

**WORLD 5**  
PAKISTAN SHUTS KEY  
CROSSING INTO AFGHANISTAN

**MONEY 6**  
RED SEA CRISIS: MINISTRY  
CALLS INTER-MINISTERIAL MEET

**SPORT 8**  
INDIA EYE SERIES WIN  
OVER AFGHANISTAN

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## INDIA Bloc flounders

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■  
NEW DELHI

After expressing his earnest desires for the last six months to assume the role of Convener of the Opposition grouping INDIA bloc, JD(U) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar declined the offer made during the virtual meeting of Opposition leaders. In that meeting, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was named the Chairperson of the large alliance preparing to take on the juggernaut of Narendra Modi-led BJP in the Lok Sabha polls. Major stakeholders, including Mamata Banerjee-led TMC, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, and Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav, skipped the meeting for the second time in a fortnight. Despite pressures from other allies, there has been no consensus headway in the seat sharing for the general elections. AAP, which also attended the virtual meet, had a separate meeting between Kharge and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal in the presence of Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, and other AAP leaders at the residence of the Congress chief. Sources said that the intense deliberation, which also saw participation by NCP supremo Sharad Pawar, reached a consensus to choose Kharge as the Chairperson of the INDIA bloc. Nitish was



NCP chief Sharad Pawar attends a meeting of INDIA bloc leaders via video conferencing, on Saturday

PTI

another contender for the top post, but in the meeting, he proposed someone from Congress should assume charge. Further, when the proposal for the Bihar CM to be named as Convener was raised, the senior JD(U) leader declined, albeit mentioning that he would discuss the matter with the two big absentees, Mamata and Akhilesh, before expressing his mind. Nitish spearheaded the Opposition unification since last June, and through his party leaders, he has often made his intentions clear to secure the coveted post. Recently, Nitish effected a major change in the party by taking over the reins of JD(U)

from his closest aide and party Lok Sabha MP Lallan Singh after it is believed that the former was not happy with the latter, who could not oppose the name of Congress president as the bloc PM candidate in the meeting held in Mumbai. After Nitish refused to take the post immediately in the virtual meeting, Kharge said he would discuss the issue with Mamata Banerjee and Akhilesh Yadav. According to an INDIA bloc functionary, the convener of the alliance will be just below that of the chairperson. INDIA is a group of Opposition parties, including the Congress.

Continued on Page 2

## ED chasing two Elusive CMs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

After he failed to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been summoned for the fourth time in less than three months by the agency for questioning on January 18 in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case, official sources said on Saturday. Meanwhile, the ED summoned Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren for the eighth time in connection with the "illegal mining case", sources told a news agency on Saturday. According to the report, the ED asked Soren to appear before the agency between January 16 and 20. The 55-year-old Aam Aadmi Party convener had refused to depose before the ED for the third time on January 3, citing Rajya Sabha polls and Republic Day preparations. He had also questioned the motive behind the ED's actions, citing legal "objections" to the summons and accusing the agency of assuming the role of "judge, jury and executioner". By issuing the fresh notice, the ED has again rejected Kejriwal's contention that the summonses issued to him were "not in consonance with the law" and hence should be withdrawn.



AAP alleged the BJP is "misusing" the ED to stop Kejriwal from campaigning for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as it raised the issue of the timing of the summons, noting that Kejriwal is scheduled to visit Goa from January 18 to interact with party leaders and volunteers. The ED had earlier issued summons to Soren's press adviser Abhishek Prasad, asking him to join its investigation on January 16 into an alleged money laundering probe linked to an illegal mining case. The probe agency had also summoned Ramnivas Yadav, Deputy Commissioner of Sahibganj, on January 11.

## Coldest Lohri in recent memory

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Breaking Friday's record as the coldest day of the season, Delhi witnessed the coldest Lohri this season on Saturday, as Delhi's Sainik Farms recorded a temperature of 1.07 degrees Celsius. Despite the bone-chilling cold wave, people in the national capital were undeterred. They lit bonfires, danced, and distributed jaggery, popcorn, and rewri. There will be no relief from the intense cold wave, which is expected to continue on Makar Sankranti on Sunday. Given the likelihood of a



continuation of the cold wave, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted a cold wave on Sunday. The maximum and minimum

temperatures are likely to settle around 19 and 4 degrees Celsius, respectively, it added.

Continued on Page 2

## Date auspicious for Mandir inauguration

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The trustees of the Lord Rama Temple at Ayodhya have selected January 22 as the day for Prana Prathishta because it is the most auspicious day according to scriptures as well as astrological science, said South India's leading Vedic scholars and astrologers. The Sringeri Mutt and Dwaraka Mutt, established by Adi Sankaracharya, have expressed displeasure over the actions of certain entities and individuals spreading false propaganda that they were

against the Prana Prathishta scheduled for January 22. Both the Mutts issued releases negating the false news. January 22, which falls on a Monday, is Sukla Paksham, a Dwadashi day. It is a Makeeryam (Mrigaseersham) star day. Makeeryam is an Anna Prasha Nakshathra day (Auspicious day for the first feeding of an infant). Considering all other aspects of the day, it is happening during the Uttarayana, making it ideal for Mahaparivarthana Chakravarthi Yoga and Manava Shrestha Yoga day.

Continued on Page 2

### CAPSULE

#### Hindustani vocalist Prabha Atre dies

New Delhi: Prabha Atre, 92, the woman who could have been lawyer, scientist or doctor but became a globally renowned Hindustani classical vocalist instead, died in her Pune home hours before she was to leave for a concert. P2

#### 1,200 JN.1 cases

New Delhi: A total of 1,200 cases of COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 have been reported in the country so far with Nagaland becoming the latest of the 17 States and UTs. P4

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# Ram temple consecration to be live on largest floating screen

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the consecration ceremony round the corner, preparations have gained momentum under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to deck up Ramnagri as the new, grand and divine (Navya, Bhavya and Divya) Ayodhya. As part of the preparations, the Yogi Government is building the country's largest floating screen at Chaudhary Charan Singh Ghat, which will later be installed at Aarti Ghat for the live telecast of the consecration ceremony and related programmes as well as the development journey of Ayodhya. The Ayodhya Municipal Corporation had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Century Hospitality-Megaverse Associate in this regard in August. The floating screen will enable visitors and local residents to watch the 'Pran-Pratishtha' ceremony on January 22 and other cultural programmes thereafter. The objective behind the instal-



lation of the floating screen is to make visitors, both from within the country and abroad, aware of Ayodhya's rich cultural legacy. Akshay Anand, managing director of Century Hospitality-Megaverse Associate, which is constructing the floating screen, said it would be the largest floating screen of its kind built in the country so far. According to him, the size of the screen will be 1,100 square feet. The construction of the floating screen started in November and will be completed in record time.

In line with Yogi's vision, Ayodhya is being developed based on eight themes. The government is also trying to project Ayodhya as a city with great cultural heritage. In view of this, first of all, the consecration programme of Ram Temple will be telecast on this screen on January 22. Thereafter, the spiritual, cultural, mythological stories and importance of Ayodhya will be showcased. According to Anand, 60-70 artisans from Visakhapatnam are working day and night to

build the floating screen by January 19. "Work on this is being done as per PM Modi's and CM Yogi's concept of Make in India. Currently, it will be operated on biodiesel, but the plan is to operate it using solar power in future. At present, it is about 3 kms from Chaudhary Charan Singh Ghat to Laxman Ghat. It will be operated only near deep water in the distance, but keeping in view the flow of water of Saryu, the scope of this floating screen will also increase. After the consecration, there is also a plan to construct a 5,000 square feet floating restaurant. An MoU has also been signed regarding this. After the successful operation of the floating screen, the company will start work on this plan. This restaurant will be equipped with state-of-the-art facilities to make tourists' journey to Ayodhya memorable. A screen will also be installed at the restaurant on which the story of Ram will be presented.

# Army adopts new plan to end JK terror

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The top brass of the Northern Command headquarters led by Lt-Gen Upendra Dwivedi has adopted a new strategy for the year 2024 aimed at eradicating the roots of terrorism from the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch thereby defeating the inimical designs of adversary and sponsored terrorists. The new strategy was unveiled during a crucial security review meeting that took place a day after Army Chief General Manoj Pande expressed concern about an increase in incidents of terrorist violence in the Rajouri-Poonch sector. Meanwhile, another attack on a security convoy vehicle late Friday evening in the Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch has necessitated a calibrated response to the provocative acts of terrorism. The army authorities have already rushed additional troops into the region to launch counter-terrorist operations. Massive searches were conducted in the KG sector to trap the group of foreign terrorists hiding inside the natural caves in the



area. Addressing an annual press conference ahead of Army Day, General Manoj Pande Thursday pointed out that terror infrastructure continues to thrive across the border, making an apparent reference to Pakistan's support for various terrorist groups. Before chairing the meeting, Northern Army Commander, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi also visited forward areas in the Rajouri Sector to review the operational preparedness in light of the prevailing security situation. On Saturday the Northern Army Commander visited the Machhal sector to review the

Counter Infiltration Grid. "Lt-Gen Upendra Dwivedi, accompanied by Chinar Corps Commander and GOC Vajir Division visited forward Battalions in the Machhal Sector. "The Army Commander interacted with the troops and personnel of Rashtriya Rifles, Jammu and Kashmir police, BSF & BRO and commended them for their persistent vigilance & compelling contribution to maintaining lasting peace in the region. On Friday, a comprehensive 'Manthan' was carried out with the officers of Counter Insurgency Force (R), CIF (D)

& Ace of Spades Division on the operational dynamics of 2023 and the prevailing security situation along the Line of Control and the hinterland at HQ CIF (R) & Reasi. According to Defence PRO in Jammu, the Northern Army Commander, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi reviewed the complete pattern of terrorism along with senior officers. During the meeting, the Northern Army Commander outlined the 'Strat 24' for operational focus in the year 2024 to defeat the inimical designs of our adversary and sponsored terrorists. While chairing the 'Security Review Meeting', Lt-Gen Dwivedi appreciated the excellent synergy among security forces, JKP, CRPF, Intelligence Agencies, and Civil Administration. Separate discussions with DGP J&K, RR Swain, ADG Law & Order, Vijay Kumar, ADG Anand, Vajir Kumar, ADG Anand & IG CRPF Sanjeev Khirwar also took place to fine-tune the synergy between the different wings of the security forces. All stakeholders assured to work in synergy to achieve the desired end state, eradicating the roots of terrorism in the Poonch - Rajouri Area.

