporations, NGOs, and citizens. The key to the success of Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Grameen Phase I was an effective communication strategy that included mass awareness campaigns, behaviour change communication, and the formation of local committees to accelerate the adoption of healthy hygiene

practices, ensuring clean and healthy villages. The messaging from the Prime Minister, coupled with support from State and District administrations and endorsements from celebrities, significantly boosted the mission's reach and impact. Studies by UNICEF, WHO, and other organizations have highlighted the positive impact of SBM. Improvements in women's safety, convenience, and dignity, underscore the mission's success. SBM Grameen Phase II extended beyond toilet construction, focusing on transforming villages into clean, healthy spaces. This phase emphasized the importance of maintaining toilets, managing waste, and responsibly disposing of greywater. The

changed attitudes and behaviours of rural communities, adopting new sanitation practices and collaborating with various stakeholders for waste management, marked a significant cultural shift. Complementing the sanitation efforts, the Jal Jeevan Mission played a crucial role in ensuring sustained toilet usage by providing water supply to all households. The formation of Village Water Sanitation Committees institutionalized community participation, managing sanitation services and assets effectively. These committees, including self-help groups, have been instrumental in operationalizing and maintaining sanitation facilities.

The SBM Grameen Phase II campaigns, like the Sujalam Campaign, focused on specific aspects of sanitation, such as greywater management. These initiatives led to the construction of 5.1 million soak pits, showcasing the commitment to comprehensive sanitation solutions. The participation of rural communities was a driving force behind the success of SBM Grameen Phase II. Recognizing them as key stakeholders, the mission employed community-driven approaches, empowering individuals to take ownership of their sanitation facilities. The involvement of government agencies, PSUs, and rural WASH partners was crucial in realizing the mission's goals.

The achievement of over 5 lakh ODF Plus villages has led to improved quality of life, reduced disease risks, and enhanced dignity and well-being in rural communities. This milestone in India's sanitation journey is more than a statistic; it represents a deep-rooted change impacting millions. It's a testament to the collective determination and resilience of rural communities in achieving a 'Sampoorna Swachh Bharat' or a Completely Clean India. The mission's meticulous planning and concerted efforts have been pivotal in realizing the Prime Minister's vision of a 'Swachh Bharat'. As SBM Grameen moves forward, the focus on community ownership and man-

agement of sanitation infrastructure remains key to sustaining these practices. The mission's role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals and contributing to India's economic growth is significant, highlighting its comprehensive and transformative impact. By addressing water body pollution and improving water security, SBM Grameen is not only making India's villages cleaner and healthier but also positioning them as potential economic centres, contributing to the broader goal of India becoming a USD 5 trillion economy.

(The writer is Executive Director, of WASH Institute, and a Member of NFSSM Alliance, views are personal)









# Tottenham outplayed in 4-2 loss

Team top-four credentials in Premier League damaged

**AP ■ BRIGHTON (ENGLAND)**  
Tottenham's top-four credentials were damaged by a miserable performance in a 4-2 loss at Brighton in the Premier League. Late goals for Tottenham by Alejo Veliz and Ben Davies gave the score a respectable look but the visitors were outplayed at Amex Stadium by a Brighton team missing up to 10 players through injury. Jack Hinshelwood powered a shot into the roof of the net in the 11th minute and Joao Pedro converted a penalty in the 23rd after Dejan Kulusevski pulled back Danny Welbeck in the area. James Milner also struck the post for Brighton in a first half that saw Tottenham's defense-missing injured center backs Cristian Romero and Micky van de Ven -- get sliced open time and again.



Richarlison also hit the post and had a goal ruled out for offside for Tottenham before half-time substitute Pervis Estupinan made it 3-0 with a shot from 25 yards (meters) that flew into the top corner in the 63rd. Joao Pedro scored his second - again from the penalty spot - in the 75th after Evan Ferguson was fouled by Giovanni Lo Celso, but Tottenham then rallied late. Veliz netted his first Premier League goal after Kulusevski blocked Lewis Dunk's clearance straight to Son, who set up the Argentine forward in the 81st. When Davies headed in Pedro Porro's cross four minutes later, a sensational comeback was potentially on but Brighton held on despite more chances for Tottenham, which would have jumped back into the top four with a victory.