# Modi to begin BJP campaign in Kerala on Tuesday

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is flying down to Kochi next Tuesday to hold a road show in Kerala, his second in as many weeks. The Congress as well as the CPI(M) and the fringe outfits supporting these parties fear that the BJP to go out for an all out campaign to open its account from the State in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. The Prime Minister's road show held on 3 January at Thrissur, the cultural capital of the State, has been a major success, going by the size of the crowd gathered for the public meeting and also the number of people, especially women, who lined up the thoroughfare in the town to greet him. His public speech in which he articulated the welfare measures implemented by the Union Government with the suffix "Modiyude Guarantee" (Malayalam for Modi's Guarantee) has become a war cry for the BJP. Modi will take off to the Lord Krishna Temple at Guruvayur on Wednesday morning to attend the wedding of Bhagya, daughter of former Rajya Sabha member Suresh Gopi. It is widely believed that Suresh Gopi is being fielded by the BJP from the Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency as its candidate. The Prime Minister will return to Kochi and is scheduled to inaugurate a series of projects implemented by the Central Government. He is visiting



Cochin Shipyard Ltd where works of the battleship meant for Indian Navy are in progress. Modi will also interact with the party's State-level office bearers during his tour. Though the Prime Minister commands wide respect and adoration among the people of the State, the same cannot be said about the Kerala BJP. The party, despite the bountiful financial help provided by the Central leadership has failed to win at least one seat from Kerala since the party was formed in 1980. Despite its image as a Hindutva outfit, the BJP has succeeded in attracting Christian community members but the State leadership has failed successively to take them into confidence and enlarge the vote base of the party. Internal squabbling and playing the game of one-upmanship together with the absence of an effective leader are seen as the reason for the party's failure. The best performance by the BJP till date has been the 2016 assembly polls when the party polled 14.9 per cent. But

this fell down to 12 per cent in the 2021 election. There is widespread resentment among the party cadre against union minister of state V Muraleedharan who has been elected to Rajya Sabha from north Indian States and K Surendran, the state party chief. Surendran will go down in history as the first State chief who has been listed as an accused in hawala transaction and electoral manipulation," said a party insider. He also pointed out that Muraleedharan does not allow anyone to grow up in the party. "We had succeeded in fielding a former director general of police Dr Jacob Thomas as party candidate in the 2021 assembly election. But the Muraleedharan-Surendran combo does not like induction of efficient persons like Dr Thomas and Metro Man E Sreedharan in the party," said the party's leader. The general impression is that Surendran and Muraleedharan should be shown the door for the BJP to take roots in Kerala.

# Diverse group of artists strumming paeans in praise of Lord Ram

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Be it 70-year-old bhajan Samrat Padmshree Anup Jalota, 21-year-old German singer Cassandra Mei Spittmann or GenNext Indian singers—a diverse group of artists from music arena are strumming paeans in praise of God Ram in the run up to the Ram Mandir consecration in Ayodhya on January 22. This kind of cultural convergence, celebrating and honoring Lord Ram through their musical expressions has already drawn the attention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi too who on last Sunday in his 'Mann ki Baat' noted that "There is enthusiasm and excitement across the country regarding the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. People are expressing their emotions in various ways. "You must have seen that in the last few days, new songs and bhajans have been composed on Shri Ram and Ayodhya. Many people are also writing new poems," he said in his post On X. He talked about half a dozen such devotional songs spotlighting names such as Swati Mishra (Ram Aayenge), Hansraj Raghuvanshi (Yug Ram Raj Ka), Geetaben Rabari (Shree Ram Ghar Aaye), Swasti Mehul (Ram Aayenge) and Jubin Nautiyal (Mere Ghar Ram Aaye Hain), Vikas (Known as JJ Vyck) and



Mahesh Kukreja as well as playback singer Hariharan. In tune with the sentiments in the air, Music companies too have focused their attention on devotional songs relating to God Ram. For instance, BhojpuriT and Bhojpur Astha supported by Santani organization recently released a new song roping in Jalota. The title of this song, based on the construction of the Ayodhya Ram temple, is 'Ram Lala Ghar Aa Gayile'. The song is produced by producers Shailendra Dwivedi and Director Ashutosh Upadhyay and written by Prafulla Tiwari. Two popular faces of social media, Vipul Mishra and Tanna Upadhyay, are also featured in the song. Dwivedi said "BhojpuriT aims to 'create clean content'. The dream of building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, seen by many of our generations in the last 500 years, is about to be fulfilled. My idea was to dedicate a song to welcome Ram Lalla on his arrival." The venture is supported by retired police officer Ajay Raj Pandey, founder of 'Sanatani Coins'.

# Nadda to launch drive to clean up holy places today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda will launch on Sunday a nationwide campaign to clean up holy places and their surrounding areas in the run-up to the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. BJP national spokesperson Prem Shukla said Union Ministers and party leaders at the national and State levels will be part of the campaign and are expected to give two to three hours everyday for the task till January 22, the day of the consecration ceremony.

# AAP to launch ghar bachao, BJP hatao campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Alleging that the Centre has demolished slum clusters in the national capital, the AAP's Delhi unit convenor Gopal Rai on Saturday said the party will launch a campaign against it and hold a protest outside the BJP headquarters here. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP General Secretary Harsh Malhotra has said that the Arvind Kejriwal government, which is surrounded by corruption allegations, is trying to divert the attention of media and public from its corruption by misleading the slum dwellers.

# International wrestler joins campaign for tobacco free India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Unlike many celebrities who are busy earning quick buck by surrogate tobacco advertising ignoring health of youths, international wrestler Sangram Singh has chosen to use his influence for a positive cause by joining forces with health experts like Alok Thakar, Head, National Cancer Institute and Professor of Otolaryngology & Head-Neck Surgery, AIIMS Delhi, and Urvasi Prasad, Director of NITI Aayog to advocate against the tobacco menace. On the occasion of National Youth Day, the youth icon Sangarm Singh, said, "This young population is particularly vulnerable to the hazards of tobacco; implementing tobacco warnings is crucial." He was sharing his concerns at the webinar 'Viksit Bharat-Tambaku Mukta Bharat' organized by Tobacco Free India, a citizen's initiative recently. Along with other participants he too underscored the importance of implementing tobacco warning rules on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, akin to the regulations previously enforced for film and television. The experts also called for the prohibition of surrogate advertisements, point-of-sale tobacco ads, and smoking zones. Alok Thakar brought attention to "the alarming surge in can-



cer cases associated with tobacco consumption". He said, "In the past year, there has been a proliferation of surrogate advertisements, particularly for smokeless tobacco products." Epidemiologist and public health expert Chandrakant Lahariya cited findings from the GYTS-India Survey conducted by the Government and said, "Approximately one-fifth of individuals aged 13-15 had used some form of tobacco product, and this proportion was even higher among older age groups." He emphasised that on-screen tobacco warnings not only have a direct impact on youth but also result in a reduction of tobacco-related scenes in the media. He also cited the Health Ministry's report on India's tobacco-free film and television policy, illustrating the positive outcomes of implementing tobacco warnings. Lahariya also stressed that even a 10 per cent reduction in tobacco use among these individuals through warning rules could potentially save up to 20 million lives in the long run.

# Coldest Lohri in recent...

From Page 1

According to the IMD, the minimum temperature in Ayanagar was 3 degrees Celsius (four notches below the season's normal), 3.4 degrees in Lodhi Road (four notches below the normal), 3.6 in Safdarjung (four notches below the season's normal), 3.9 in Ridge (four notches below the season's normal), and 5.8 in Palam (two notches below the season's average). The maximum temperature in Delhi was recorded at 18.1 degrees Celsius, two notches below the normal. The maximum temperatures in Palam 17.6 degrees Celsius (three notches below the normal), Lodhi Road 18.1 degrees Celsius, Ridge 16.3 degrees Celsius, Ayanagar 20 degrees Celsius, Jafarpur 17.1 degrees Celsius, Mungeshpur 15.6 degrees Celsius, Narela 17.5 degrees Celsius, Pitampura 17.3 degrees Celsius, Pusa 18.2 degrees Celsius, and SPS Mayur Vihar 14.4 degrees Celsius. IMD issued a red alert due to cold and dense fog conditions in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) for Saturday. Officials reported that mild sunlight failed to raise the daytime temperature. On Friday, the national capital woke up to bone-chilling temperatures as the mercury plummeted to 3.9 degrees Celsius, marking the lowest temperature recorded this season. The coldest Lohri was recorded in 2021 when the minimum temperature was 3.2 degrees Celsius. Earlier, the second-lowest, 3.3 degrees Celsius, was recorded on January 13, 2001, and the next closest was Lohri 2007, measuring a temperature of 3.6 degrees Celsius. On four occasions, the lowest temperature was in double digits, 10 degrees Celsius and above, in the years 2000 (12.5°C), 2004 (10.4°C), 2013 (10°C), and 2016 (10°C). In an advisory, the IMD warned not to ignore shivering, as it is the first sign that the body is losing heat. The advisory recommended staying indoors and wearing several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm woolen

clothing. To combat the bone-chilling temperatures, streets and public spaces became dotted with small groups huddled around bonfires to keep warm. Drone visuals from Munirka and Vasant Vihar areas showed fog enveloping the city, reducing visibility, and causing traffic to slow down on major roads and highways. The visibility at Safdarjung Observatory, Delhi's main weather station, was 200 meters at 5:30 am, according to the IMD. According to the Railways, 18 Delhi-bound trains were delayed by one to six hours due to the fog. Several flight operations were delayed at the Delhi airport due to low visibility amid fog. Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 365 at 9 am, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. The IMD said that cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are very likely to continue in some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi till January 15 and cold wave conditions in isolated pockets on January 16. In its daily bulletin, the weather forecast agency also predicted that dense to very dense fog conditions are likely to continue to prevail over North India during the next 4-5 days. The meteorological department anticipates cold day to severe cold day wave conditions over the plains of Northwest India for the next three days, with a gradual reduction thereafter. The impact of the cold wave extended beyond Delhi, as neighboring states experienced similar weather woes. In Uttar Pradesh, Ayodhya was blanketed in dense fog, causing disruptions to daily life. According to the IMD, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Uttar Pradesh are experiencing dense to very dense fog at many places, severely affecting visibility and disrupting transportation. Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan are grappling with isolated instances of dense fog, creating challenging conditions for residents.

# INDIA Bloc flounders

From Page 1

The parties have come together to take on the BJP and prevent it from winning a third straight term at the Centre in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. While the party's position in the INDIA Bloc continues what is worrisome is the seat sharing with bigger allies ans in states with large number of Lok Sabha seats. In Uttar Pradesh, the SP will not budge from taking the huge pie. In recent Madhya Pradesh assembly elections, Congress did not honour SPs demand of assembly seats and since then the relationship between Congress and SP is at its lowest ebb and leaders from both sides washed liens in public. Congress's discussion with AAP is also proving contentious. While the party pressing for 4 seats in Delhi and seven seats in Punjab, AAP is not ready to comply. In both Delhi and Punjab, the ruling party wants the bigger share of seats. AAP also wants to contest in Goa, Haryana and Gujarat, sources said. TMC which abstained from the virtual

meeting though affirmed its commitment to it but said that Congress should recognise its limitations in Bengal and permit the party to spearhead the political battle in it. "We are committed to the INDIA alliance and want to work together to defeat BJP. But we sincerely wish that the Congress leadership acknowledges the limitations and weaknesses of their Bengal unit and allows us (TMC) to lead the fight in the state," a TMC senior functionary said. The TMC had already announced that Mamata Banerjee will not be able to attend the virtual meeting as she has "prior engagements and will not be able to change them at 16 hours notice". "We were told that no one else can attend as only one person is allowed from each of the INDIA constituent parties," the TMC member said. Earlier, TMC had declined to send representatives to meetings with the Congress' national alliance committee on seat sharing for

Sabha elections, citing its prior stance, which it had communicated to the Congress. The TMC had offered Congress two seats in West Bengal based on the result of the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The Congress, however, deemed the offer inadequate. Last week, TMC Lok Sabha Party leader Sudip Bandopadhyay indicated the party's willingness to collaborate with the Congress but said the party will go solo if negotiations fail. Recently, state Congress president and the party's leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who is a vocal critic of TMC, asserted that his party will not "beg" for seats from TMC. In the 2019 elections, TMC secured 22 seats, and Congress bagged two, while BJP secured 18 seats in the State. Banerjee's proposal for an alliance between TMC, Congress, and the Left in West Bengal in November last year met swift dismissal from the CPI (M) and criticism from some Congress leaders.

# Date auspicious...

From Page 1

"This qualifies the day as the most auspicious for rulers as well as the ruled," said Parappananga di Unnikrishnan Panicker, Vedic scholar, and author. "The opinion expressed by a section of society could be either due to ignorance or for the sake of opposition. Astrological traditions

followed in the North and South of the country may show slight variations, but they have no major significance," added Panicker. P Gopala Menon, the chief priest of the upcoming Lord Rama Temple at Puthussery, said that there is nothing wrong in consecrating the temple as the works of the

sanctum sanctorum have been completed. Menon serves as the chief priest (Thanthri) of the temple, where an 18 ft Lord Rama idol will soon be consecrated. Rama Chandran, a scholar and author of many books on philosophy, pointed out that the Sankaracharyas would stay out of the consecration ceremony because they are expected to step out of their Ashrams only during the Chaathur Maasya Vritham (the four-month period of

meditation and prayer). "The pontiffs of Sringeri Mutt in Karnataka and Dwaraka Mutt in Gujarat made it clear on Friday that they would only be able to leave the Ashrams during the Chaathur Maasya Vritham. Hindu do not consider the Puri pontiff as the last word on anything because the previous head of the Mutt was involved in the Khilafat movement, a cardinal sin as far as a Pontiff is concerned," said Rama Chandran.

# Renowned Hindi vocalist Prabha Atre dies at 92



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

She wanted to sing till her last Sbreath and she did. Almost. Prabha Atre, the woman who could have been lawyer, scientist or doctor but became a globally renowned Hindustani classical vocalist instead, died in her Pune home on Saturday hours before she was to leave for a concert in Mumbai. She was 92. In an era when few women ventured into academia or public life, Atre studied two varying disciplines - she had a Bachelor of Science degree from Ferguson College in Pune and one from the Law College in the university there. And unlike many artistes born into families where music was a generations-old tradition or those who trained since they were children, Atre found melody somewhere along the way of life.

# Body of former model found 10 days after murder

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

More than 10 days after she was shot dead in a Gurugram hotel, former model Divya Pahuja's body was found in Bhakra canal in Haryana's Tohana on Saturday. Pahuja's body was identified by a tattoo on her back. The body has been recovered from the subsidiary canal of the Bhakra canal in Tohana, said Gurugram Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime) Varun Kumar Dahiya.

Pahuja, 27, was murdered on January 2, over five months after she was released on bail in connection with the alleged fake encounter of a Haryana-based gangster in a Mumbai hotel room in 2016. "The body in a decomposing situation was recovered from the Bhakra canal in Tohana, Fatehabad district," Dahiya said. However, in connection with the murder, the police have also one another accused identified as Parvesh from Rohtak on Saturday for supplying a murder weapon and other illegal weapons to Abhijeet Singh who killed Divya. The police have so far three illegal weapons and 40 live cartridges from the possession of Abhijeet. The murder weapon is yet to be recovered. Meanwhile, a clue regard-

ing the whereabouts of the body was revealed after the arrest of Balraj Gill, who along with his associate Ravi Banga had fled with Divya's body. With the help of 25 teams of NDRF, and SDRF, the police launched a search for the body from Patiala to Khanauri in Fatehabad. The police sent a photo of the body to Divya's family, following which they identified it to be hers due to the tattoo, police said. After the confirmation, the police took possession of the body. According to the police, Divya and Abhijeet were in a relationship and the latter killed the woman in a fit of rage after she refused to delete some of his



objectionable photos from her mobile phone. Balraj had earlier said that he along with Ravi had thrown Divya's body into the Bhakra Canal near Patiala, Punjab. The body travelled 150 km from Bhakra Canal

near Patiala, Punjab to Khanauri in Fatehabad after it was recovered by the police. Balraj is being brought to Gurugram on a three-day transit remand. He disclosed that after throw-

ing the body into the Bhakra Canal, they abandoned the BMW used in the crime at the Patiala bus stand. According to police sources, Balraj revealed that on the night of January 2, he and Ravi had left Gurugram with the body in the BMW. After they abandoned the car in Patiala, they first went to Udaipur in a taxi. After this, the police traced both the accused and found out that they were staying in a hotel in Udaipur. By the time the police team reached Udaipur, both the accused escaped from there and returned to Chandigarh. From Chandigarh, Balraj and Ravi boarded a train and reached

Howrah, following which they parted ways. On Thursday, a Look Out Circular (LOC) was issued by the Gurugram Police for Balraj and Ravi amid the possibility of them fleeing abroad. The very next day, the airport police arrested Balraj from Kolkata airport. Ravi, however, remains absconding. In connection with Divya's murder, the police have so far arrested five persons including the prime accused, Abhijeet Singh, his aides Om Prakash, Hemraj, Balraj Gill, Parvesh and a woman, Megha. The woman had helped Abhijeet in hiding, throwing away the murder weapon, documents, and personal belong-

ings of Divya Pahuja. Om Prakash and Hemraj had helped Abhijeet to drag Divya's body into the boot of a BMW car. Later, Balraj and Ravi fled with the body. Megha told the police that when she reached the hotel on January 2, she noticed Divya's body. Abhijeet then asked her to dispose of the belongings of the deceased woman, but she was too scared to follow his instructions, sources said. The police have recovered the BMW car which was used to take the body to Patiala. During questioning, Abhijeet told the police that Divya used to blackmail him and also extorted money.

## Film screenings soared to 623 in 2022, moviegoer numbers shrunk

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The average number of cinema shows per day rose from 450 in 2010 to 623 in 2022 but the average number of cinema goers per day declined in the last 13 years. According to the Delhi Statistical Handbook-2023, the number of theatres in Delhi rose from 129 in 2008 to 137 in 2022, with the peak point being in 2017, when the number was 142. The handbook containing data on socio-economic parameters of the national capital was released by the Delhi government's Economic and Statistics department. The number of multiplexes has also risen from 21 in 2008 to 33 in 2022, the handbook said. The average number of cinema goers per day was 90,000 in 2010 when the theatres, including multiplexes, were showing an average of 450 shows per day. With the average number of shows going up to 510, 98,000 cinema goers visited cinema halls on an average per day in 2011. It rose to 1,07,000 and



1,15,000 in 2012 and 2013, respectively, as the number of shows also surged. In 2014, the average number of shows rose to 665 with the cinema goers rising to 1,23,025. A slump was witnessed in 2017, when the number of average cinema goers per day declined to 49,353. The lowest point came in 2020, when cinemas were shut down from mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The average cinema goers per day figure was 16,180. In 2021, cinema halls across the country were permitted by the

Centre to operate at full capacity from February 1 with adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols. However, cinemas were completely shut during the deadly second wave of the pandemic in April. They were allowed to reopen with 100 per cent occupancy in Delhi from November 1. In 2021, the number of shows stood at 614, while the average number of cinema-goers was at 61,455 and in 2022, the number of shows stood at 623 while the cinema goers figure was at 62,352.