## Arsenal beaten 2-0 for 1st home loss in Premier League

**AP ■ LONDON**  
Arsenal lost at home for the first time since May as a 2-0 defeat to West Ham cost Mikel Arteta's team the chance to return to the top of the Premier League. Goals by Tomas Soucek in the 13th minute and former Arsenal player Konstantinos Mavropanos in the 55th - combined with a stout defensive display - gave West Ham a surprising win at Emirates Stadium and continued a midseason blip by the Gunners. That's just one win in its last four league matches for Arsenal, which was in first place for Christmas and needs to beat Fulham away on Sunday to be in that position heading into 2024. Arsenal is currently in second place and two points behind Liverpool, which doesn't play again until New Year's Day. It could have been an even bigger win for West Ham but Said Benrahma had a penalty saved by Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya in the sixth minute of stoppage time. There was some controversy over the first goal, with cameras not showing definitively if the ball was out of play when Jarrod Bowen turned it back into the area for Soucek to force home. Bowen's leg blocked the best sight of whether any of the ball was in play and the referee stayed with the onfield decision of giving the goal. A similar situation occurred with Arsenal at Newcastle, which scored the only goal of their game at St. James' Park on Nov. 4 amid debate over whether the ball was in play as a cross came in for Anthony Gordon's strike. West Ham lost Lucas Paqueta to an apparent leg hamstring injury just after the half-hour mark - the Brazilian had been a doubt at the start of the game - but losing one of their key players didn't put the visitors out of their stride. Bukayo Saka hit the post for Arsenal but the home side lacked its usual energy in attack and conceded again when James Ward-Prowse's corner was flicked home off the underside of the crossbar by Mavropanos, whose celebration was muted because of his previous links to Arsenal. Arsenal last lost at home in mid-May to Brighton, a defeat that virtually ensured the title last season would be heading to Manchester City and not the Gunners.

## Australian Open hikes prize money by 13 per cent

**AP ■ MELBOURNE**  
Australian Open tennis officials have announced an increase in prize money by 10 million Australian dollars (USD 6.8 million) for the upcoming tournament which begins on Jan. 14 at Melbourne Park. Tournament director Craig Tiley said in a statement Friday that the Grand Slam tournament will now offer 86.5 Australian dollars (USD58.4 million) in total prize money. The U.S. Open announced in August that it was increasing its total prize money and player compensation to a record USD 65 million, which is the highest among the four Grand Slam tournaments.



"We've upped prize money for every round at the Australian Open with the major increases in qualifying and the early rounds of singles and doubles," Tiley said. At Melbourne, first-round qualifiers will receive a 20% increase to 31,250 Australian dollars (about USD 21,000). Men's and women's singles champions will receive \$3.15 million Australian dollars each (about \$2.15 million). The women's final, where Aryna Sabalenka is the defending champion, is set for Jan. 27. The men's final, where Novak Djokovic is the defending champion, is scheduled for Jan.

## US routs Swiss 11-3 at Hockey world juniors

**PTI ■ GOTHENBURG (SWEDEN)**  
Jimmy Snuggerud scored three goals for a natural hat trick in the first 12 minutes to help the United States rout Switzerland 11-3 in the world junior hockey championship. Will Smith opened the rout 1:20 into the game off a cross-ice pass from Zeev Buium for a one-timer near the net. Snuggerud also got his first two minutes later and the University of Minnesota star added goals at 8:11 and 12:36. Tied with Slovakia for the Group B lead, the U.S. (2-0) led 9-1 after two periods. The Americans outshot Switzerland 40-24, with Jacob Fowler making 21 saves. "I liked our start," coach David Carle said. "We made them uncomfortable early and that was important. It was a good win and now we'll turn our attention to an excellent Czech team." Snuggerud also had an assist. Gavin Brindley had two goals