## BJP misusing ED to stop Kejriwal from campaigning for LS polls: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After the Enforcement Directorate (ED) sent its fourth summons to AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy scam case, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Saturday accused the BJP for "misusing" the ED to stop Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from campaigning for Lok Sabha polls. Responding to the AAP's charges, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that Kejriwal was acting like a "fugitive" and his party was giving "political colour" to ED's probe into a case in which two AAP leaders -- former deputy CM Manish Sisodia and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh -- were in jail with different courts rejecting their bail applications multiple times. Addressing a press conference, Rai questioned the timing of the Enforcement Directorate's summons to Kejriwal, saying it came ahead of his Goa tour from January 18. When asked if Kejriwal would appear before the ED



stitutional bodies. It is the BJP's work," Rai charged. "It is beyond comprehension... Delhi CM's Goa tour to be held from January 18-20 in view of Lok Sabha polls was announced yesterday (Friday) and now this news about the ED notice comes," he said. The agency was sitting quietly and as soon as Delhi Chief Minister's tour was announced, it sent the notice, he said. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also slammed the AAP leaders for playing a victim card on the issue of ED's summons. "The Aam Aadmi Party is the most corrupt party in the country. Kejriwal is just playing a game to get public sympathy for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls," he added. The ED has issued summons to Kejriwal for the fourth time for questioning in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case. Kejriwal, who is also the national convener of the AAP, has been asked to appear before the agency at its headquarters here on January 18. This is not the work of a con-

stitutional bodies. It is the BJP's work," Rai charged. "It is beyond comprehension... Delhi CM's Goa tour to be held from January 18-20 in view of Lok Sabha polls was announced yesterday (Friday) and now this news about the ED notice comes," he said. The agency was sitting quietly and as soon as Delhi Chief Minister's tour was announced, it sent the notice, he said. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also slammed the AAP leaders for playing a victim card on the issue of ED's summons. "The Aam Aadmi Party is the most corrupt party in the country. Kejriwal is just playing a game to get public sympathy for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls," he added. The ED has issued summons to Kejriwal for the fourth time for questioning in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case. Kejriwal, who is also the national convener of the AAP, has been asked to appear before the agency at its headquarters here on January 18. This is not the work of a con-

## DMRC records highest ridership on New Year day in last six years

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) carried more than 67 lakh people on January 1, 2024, the highest ridership registered by the mass transit system on a New Year day in the last six years. According to DMRC data released on Saturday, a total of 67.47 lakh commuters availed the services of metro on January 1. The data showed that 49.16 lakh people used metro on January 1 last year, 23.66 lakh in 2022, 55.26 lakh in 2020 and 50.16 lakh in 2019. Among the six years, the lowest ridership of 18.07 lakh was recorded on January 1, 2021, the first New Year celebration post COVID-19 lockdown. On January 1 this year, there were long queues outside several metro stations, including Rajiv Chowk, Patel Chowk, and Central Secretariat. Similarly, on December 31

last year, 48.46 lakh people availed the metro facility. However, the highest ridership on the New Year's eve in the last six years was recorded at 55.29 lakh on December 31, 2019, the data said. According to the data, 47.40 lakh commuters availed the facility on December 31, 2022, 27.45 lakh in 2021, and 50.67 lakh in 2018. The lowest ridership of 18.86 lakh was recorded on December 31, 2020, the first New Year's eve celebration post Covid lockdown. Recently, the DMRC has integrated its ticketing service with 'One Delhi' mobile application, offering the commuters uninterrupted journeys. DMRC Principal Executive Director Anuj Dayal had said that currently utilised for generating QR tickets for the DTC buses, the 'One Delhi' app now serves as a comprehensive platform for streamlined travel arrangements by including QR tickets for the Delhi Metro also.

## Install CCTV cameras outside women toilets, changing rooms during fests: DU to colleges

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi University has directed its colleges to install CCTV cameras outside women's toilets and changing rooms during fests in the aftermath of an incident in which some women were secretly filmed while changing in IIT-Delhi, officials said on Friday. In a recent advisory, the administration also asked its colleges and departments to ensure that CCTV camera arrangements were made at all gates of the institutes and hostels to avoid any mishap. "After recommendations by the Delhi Police, we have made relevant additions to fest guidelines in view of the recent incident at IIT-Delhi. We have asked colleges to make CCTV arrangements



in front of ladies' washrooms and dressing rooms during fests for the safety of students," DU proctor Rajni Abbi said. Last October, about 10 students of Delhi University's Bharti College complained that they were secretly filmed while changing in an IIT-Delhi washroom during a fashion show at the institute's fest. Police arrested a 20-year-old contractual sweeper

in the case and sent the person to judicial custody. A case under section 354C (voyeurism) of the Indian Penal Code was registered at the Kishangarh police station. Under the revised guidelines, the colleges have been asked to conduct an assessment of their boundary walls before any big event and install low concertina wires to prevent outsiders from scaling the

walls. The advisory also suggests a centralised public announcement system at all gates of the institute. Before any big event where students from outside are invited to any institute, the administration must hold an advanced security liaison meeting with all stakeholders. The advisory also puts a cap on the strength of students allowed during fests, suggests a check on the structural stability of the stage during a concert, hiring of door frame metallic detectors and making proper light arrangements to cover dark patches. Entry to the events should be regulated through Google Forms, copies of which have to be submitted to the police along with other departments concerned.

## Justice has been done after 500 years: Rajnath on Ayodhya Ram temple Pran Pratishtha

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here on Saturday Ayodhya does not break, rather Ayodhya unites and justice has been done after 500 years in the context of Pran Pratishtha of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22. He made these assertions here while addressing a get together on the occasion of Lohri and Makar Sankranti and book release titled "Tryst with AYODHYA (Decolonization of India)" written by author Balbir Punj at Delhi University. Delhi University Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh said "We have to learn from Ram how to work in public interest." Rajnath said as soon as the name of Ram comes to mind, the opposite name of Ravana also comes to mind. Ravana



was wealthier, stronger and more knowledgeable than Ram, but Ram is still worshipped. Because, Ram followed the limits in his life. Regarding the Pran Pratishtha of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22, Rajnath said that justice has been done to Ayodhya after 500 years. This will be a moment of extreme feeling of national self-respect when Ram Lalla will return to the grand temple.

Discussing the book, written by Balbir Punj, he said this book exposes the cultural heritage of Ayodhya and the vote bank game and appeasement politics related to that heritage. The Defence Minister said these days many books have come out on Ayodhya and Ram. This shows that Ram is the consciousness of India. Rajnath said Ram is not just a king but a folk hero. Ram is a man of the era, he always

remained bound by dignity, hence he is called Maryada Purushottam. This adjective was not given to any other god other than Ram. Therefore, Ram belongs to everyone and Ram is in everyone. He said that everyone has their own Ram. Gandhi's Ram is different and Lohia's Ram is different. Ram is not bound by any ideology. Rajnath said the temple of Ram's birthplace in Ayodhya will be a symbol of new India. This temple will also be the pinnacle of our Sanatan faith. He said some people in this country call Ram imaginary. Ram they, Ram hain aur Ram rahenge. The truth is that India's personality cannot be imagined without Ram. Rajnath said Balbir Punj establishes through his book that the issue of Ram Janmabhoomi was never an issue of Hindu-Muslim conflict, but vote bank politics has made it so.

## Kite festival celebrations on Makar Sankranti tribute to Lord Ram: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday said the two-day international kite festival being celebrated in Delhi on the occasion of 'Makar Sankranti' is also a "tribute to one of our prime deities", Lord Ram. Lord Ram is said to have "flown kites in his childhood, along with his brothers," Saxena said. He was addressing a gathering at the opening ceremony of the 'Patang Utsav' being hosted at 'Baansera' -- a sustainability-themed bamboo park located at Sarai Kale Khan on the banks of the river Yamuna. The festival, being organised by Delhi Development Authority (DDA), has major attractions including a theme pavilion, which displays "history of kites, in the form of a kite gallery showing use of kites during times of war, fighter kites, and the significance of kites in India," according to officials. The 'Patang Utsav' was inaugurated a day ahead of the 'Makar Sankranti' festival. With more than 30 professional kites from different states participating, the Kite festival,

also has attractions like a theme pavilion displaying the history of kites in the form of kite gallery, a classical Patang Bazaar for people to buy and fly kites and traditional food and handicrafts stalls. Besides, cultural performances by folk artists showcasing India's cultural diversity and exclusive activities have been planned for kids in the form of a kids zone. "We are celebrating today an international kite festival at a place that was reclaimed, rejuvenated and regenerated. This used to be a garbage dump of Delhi's construction and demolition waste. What you see now is a beautiful abode of bamboos," Saxena said. He added that celebrating this kite festival on the occasion of 'Makar Sankranti' is "also a tribute to one of our prime deities, Lord Shri Ram, who is said to have flown kites in his childhood, along with his brothers". The Delhi Lt Governor also quoted a couplet from a scripture. As a nation that possibly provided the world with its "fullest experience" in flying by human endeavours, this kite festival prevalent across the globe for

centuries now, wouldn't have been more appropriate as "a symbol of basic human endeavour of soaring and breaking free," he said. "This bamboo park, 'Baansera', is a tribute to that human endeavour. It aims at providing people of Delhi the much-needed public spaces in the capital on one hand, and on the other ensure that the rich biodiversity of the floodplains is preserved and maintained," Saxena said. To enhance the ecological character of the Yamuna floodplains and make it more people-friendly by developing it as a recreational and cultural venue, Saxena had laid the foundation of 'Baansera' in August 2022 and it was developed in six months. More than 25,000 special varieties of Bamboo saplings brought from Assam were planted here. A classic 'Patang Bazaar' is also operational here for people to buy and fly kites and embrace Delhi's skies with a "riot of colours", Saxena, also the chairman of the DDA, said on Saturday. "Besides, traditional food and handicraft stalls have also been set up for



public, along with cultural performances by folk artistes to showcase our diversity. I assure you that many such events will be planned in the future to promote ease of living for the people of Delhi," he added. On the occasion, the Lt Governor also unveiled the 2024 calendar published by the DDA. It contains images of various monuments and other public spaces in Delhi. Union Minister of State for External Affairs & Culture, Meenakshi Lekhi, Members of Parliament, Harsh Vardhan, Ramesh Bidhuri and Gautam Gumber, MLA O P Sharma, Chief

Secretary Naresh Kumar and Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora were present on the occasion. Besides, foreign envoys and diplomats from countries like Seychelles, Mongolia, Mali, Burundi, Bolivia, Niger, Austria, Maldives, Libya and Peru also participated in the festival. The 2-day festival will see over 30 professional kites from Rajasthan, Sikkim, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Lakshadweep and Gujarat exhibiting their art. Kites of various shapes, sizes and colours, including tri-colour, train and eagle will fly during the festival.

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# INDIA leaders agenda is to save families, properties: Nadda

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

BJP national president JP Nadda on Saturday took a swipe at the Opposition bloc INDIA, saying it is a virtual alliance which is doing virtual meetings as a mere formality and that its leaders' two-point agenda is to save their families and properties. Addressing a meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha to launch 'Namto Navmatdata Abhiyan' to connect with first-time voters, he said while Prime Minister Narendra Modi is working for a developed India, empowering the youth, farmers and women, and removing poverty, the opposition stands for "remov-

ing Modi". When he enquired about the meeting of INDIA parties, he was told they were meeting virtually, Nadda said. "A virtual alliance will do virtual meetings only. It will do so for the sake of formalities," he said. Opposition leaders, including the likes of M Karunanidhi and Parkash Singh Badal who are no more, were always concerned about their children's political future, he said, attacking Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, Farooq Abdullah and M K Stalin among others. Isn't Akhilesh Yadav concerned about Dimple Yadav, his wife and a Lok Sabha MP, he asked. All of them are facing some



CBI or ED cases, he claimed, alleging that they commit corruption but abuse probe agencies. In a reference to former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, he said both are on bail. Nadda asserted that Modi

has redefined politics with his emphasis on "sabka saath, sabka vikas" and has left opposition parties without any issue. "They are unable to make out as to what issues they should raise," he said, alleging that they used to resort to divide and rule in the name of religion and caste but Modi has changed the conventional approach. The Prime Minister has identified the poor, youth, farmers and women as the four biggest castes, he noted. In an apparent dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said issues related to the Other Backward Classes are now being raised while it was former Prime

Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi who sat on reports on their empowerment for decades. It is Modi who has done so much for the OBCs, he added. Attacking the West Bengal government over the alleged attack on sadhus, the BJP president said opposition leaders have an issue with saffron colour at a time when the entire country is imbued with devotion towards Lord Ram. Nadda told the members of the party's youth wing that many youngsters often claim to be apolitical which amounted to closing one's eyes to reality. "Whatever the condition may be, you have to be political.