## Djokovic, Swiatek arrive for United Cup

**AP ■ PERTH (AUSTRALIA)**  
The United Cup tennis tournament began Friday with Spain playing Brazil and Australia taking on Britain in the higher-profile late match at Perth, Western Australia. The tournament involving mixed teams from 18 countries is being played in Perth and Sydney, where matches begin on Saturday. Two quarterfinalists will be determined from each of the Perth and Sydney group games with the semifinals and the Jan. 7 final set for Sydney. The format sees men's and women's singles matches played ahead of mixed doubles, the same used by the highly-successful Hopman Cup that was formerly played in Perth. No. 1-ranked woman Iga Swiatek is representing Poland and playing in Perth. Top-ranked and defending Australian Open champion Carlos Alcaraz in the final in five sets. He has won the Australian Open a record 10 times among his record 24 Grand Slam singles titles. On his arrival in Perth, he reiterated he has no plans to retire. "I hope it's not (the) last (time), to be honest. I mean I always look forward coming back to Australia," Djokovic said. "I always felt like I played my best tennis over the years (here) and had great support." Djokovic last visited Perth in 2013 when he played at the Hopman Cup. "It feels great, it's been a while since I was here last," Djokovic said. "I remember every single time I played in Perth it was great attendance, people love tennis, people love sport in Australia in general. So I don't expect anything less this time, and I'm sure it's going to be a blast for all of us."



Novak Djokovic has arrived to represent Serbia, also in Perth. Serbia will take on China on Sunday and Czech Republic on Tuesday in the group stage, with Djokovic set to face world No. 58 Zhang Zhizhen and No.31-ranked Jiri Lehecka in his men's singles matches. Djokovic won three Grand Slam singles titles this year, missing out on only Wimbledon, where he lost to

## Women Hockey team works with Rupinder Pal to address penalty corner woes

**PTI ■ BENGALURU**  
In order to fix its perennial penalty-corner woes, the Indian women's hockey team is engaged in a skill-sharpening exercise with legendary drag flicker Rupinder Pal Singh during the on-going five-day camp here ahead of next month's FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi. Despite winning the recent Asian Champions Trophy in Ranchi defeating Japan, India had wasted plenty of penalty corners, and coach Janneke Schopman had marked it as an area that needed urgent improvement. Ace women's drag flicker Gurjit Kaur termed the camp, that began on Wednesday at the SAI Bengaluru, as a perfect learning space ahead of the crucial qualifiers. The Olympic qualifiers are scheduled to be held between January 13 and 19, 2024. "We are learning new things each day and looking to further improve our game by focusing on specific aspects that need refinement. Rupinder has been instrumental in guiding us. "As we gear up for the upcoming tournaments, we are confident that the lessons learned here will contribute significantly to our performance on the field," said Gurjit. It was not tough to see why



Games, where they ended up with a bronze medal. In that tournament, India had earned 69 penalty corners and converted just 16 of them at an average of 23.1 per cent. That Achilles' heel haunted them in the semifinal against hosts China as India could not score off the six penalty corners they earned. Eventually, India lost that game 0-4. India nearly botched up the bronze medal match against Japan too as they could score only once from 11 penalty corners. However, they managed a 2-1 win over the Asian rivals.

Deepika, who regularly takes the penalty corner, said Rupinder shared the nuances about drag flicking such as the angle to take the shot and how to tackle the first-rushers from the opposition defence. "He shared insights on the first rushers, how they have become fearless and close down on the ball faster than before. To counter this, he advised us to pick up the ball faster. "We also picked his brain on how to beat the first rusher, determining the line the rusher follows, where to get the ball stopped, which angle to take the shot in, and how to deal with mis-trapped balls," noted Deepika. Rupinder, who had scored a whopping 234 goals in 223 appearances before his retirement in 2021, said he was satisfied by the lesson-intake ability of his wards. "Gurjit and Deepika are exceptional drag flickers. They quickly understand and implement our pointers. This crash course will be a fantastic way to brush up their skills before heading to Ranchi," said the towering full-back, who played a stellar role in India's bronze-winning effort in the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

## Prasanna, Chakkravarthy, Laxman headline Chennai Open 2023 field

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
Indian Grandmasters Vishnu Prasanna, Deepan Chakkravarthy and RR Laxman will headline a strong field in the 2023 Chennai Open International Chess Tournament which starts here from December 31. The tournament, which ends on January 7, 2024, has attracted over 320 entries, including 28 foreign players. India's Aronyak Ghosh (Elo 2545) is the top seed while Russian GM Savchenko Boris (Elo 2505) is seeded second. "This tournament offers a great opportunity for players who are in good form. It acts as a norm-seeker. One can even complete three IM and GM (norms) if they are in great form," said Tamil Nadu State Chess Association vice-president B Murugavel during a press meet here on Friday. Some of the other GMs to participate in the event are: Fedorov Alexei (Belarus), Glek Igor (Belgium), Nguyen Duc Hoa (Vietnam), Ziatdinov, Raset (USA),