You have to understand what is good and what is bad," he said. India's youthful population is an asset and a source of energy for the country and will be instrumental in fulfilling Modi's resolve for making India a developed country, the BJP president said. He cited the rise in the numbers of IITs, IIMs, AIIMS and other institutions to assert that the country has undergone a transformation under the Modi government as far as opportunities for the youth are concerned. Nadda said the party is aiming to register one crore new voters by January 25, National Voters' Day, when Modi will address its members.

## India protests POK visit by British envoy to Pakistan

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Taking exception to visit to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) by British envoy to Pakistan, India on Saturday said it amounted to an "unacceptable" infringement of the country's territorial integrity. Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra lodged a strong protest with British High Commissioner to New Delhi Alex Ellis on this infringement. This reaction by India came after Jane Marriott, British envoy in Pakistan, travelled to Mirpur in POK on January 10 and held several meetings with businesspeople, members of the local community and government officials. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here in a statement on Saturday the Indian side has taken "serious note of the highly objectionable visit" by Marriott and a UK Foreign Office official to POK. "Such infringement of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity is unacceptable," the statement said. Foreign secretary Kwatra lodged a strong protest with British high commissioner here. "The Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are, have been and shall always remain an integral part



of India," the MEA statement added. Marriott, who became the first woman British envoy to Pakistan in July 2023, had posted on X about the visit. "Salaam from Mirpur, the heart of the UK and Pakistan's people to people ties! 70% of British Pakistani roots are from Mirpur, making our work together crucial for diaspora interests. Thank you for your hospitality!" the post said. The UK high commission in Islamabad posted a brief video on X that showed Marriott visiting a business enterprise in Mirpur and interacting with a street children's football team. The video also showed her interacting with Mirpur's district management and the local chamber of commerce. Mirpur has a sizeable number of people who hold dual British and Pakistani citizenship. Remittances from British Pakistanis have also strengthened the economy of Mirpur and British nationals play a

prominent role in the area as business and community leaders. India has traditionally taken exception at visits to POK by foreign diplomats, especially those from friendly countries such as the US and the UK. In October last year, India conveyed its concerns to the US after Donald Blome, the US ambassador to Pakistan, visited Gilgit-Baltistan in POK. At the time, New Delhi had urged the world community to respect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. India also protested to the US in October 2022 when Blome made another visit to POK and repeatedly referred to the region as "Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)". India had also criticised a visit to POK in April 2022 by US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar as "condemnable". India had accused Omar of violating the country's sovereignty by travelling to a region illegally occupied by Pakistan.

## 2024 could be hotter than record shattering last year, says WMO

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

If 2023 was the hottest on record by a 'large margin', with average temperatures approaching 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, brace for the worst as 2024 would be no better. In fact it may be worse with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) warning that global temperatures could outstrip last year's record due to the increasing impact of climate change. In a report released recently, the UN weather agency has officially confirmed that 2023 is the warmest year on record, by a huge margin as El Niño combined with climate change to fuel heat in the latter half of the said year. "The shift from cooling La Niña to warming El Niño by the middle of 2023 is clearly reflected in the rise in temperature from last year. Given that El Niño usually has the biggest impact on global temperatures after it peaks, 2024 could be even hotter," said WMO Secretary-General Prof. Celeste Saulo. Six leading international datasets used for monitoring global temperatures and consolidated by WMO show that the annual average global temperature was 1.45 ± 0.12°C above pre-industrial levels (1850-1900) in 2023. Global temperatures in every month



between June and December set new monthly records. July and August were the two hottest months on record. "Climate change is the biggest challenge that humanity faces. It is affecting all of us, especially the most vulnerable," said Saulo. "We cannot afford to wait any longer. We are already taking action but we have to do more and we have to do it quickly. We have to make drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate the transition to renewable energy sources," he said. "While El Niño events are naturally occurring and come and go from one year to the next, longer-term climate change is escalating, and this is unequivocal because of human activities. The climate crisis is worsening the inequality crisis. It affects all aspects of sustainable development and undermines efforts to tackle poverty, hunger, ill-health, displacement, and environmental degradation," said Prof. Saulo

(Argentina), who became WMO Secretary-General early this year. Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one. The past nine years have been the warmest on record. The years 2016 (strong El Niño) and 2020 were previously classed as the warmest on record, at 1.29 ± 0.12°C and 1.27 ± 0.12°C above the pre-industrial era. "Humanity's actions are scorching the earth. 2023 was a mere preview of the catastrophic future that awaits if we don't act now. We must respond to record-breaking temperature rises with path-breaking action," said UN Secretary-General António Guterres. "We can still avoid the worst of the climate catastrophe. But only if we act now with the ambition required to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius and deliver climate justice," he said in a statement.

## Covid subvariant JN.1 cases touch 1,200 in India amid WHO warning

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Amid WHO warning that the Covid-19 virus remained a major threat despite partially passing under the radar, India's Covid-19 subvariant JN.1 has touched a tally of 1,200 cases so far with Nagaland becoming the latest of the 17 states and Union territories to have detected its presence, according to INSACOG on Saturday. Data compiled by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) showed Karnataka has reported the highest number of JN.1 cases at 215, followed by Andhra Pradesh (189), Maharashtra (170), Kerala (154), West Bengal (96), Goa (90), Tamil Nadu (88) and Gujarat (76). Telangana and Rajasthan have recorded 32 JN.1 cases each, Chhattisgarh has recorded 25, Delhi 16, Uttar Pradesh 7, Haryana five, Odisha three, and Uttarakhand and Nagaland one each. Cases of fresh Covid day-wise continue to be recorded with 441 fresh infections while the number of active cases has come down to 3,238, the Union health ministry. No deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours, according to the min-

istry's data updated at 8 am. The number of daily cases was in double digits till December 5 but it began to rise again amid cold weather conditions and after the emergence of a new Covid-19 variant, JN.1. Since the pandemic began in early 2020, more than 4.5 crore people have been infected and over 5.3 lakh have died across India. The WHO has said data from various sources pointed to increased transmission last month, fueled by gatherings over the Christmas holiday period and by the JN.1 variant, which is now the most commonly reported around the globe. Although COVID-19 is no longer a global health emergency, the virus is still circulating, changing, and killing," the UN health agency's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. Besides the near 10,000 deaths reported to the WHO last month, there was a 42 percent increase in hospitalizations and a 62 percent increase in intensive care unit admissions, compared with November. However, the figures are based on data from less than 50 countries, mostly in Europe and the Americas, Tedros said. "It is certain that there are also increases in other countries that are not being reported."

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## Rajnath to lead 8th Armed Forces Veterans Day celebrations

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will lead the 8th Armed Forces Veterans' Day nationwide celebrations on January 14, Sunday with an ex-servicemen rally at Air Force Station, Kanpur. He will also lay a wreath at the War Memorial to pay homage to the bravehearts for their supreme sacri-



and dedicated service to the nation, defence ministry said here on Saturday. This year, the event is being celebrated by the three Services at 10 locations across the country, namely Srinagar, Pathankot, Delhi, Kanpur, Alwar, Jodhpur, Guwahati, Mumbai, Secunderabad and Kochi. The event at Secunderabad will be presided over by Raksha Rajya Mantri Shri Ajay Bhatt. The event in New Delhi will be held at the Manekshaw Centre and attended by Chief of the Air Staff, Chief of the Naval Staff and Vice Chief of the Army Staff. As a part of scaling up of the Veterans' Day, the Chief Ministers/Lieutenant Governors have been urged to celebrate the day in their respective States/Union Territories. During the event, the Veterans will be felicitated with a medal/souvenir/recognition certificate etc. As part of the celebrations, 'We for Veterans' Anthem, an ode to the Veterans, will also be played.

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## Term insurance for BRO casual labourers approved

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal to roll out a term insurance scheme for casual paid labourers engaged by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) for various infrastructure projects. Under the scheme, a sum of Rs 10 lakh will be given to the next of kin in case of death of a labourer during project works. Giving these details here on Saturday, defence ministry officials said. "Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal to launch a group (term) insurance scheme for Casual Paid Labourers (CPLs) engaged by Border Roads Organisation/General Reserve Engineer Force for the ongoing



project works." This scheme will provide the insured value of Rs 10 lakh as an insurance in any kind of death to CPLs family/next of kin, they said. The scheme will serve as a social security and welfare measure to the CPLs working in remote and far-flung areas of the nation, they said. "Keeping in view the severe risk posed to the lives of CPLs posted in hazardous work-sites, inclement weather, inhospitable terrain and occupational health hazards, and considering the

deaths occurred/reported during their engagement, the provision of insurance coverage on humanitarian grounds will prove to be a great morale booster to the CPLs," defence ministry statement added. The ministry said the scheme will go a "long way" in securing the livelihoods of the families of the CPLs. It may be recalled Rajnath had recently approved many welfare measures for the betterment of the CPLs. These include preservation and transportation of mortal remains and Transport Allowance entitlement of the attendant, enhancement of Funeral Assistance from Rs 1,000 to Rs 10,000 and advance payment against ex-gratia compensation of Rs 50,000 as immediate help in case of death, they said.

**कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, चतुर्थ वृत्त, लोक निर्माण विभाग, रुद्रपुर (ऊधम सिंह नगर)**  
फोन / फैक्स : 05944-240921 ई-मेल: sepwdusn@gmail.com  
पत्रांक : 06 / 23 एम-04 / 2023 दिनांक : 09 / 01 / 2024

**राष्ट्रीय प्रतिस्पर्धात्मक निविदा (e-tendering)**

महामहिम राज्यपाल उत्तराखण्ड की ओर से अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, चतुर्थ वृत्त, लो0नि0वि0 रुद्रपुर (ऊधम सिंह नगर) द्वारा निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु ई-टेंडरिंग द्वारा टू-बिड सिस्टम के अंतर्गत निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा से सम्बन्धित सभी सूचनायें वेबसाईट <http://www.uktenders.gov.in> पर दिनांक 16.01.2024 से उपलब्ध होंगी।

क्र. सं.	कार्य का नाम	घरोहर धनराशि (लाख में)	निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य (रु0 में)	निविदा की वैधता (दिवस)	कार्य पूर्ण करने का समय (माह में)	ठेकेदार की श्रेणी
1	वित्तीय वर्ष 2023-2024 में पं0 नारायण दत्त तिवारी एकीकृत औद्योगिक आस्थान पन्तनगर में निम्नलिखित मार्गों पर नवीनीकरण का कार्य- 1- 01 ए मार्ग। 2- 01 बी मार्ग। 3- 04 बी मार्ग।	14.40	5000.00 + 18% GST	90 दिन	06 माह	केन्द्र / राज्य सरकार के विभाग / उपक्रम में मार्ग कार्य हेतु श्रेणी A/A+ में पंजीकृत
2	वित्तीय वर्ष 2023-2024 में पं0 नारायण दत्त तिवारी एकीकृत औद्योगिक आस्थान पन्तनगर में निम्नलिखित मार्गों पर नवीनीकरण का कार्य- 1- 02 सी मार्ग। 2- 04 एल मार्ग। 3- 02 ए मार्ग। 4- 3 ए मार्ग।	8.60	5000.00 + 18% GST	90 दिन	06 माह	-तदेव-
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अधीक्षण अभियन्ता D(238)A

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform to general public in all that my client Mr. SHYAM Proprietor of AUTHORIZED SOLUTIONS PVT. LTD. Registered office at Plot 15, Kh. No. 71/8 Mahashakti Colony Saroop Nagar Road, Kausnik Endave, Burari, Delhi-110094, engaged in the business of placement services. It has to come in the knowledge of my above said client that some person personating themselves to be the agents/employees of my above said client persuaded the persons for placements in different offices, and thus cheated the gullible persons. My above said client has no responsibility towards the people thus cheated.

**ANIL KUMAR SINGH (ADVOCATE) DELHI HIGH COURT**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given to the General Public that MR. SATENDER SHARMA S/O. MR. RAMANAND (IPA HOLDER), the owner of a RESIDENTIAL PLOT NO. 42 AREA 65.50 SQ. YARDS (E 62.70 SQ. METER) OUT OF KHASTIA NO. 52B, SITUATED IN RESIDENTIAL COLONY KHAWAJA PARK, VILLAGE: LAICHIPUR, PARAGANA & TEHSIL: LONI, DISTRICT: GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH vide Registered General Power of Attorney Dated 26.02.2019 Document no. 10116 Executed By Mrs. Gulabo W/o. Mr. Murlidhar, General Power of Attorney dated 26.02.2019 Document No. 1919. All Persons are hereby informed that MR. VINOD KUMAR & MRS. SUNITA are mortgaging the said property with SINGH India Credit Company Limited (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Company Limited) General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present. Devasdani Sharma, Advocate SG Associates (Law Firm) F118, Lotus Plaza Vashishth Khand, Indira Puram, Ghazabad UP. E-MAIL: sgassociates@gmail.com Ph: 011-17214, 81320057

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

I, Nida Fatima, D/o. Mohd. Raza, R/o. B-46/4, Lane No.7, Abul Fazal Enclave-2, Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025, declare that my name has been wrongly mentioned in my passport No. (J5248499) as Neda Fatima instead of Nida Fatima.

## Smoking, poor sleep, obesity may increase risk of blood cancer

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Modifiable risk factors such as smoking, poor sleep, and obesity may increase the risk of a blood condition that can occur before a type of blood cancer known as multiple myeloma develops, according to research published in the journal Blood Advances. In myeloma, a type of white blood cell found in the bone marrow builds up, creating tumors throughout the bones in the body. "While significant advancements have been made in therapeutics for multiple myeloma, it remains an incurable disease, often diagnosed after patients



have already experienced end-organ damage," Dr. David Lee, a co-author of the study and an internal medicine resident at Massachusetts General Hospital, said in a press release. "It's preceded by premalignant conditions including monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS), a condition that can occur before multiple myeloma devel-

ops. MGUS is a condition in which the blood contains higher than normal levels of a protein known as M protein that is found in 3 percent of people over age 50. In the majority of cases, MGUS is not problematic. The risk of a person progressing from MGUS to myeloma, a cancer of the plasma cells, is 1% per year. By itself, MGUS is difficult to diagnose. The diagnosis is usually by accident, often driven by tests performed for the diagnosis or management of other conditions. The disease is more common in men and is twice as common in Black people as in white peo-

ple. In the new study, the researchers suggest that being obese is associated with a 73% greater chance of having MGUS, when compared with individuals who don't have obesity. However, while the researchers note a possible connection between obesity and MGUS, they note there is not enough evidence to prove causation. "Before we can develop effective preventative health strategies to lower the risk of serious diseases like multiple myeloma, we first need to better understand the relationship between MGUS and potentially modifiable risk factors like obesity," Lee said.

# Ruling-party candidate wins Taiwan's presidential poll

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)

Ruling-party candidate Lai Ching-te emerged victorious in Taiwan's presidential election on Saturday and his opponents conceded, a result that will chart the trajectory of the self-ruled democracy's relations with China over the next four years.

At stake is the peace and stability of the island, 160 kilometres (100 miles) off the coast of China, that Beijing claims as its own and is to be retaken by force if necessary.

Domestic issues such as the sluggish economy and expensive housing also featured prominently in the campaign. China had called the poll a choice between war and peace. Beijing strongly opposes Lai, the current vice president and a member of the governing Democratic Progressive Party, or DPP.

Lai and incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen reject China's sovereignty claims over Taiwan, a former Japanese colony that split from the mainland amid civil war in 1949. They have, however, offered to speak with Beijing, which has repeatedly refused to hold talks

and called them separatists.

Beijing was believed to favour the candidate from the more China-friendly Nationalist party, also known as Kuomintang, or KMT. Its candidate, Hou Yu-ih, also promised to restart talks with China while bolstering national defense. He promised not to move toward unifying the two sides of the Taiwan Strait if elected.

A third candidate in the race, Ko Wen-je of the smaller Taiwan People's Party, or TPP, had drawn the support particularly of young people wanting an alternative to the KMT and DPP, Taiwan's traditional opposing parties, which have largely taken turns governing since the 1990s. Ko also stated he wanted to speak with Beijing, and that his bottom line would be that Taiwan needs to remain democratic and free.

The United States, which is bound by its laws to provide Taiwan with the weapons needed to defend itself, pledged support for whichever government emerges, reinforced by the Biden administration's plans to send an unofficial delegation made up of former



People cast a vote at a polling station during the elections in New Taipei City on Saturday. Taiwanese cast their votes Saturday for a new president in an election that could chart the trajectory of its relations with China over the next four years.

senior officials to the island shortly after the election.

Beside the China tensions, domestic issues such as the dearth of affordable housing and stagnating wages have dominated the campaign.

For Tony Chen, a 74-year-old retiree who voted in Taipei in the hour before the polls closed, the election boiled down to a choice between communism and democracy. "I hope democracy wins,"

he said. He added that more Taiwanese were open to China's model of governance decades ago, when the Chinese economy was growing by double digits annually, but are repulsed by the crackdown on civil liberties

that has occurred under current Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Stacy Chen, 43, said she has always voted for DPP because "Taiwan is an independent country." She said she

wanted her son to grow up in a country that is separate from China.

For Ben Wang, 44, the vote was more about altering the dynamic between Taiwan's main opposing parties, the DPP and the KMT. A potential attack by China could not be pre-empted by anything Taiwan would do, he said.

Taiwan's election is seen as having "real and lasting influence on the geopolitical landscape," said Gabrielle Reid, associate director with the global intelligence consultancy S-RM.

"The outcome of the vote will ultimately determine the nature of ties with China relative to the West and will have strong bearing on the state of play in the South China Sea," she said.

Beside the China tensions, domestic issues dominated the campaign, particularly an economy that was estimated to have grown just 1.4 per cent last year. That partly reflects inevitable cycles in demand for computer chips and other exports from the high-tech, heavily trade-dependent manufacturing base, and a slowing of the Chinese economy.

## Mauritius grants special break to officials for Ram Mandir inauguration

PTI ■ PORT LOUIS

In a significant move, the Mauritius government has decided to grant a one-off special leave for two hours to public servants of the Hindu faith to attend prayers marking the "landmark" inauguration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22.

The Pran Pratishtha at the Ram temple will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior leaders. The ceremony will be telecast live.

"Cabinet has agreed to the grant of a one-off special leave of two hours on Monday 22 January 2024 from 1400 hours to public officers of Hindu faith, subject to exigencies of service, in the context of the inauguration of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir in India, which is a landmark event as it symbolises the return of Lord Ram in Ayodhya," the Mauritius Cabinet led by Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth said in a statement on Friday.

Hinduism is the largest religion in Mauritius, with Hindus representing approximately 48.5 per cent of the population in 2011.

Mauritius is the only country in Africa where Hinduism is the most practised religion. In terms of percentage, the nation ranks third globally in the prevalence of Hinduism, following Nepal and India.

Hinduism came to Mauritius when Indians were brought as indentured labour to colonial French and later in much larger numbers to British plantations in Mauritius and neighbouring islands of the Indian Ocean.

The migrants came primarily from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

# US military strikes another Houthi-controlled site

AP ■ DUBAI (UAE)

The US military early Saturday struck another Houthi-controlled site in Yemen that they have determined was putting commercial vessels in the Red Sea at risk.

That's according to two US officials who spoke anonymously to The Associated Press to discuss an operation that hadn't yet been publicly announced.

The first day of strikes on Friday hit 28 locations and struck more than 60 targets. However, the U.S. determined the additional location, a radar site, still presented a threat to maritime traffic, one official said.

Earlier on Friday, the US Navy warned American-flagged vessels to steer clear of areas around Yemen in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden for the next 72 hours after the US and Britain launched multiple airstrikes targeting Houthi rebels. The warning in a notice to shippers came as Yemen's

Houthis vowed fierce retaliation for the US-led strikes, further raising the prospect of a wider conflict in a region already beset by Israel's war in Gaza.