Podolchenko Evgeniy (Belarus) and Manik Mikulas (Slovakia). The Chennai Open is the third of the six GM competitions in India after the Meghalaya Open and Madurai Open, while Indore Open, Bengaluru Open and Bhubaneswar Open will follow this tournament. The total prize money for this event is Rs 20,00,000 and the winner will be richer by Rs 4,00,000 and the runner-up will add Rs 3,00,000 to his account.

## Final line will be drawn by players strength of character: Stimac

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Lined up to face strong sides like Australia and Uzbekistan in the AFC Asian Cup football in Doha next month, India head coach Igor Stimac on Friday said "strength of character" will be the parameter to decide who will be included in the final squad. India are clubbed with formidable Australia, strong central Asian side Uzbekistan and tricky Syria -- all above Stimac's team in the FIFA rankings -- in the group stage of the Asian Cup from January 13 onwards. "All the boys in the (probable) list are similar in their football qualities. What we are looking for the final list of 26 is definitely experience, physical strength, and the final line will be drawn by the strength of their character," Stimac said on the All India Football Federation's social media handles. "This is very important for us as a team, because no matter the talent, if there is no character nothing can be achieved," he added. Stimac will announce his final 26 players before the team's departure on Saturday. Regarding areas which the team needs improvement, he said, "I am looking for defensive compactness, offensive transition, and the set pieces mostly. "It's also very important to work on man marking inside the box, because I was not happy with that part of our game, in the last few games. We started leaking some unnecessary goals inside the box because marking was not properly done." India will face Australia on January 13, before playing against Uzbekistan (January 18) and Syria (January 23). "All three opponents are technically good, physically strong, with great speed. So, we are not going to have much difference in approach of all these three games. "The main focus for us will be to check the fitness level of our players at present and see how much we can develop in the next two weeks," he said. Stimac is also grappling with injuries to few of his key players. Defensive midfielder Jeakson Singh, who underwent surgery on his left shoulder early last month, was named among the 50 probables but he is uncertain to be in the final 26. Midfielders Glan Martins and Shah Abdul Samad, both Mohun Bagan players, had suffered injuries recently, which has given more headache to Stimac.



## Over 20 sportspersons fail dope tests in Goa National Games in one of country's biggest hauls

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
More than 20 athletes from various sports have returned positive for banned drugs in tests conducted during the National Games in Goa in October-November in one of the biggest hauls of doping cases in the country. Most of the 20-odd dope offenders have been handed provisional suspension by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), which had collected dope samples from the participants in the October 25 to November 9 multi-sport event. Many have won medals in the Games while there were a few international players. There were nine track and field athletes and seven weightlifters among the dope offenders, according to sources. The most prominent of the seven weightlifters who failed dope tests was Vandana Gupta, a double bronze-medal winner in the Commonwealth Championships. "Yes, seven weightlifters have failed dope tests during the Goa National Games and there could be more in the coming days," a source from the Indian Weightlifting Federation told PTI. The 29-year-old Vandana, from Uttar Pradesh, had won gold in the women's 76kg category in Goa with a total lift of 207kg. She is a bronze-medal winner in 63kg category in both the 2013 and 2017 Commonwealth Championships, besides finishing fourth in 63kg class in the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Cyclist Anita Devi was handed provisional suspension by the NADA on December 6 after her urine sample collected on November 3 was found to contain banned drug 19-Norandrosterone, an anabolic androgenic steroid. Devi was a member of the women's 4km pursuit team from Manipur that won the gold medal. The Goa National Games were held after a seven-year delay due to issues related to building of infrastructure and a huge number of dope offenders has now come out from the multi-sport event. 2015 National Games in Kerala had seen 16 dope positive cases while the count in the 2022 edition in Gujarat was 10.