US military and White House officials said they expected the Houthis to try to strike back. And President Joe Biden warned on Friday that the group could face further strikes.

The US-led bombardment — launched in response to a recent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships in the vital Red Sea — killed at least five people and wounded six, the Houthis said. The US said the strikes, in two waves, took aim at targets in 28 different locations across Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

"We will make sure that we respond to the Houthis if they continue this outrageous behavior along with our allies," Biden told reporters during a stop in Emmaus, Pennsylvania.

Asked if he believes the

Houthis are a terrorist group, Biden responded, "I think they are." The president in a later exchange with reporters during a stop in Allentown, Pennsylvania, said whether the Houthis are redesignated as such was "irrelevant."

Biden also pushed back against some lawmakers, both Democrats and Republicans, who said he should have sought congressional authorization before carrying out the strikes.

"They're wrong, and I sent up this morning when the strikes occurred exactly what happened," Biden said.

The Pentagon said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the military action from the hospital where he is recovering from complications following prostate cancer surgery.

The White House said in November that it was considering redesignating the Houthis as a terrorist organization after they began their targeting of civilian vessels. The administration formally delisted the Houthis as a "foreign terrorist

organization" and "specially designated global terrorists" in 2021, undoing a move by President Donald Trump

Lt. Gen. Douglas Sims, director of the Joint Staff, said that the new US strikes were largely in low-populated areas, and the number of those killed would not be high. He said the strikes hit weapons, radar and targeting sites, including in remote mountain areas.

As the bombing lit the predawn sky over multiple sites held by the Iranian-backed rebels, it forced the world to again focus on Yemen's years-long war, which began when the Houthis seized the country's capital.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea, saying they were avenging Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade and energy shipments.

# UN Human Rights body slams Lanka police's drug bust op

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Raising deep concerns, the UN Human Rights body has slammed Sri Lanka police's ongoing operation to curb the narcotics menace and called on the government to reassess strategy with a human rights-based approach.

"We are very concerned that authorities in Sri Lanka are adopting a heavily security-based response to the country's drugs problem, instead of public health policies grounded in human rights. A staggering 29,000 people have reportedly been arrested on drug related matters since December 17, with allegations that some have been subjected to ill-treatment and torture," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said in a statement.

The statement came in the wake of Operation 'Yukthiya' (the Sinhala term for 'justice') launched on December 17 with a June 30 deadline to end the drug menace plaguing the

island nation and arrest all the drug dealers.

Conceptualised by Public Security Minister Tiran Alles and overseen by acting Inspector General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon, thousands have been arrested since the launch of Operation Yukthiya since its launch. Despite its purported anti-narcotic aims, it has come under criticism for various reasons, local media reported.

The OHCHR statement, released in Geneva on Friday night, expressed grave concerns over alleged abuses of authority, torture, and the denial of due process and fair trial rights within the operation even as Turk insisted on thorough and impartial investigations into these allegations.

Security forces have reportedly conducted raids without search warrants, detaining suspected drug sellers and users, with hundreds sent to military-run rehabilitation centres, the statement claimed.

"During and after these

operations, people are reported to have been subjected to a number of violations, including unauthorised searches, arbitrary arrests and detention, ill-treatment, torture, and strip searches in public. Lawyers acting for those detained have alleged that they have faced intimidation from police officers," Turk said in the statement.

While drug use presents a serious challenge to society, a heavy-handed law enforcement approach is not the solution, the statement said and added, "Abuse of drugs and the factors that lead to it are first and foremost public health and social issues. People suspected of selling or trafficking drugs are entitled to humane treatment, with full respect for due process and transparent, fair trials."

He urged the Sri Lankan government to review Operation Yukthiya and "to implement human rights based approaches, notably the right to health, in addressing the issues of illicit drugs in society."

# Pakistan shuts key crossing into Afghanistan to truck drivers

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan effectively closed a key northwestern border crossing with Afghanistan to truck drivers on Saturday, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban said.

Noor Mohammad Hanif, director of Information and Culture department in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province said that officials at the Torkham began asking for passports and visas from Afghan drivers.

Truckers have for years been able to pass the border without documents so they generally do not have them.

Hanif said that, in response, Afghanistan is now asking Pakistani drivers for passports and visas.

In a separate statement, the Nangarhar governor's office said that officials from both sides are in talks to solve the

problem, and a "decision will be made soon," it added.

The Torkham border crossing has been closed a number of times in recent months, including in September when it was shut for nine days due to clashes between border forces.

On Saturday, dozens of trucks carrying perishable items, including vegetables and fruits, waited on each side of the border for the reopening of the crossing, which is a vital commercial artery and a trade route to Central Asian countries for Pakistan.

Pakistan is concerned about the presence in Afghanistan of the Pakistani Taliban, which is a close ally of the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan has said many Pakistani Taliban leaders and fighters have found sanctuary in Afghanistan and have been

emboldened to carry out more attacks on security forces in Pakistan.

The Afghan Taliban government insists it does not allow the Pakistani Taliban to use its soil to launch attacks in Pakistan.

This comes just days after one of Pakistan's most senior politicians, Fazlur Rehman, whose Jamiat Ulama Islam party is known for backing the Afghan Taliban, visited Kabul in an attempt to reduce lingering tensions between the two countries.

Rehman was the first senior Pakistani politician to visit Kabul since the Taliban seized power in neighboring Afghanistan in August 2021 as U.S. and NATO troops withdrew from the country after 20 years of war.

Tensions also exist around Pakistan's ongoing expulsion of Afghans.

## 10 coal miners killed in China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Ten people were killed and six others missing after an accident in a coal mine in central China's Henan Province, local authorities said early Saturday.

The accident, a likely coal and gas explosion described as an "outburst", happened around 2:55 pm on Friday in Pingdingshan, state broadcaster CCTV said.

According to the local government, ten people were killed, state-run China Daily reported.

The accident happened in a coal mine of the Pingdingshan Tianan Coal Mining Co., Ltd.

A total of 425 people were working underground when the accident took place, and 380 of them have been lifted out of the mine, official news agency Xinhua reported.

Rescue work is still underway.

# 'Queen Elizabeth left sealed death-bed letter for Charles'

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, who died aged 96 in September 2022, left a sealed death-bed letter for her son and heir — King Charles III, a new book has claimed.

According to a report in 'The Daily Telegraph' on Saturday, biographer Robert Hardman has written about the immediate aftermath of the Queen's passing in a new biography of King Charles III and revealed how she was working on her traditional "red boxes" of official correspondence till the very end.

Her final red box included a private letter for the new King, brought down by staff at Balmoral Castle in Scotland — where she breathed her last on September 8, 2022.

The newspaper reports that Hardman describes how, as private secretaries Sir Edward

Young and Sir Clive Alderton settled down to work their way through official business, a "footman appeared with a red box — the last one that had gone up to the Queen before her death."

Saying Sir Edward was "not sure what to expect as he turned the lock", Hardman writes: "Inside, he found that Elizabeth II had left a sealed letter to the Prince of Wales and a private letter to himself. Were they final instructions or final farewells? Or both? "We will probably never know what they said. However, it is clear enough that the Queen had known that the end was imminent and had planned accordingly."

The box also included the late Queen's approved shortlist of candidates to receive the Order of Merit, one of the highest honours in the gift of the British monarch that is intended to reward distinguished service in public life.

Hardman notes: "It was the last document ever handled by Queen Elizabeth II. Even on her deathbed, there had been work to do. And she had done it."

The newspaper reports that the biography, entitled 'Charles III: The Inside Story', also describes how the late Queen had seemed "energised" by a win for her horse Love Affairs at the Goodwood races just days before on September 6, appearing "buzzy" over pre-dinner drinks and recalling the UK prime ministers she had known.

The Queen then decided to have dinner alone in her room after a tiring day of holding audiences with the outgoing prime minister, Boris Johnson, and incoming prime minister Liz Truss. Her audience with Truss was to become the Queen's last official duty and photograph as Britain's longest-serving monarch.

## 2 Indians among 12 killed in Nepal bus mishap

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

At least 12 people, including two Indians, were killed and 23 others injured after a passenger bus plunged into the Rapti river in Nepal's Lumbini province, according to a media report on Saturday.

The accident happened late night on Friday when the bus heading to Kathmandu from Nepalgunj veered off the Rapti bridge in Bhgalubang and plunged into the river along the East-West Highway.

"Twelve people were killed in the accident after a passenger bus fell into the Rapti River. Two Indians were among the dead," said the report. A total of 23 people were also injured in the accident. "All the injured were rushed to the Nepalgunj Medical Teaching Hospital in Kohalpur for treatment," said the Deputy Inspector of Police Sundar Tiwari.

# Families of Hamas hostages mark loved ones' 100th day in captivity

AP ■ LONDON

It has become a daily ritual.

Every morning, before she's even out of her pajamas, Rachel Goldberg-Polin tears a piece of masking tape off the roll, grabs a marking pen and in thick black strokes writes down the number of days her son, Hersh, has been held hostage by Hamas militants. Then she sticks the tape to her chest.

"I find it so remarkable how nauseating it is every single time," she said. "And it's good. I don't want to get used to it. I don't want anybody to get used to the fact that these people are missing."

Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, was last seen Oct 7, when militants loaded him into the back of a pickup truck with other people who were abducted from a southern Israel music festival where over 300 attendees were killed. The native of Berkeley, California, lost part of an arm when the attackers tossed grenades into the shelter where a group of young people had taken refuge.

Sunday will mark 100 days since he and about 250 others were taken hostage by the militants who stormed across the border from Gaza, triggering the latest war between Israel and Hamas. While dozens of women, children and foreign-

ers were released during a weeklong November ceasefire, and a number of hostages have been confirmed dead, 132 others remain in captivity. The Red Cross hasn't been permitted to see them, and almost nothing is known about their conditions. Rachel Goldberg-Polin, 54, now spends her days trying to bring Hersh and the other hostages home.

The mother of three has spent the past three months in relentless motion, crisscrossing the globe, reminding anyone who will listen that her child is more than just an inconvenient statistic: He is her only son, a music lover, a young man who

deserves the chance to fulfill his dream of traveling the world.

Goldberg-Polin and her family, who moved to Israel from the United States when Hersh was 7, have met with U.S. President Joe Biden, Pope Francis, Elon Musk and dozens of journalists. She's spoken at the United Nations, gone to protests and carried placards.

The plight of the hostages has gripped Israel's attention, and the tireless campaign by families has gained widespread support and sympathy, ratcheting up pressure on the Israeli government to make concessions to win their release.

The Goldberg-Polin family plans to attend the start of a

24-hour rally for the hostages in Tel Aviv on Saturday and another Sunday on the Jerusalem Promenade, a collection of parks and walkways overlooking the city. Similar events are scheduled in cities outside Israel, including London, New York and Paris.

But so far, nothing has stopped the number on the masking tape from going up. The ritual began on Day 26, when Goldberg-Polin stuck the makeshift badge to her chest to show everyone that the excruciating, ever-increasing tally was the focus of her life, not just a factoid for news stories. "It defines me anyway," she told The Associated Press on

Wednesday, when her badge read 96. She likened it to a name tag, in the fashion of "Hello my name is."

"This is who I am," she said. "My identity is the number of days he's been stolen."

Ahead of the 100-day milestone, Goldberg-Polin asked people around the world to adopt her routine on Sunday, hoping the show of solidarity would help her and the other families bear the pain and anguish of waiting yet another day for their loved ones to return.

Goldberg-Polin's masking tape badge was inspired by childhood memories from 1979, when America was trans-

fixed by the fate of 52 people held hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Iran. ABC News opened its coverage every night with a running count of how many days the crisis had lasted. The hostages were finally released after 444 days.

"This makes people very uncomfortable because you know what? Human beings like a countdown," Goldberg-Polin said. "We like to countdown to vacation. We like to countdown in Times Square on New Year's Eve."

"We do not like a count-up. A count-up of humanity's failure of getting these human beings out of captivity is something that makes people very

uncomfortable. And you know what? Join the club. I've been uncomfortable for 96 days."

Even so, the 100-day mark has offered a moment to direct the world's attention back on the hostages. Goldberg-Polin hopes that someone, somewhere is caring for her injured son. She has a message for Hersh, just in case it might reach him. "I would say: There has not been one second since you were taken that we are not working, turning over every single stone on the planet Earth and running to the ends of the Earth to get you back," she said. "So we need you to stay strong. And survive and stay alive. And we are coming."

# Red Sea crisis: Ministry calls inter ministerial meet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry has called a high-level inter-ministerial meeting on January 17 to discuss the way forward on the trade front in the wake of ongoing problems in the Red Sea, a senior official said on Saturday. Senior officials from five ministries — external affairs, defence, shipping and finance (department of financial services) and commerce — will participate in the deliberations. The commerce ministry has also set up an internal strategic group, comprising additional secretaries of the ministry, to discuss global issues impacting the country's trade on a daily basis and prepare a strategy so that India's response can be quick and decisive. "This Wednesday, we are hold-

ing an inter-ministerial consultation. We will be discussing the way forward," the official said. The situation around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, has escalated due to recent attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants. Due to these attacks, the shippers are taking consignments through the Cape of Good Hope, resulting in delays of almost 14 days and also higher freight and insurance costs. New trade routes are also being considered and "we will keep exploring our options if the problems at Red Sea escalate," the commerce ministry official added. The issues being faced by the stakeholders concerned were discussed at a high-level meeting in the commerce ministry on



January 4. Stakeholders, including traders, shippers, container firms, and freight forwarders were present in the meeting. Exporters are apprehensive that the crisis may cause some trade disruption because the cost of moving it around becomes expensive. "We are watching the situation

very closely. There is some cost implication for our exports, but since there are inventories for almost a month only, if it escalates for long then it will be a major problem. We are worried," the official added. The commerce ministry has also asked the ECGC not to increase the export credit interest rates. State-owned ECGC is an export promotion organisation, seeking to improve the competitiveness of Indian exports by providing them with credit insurance covers. Exports to Europe, the east coast of the US and Latin America are facing problems due to the crisis. Due to attacks, shipping lines have reduced their movement through the Red Sea and are taking the longer route via the Cape of Good Hope, encircling the African continent. The trade route of Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea is shorter and faster than the Cape of Good Hope route, making it the preferred option for most shipping companies. The route starts from major Indian ports like Mumbai, JNPT, or Chennai, heads westward

through the Arabian Sea, enters the Red Sea, and navigates through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea. From there, ships can reach various European ports, depending on their destination. The Cape of Good Hope route is longer and slower, but it avoids the potential for delays or disruptions at the Suez Canal. It is typically used for bulk cargo shipments where time is less critical or when political instability in the Middle East raises concerns about using the Suez Canal. The route starts from the same Indian ports, heads southward across the Indian Ocean, rounds the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, and then sails northward along the west coast of Africa before entering the Mediterranean Sea and reaching European ports.



## India flags delay in US visa for businesses

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has raised its concerns at the Trade Policy Forum (TPF) meeting over problems being faced by domestic businesses in getting timely visas for the US and sought to fast-track the visa-issuing process for traders and investors, an official has said. The issue came up for discussion during the 14th TPF meeting here on Friday. It was co-chaired by the US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. During the TPF meeting, the two ministers noted that the movement of professional and skilled workers, students, investors and business visitors between the countries contributes immensely to enhancing bilateral economic and technological partnership. "Minister Goyal highlighted challenges being faced by business visitors from India due to visa processing time periods and requested the US to augment processing," a joint statement has said. The government official said that India has also asked the US

to make it a permanent process for Indian H1B visa holders in America to renew those visas in the US itself so that they do not have to come to India for that. At present, in the US, this state-side facility for this is a pilot programme. State-side facility means the person staying with an H1B visa can get it renewed in the US only. "Now, we are asking to make it permanent, and we are asking to extend this facility not only to the original visa holder but to his/her family also so that the family does not need to come back to India for renewal of visas," the official added. Further, India has requested the US to consider India as an 'approved treaty country' for E1 and E2 visas, which are for traders and investors. At present, India is not an approved treaty country for the US for these visas. "So, there was a request that India should also be considered to be made a part of the treaty country so that the facility of E1 and E2 visa, which is for investors and traders, is also made available to India," the official added.

## Masur yield may touch record 1.6 mn tons: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's masur (lentil) production is estimated to touch an all-time high of 1.6 million tonnes in the 2023-24 rabi season on higher acreage, according to Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh. Masur production stood at 1.55 million tonnes in the 2022-23 rabi season, as per the official data. Despite being the world's largest producer and consumer of pulses, India imports certain pulses, including masur and tur, to meet domestic shortages. "This year, masur production is going to be at an all-time high. Our masur production will be the highest in the world. The acreage has increased. The dynamic is changing," Singh said at an event organised by the Global Pulse Confederation (GPC) on Friday. In the ongoing rabi season, more area has been brought under the masur crop. The total masur acreage has increased to 1.94 million hectare as of January 12 in the ongoing rabi season, when compared to 1.83 million hectare in the year-ago period, according to the agriculture ministry data. On the sidelines of the event, the Secretary said masur production is estimated at 1.6 million tonnes for the current rabi season. He also mentioned that the country produces on an average 26-27 million tonnes of pulses annually. In chana and moong, the country is self-sufficient but in other pulses like tur and masur, it still imports to meet the shortages. "While we pitch for self-reliance in pulses, we cannot ignore that for some time to come, we probably need to keep (pulses) imports running," he said. While the government is incentivising farmers to grow more pulses, one needs to keep in mind the limited area under cultivation, he added. Sharing how difficult it is to balance the farmers' and consumers' interests, the Secretary said, "I think we are doing ok in the last couple of years. Despite weather disturbances, we have managed to keep the prices of pulses reasonably under control".

## Received info from India on social security pact: USTR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The US Trade Representative Katherine Tai on Saturday said they have received information from India recently on the proposed social security agreement and there is a lot of work to be done on the subject. Social security totalisation agreement was one of the key asks from the Indian side in the meeting of the Trade Policy Forum here, as it will significantly contribute towards enhancing services trade between countries and help Indian IT professionals who temporarily work in the US. India has submitted all the relevant data on its social security schemes which was sought by the US to start negotiations on the agreement. "Yes, the Indian government is

in touch with our social security administration... We have received that information on the eve of the TPF. "... We have the information and the ball is back in our court, but it's just landed in our court. So there is a lot more work to do" to facilitate the conversation on India's proposal, the US Trade Representative (USTR) Tai told reporters here. She was here for the 14th TPF meeting. It was co-chaired by her and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. Under this agreement, an expatriate in either country need not contribute to the social security scheme of the host country. It will benefit a number of Indians, particularly from the IT sector, who are working in America and paying social security but are unable to get any



benefit out of it. When asked about the issues being raised by the US side on India's import management system for specified IT Hardware, Tai said they have asked India to hold consultations with them and other stakeholders on such matters. Goyal in the TPF meet has elaborated on India's objectives, including those related to national security concerns on the matter. "This is an area where we are

hearing New Delhi's concerns about sensitivities with imports in these areas. We want to ensure that New Delhi creates a space for consultation not with us but with others including all stakeholders," she said. She added that the consultation would ensure that such decisions do not disrupt the regulatory environment, which is important for both sides. On increasing cooperation in the critical minerals sector, the USTR said these goods are critical to sustainable and resilient economic industrial future for both the nations. According to the joint statement issued after the TPF meeting, the two ministers expressed commitment to launch future joint initiatives in certain areas, including critical minerals and

trade in high tech products, in which the US and India will develop a forward-looking roadmap for enhanced cooperation. As part of the roadmap, she said "we are going to begin with fact finding exploration and establishing a common vocabulary". When asked about agri-related issues on both sides, the USTR said America is looking at greater market access for products such as almonds, walnuts, blueberries, and cranberries. India has issues with regard to grapes, mangoes and pomegranates in the US market. On India's concerns over delay in visa process for Indian business, Tai said the USTR office facilitates the conversation on this subject with the parts of the US administration that are responsible for these issues.



## Singapore firm join hands to boost Kanniyakumari tourism

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Realty developer Casagrand Rhas drawn up plans to develop Kanniyakumari as "Cape Town of India" through its project MAN, boosting tourism sector in the region. Casagrand Contracts Pvt Ltd is the EPC venture of Casagrand Group, Singapore-based Our SHINE GOGLOBAL have come together for the project to offer eco-friendly wellness tourism, convention centre among many others in Kanniyakumari. Casagrand Contracts and Our SHINE GOGLOBAL Ltd would identify a land parcel of 40 acres under the first phase of project which is expected to attract investments worth USD 300 million, a company statement here said. "Casagrand Builders, being the

premium real estate developer in South India is thrilled to leverage its expertise and network to bring life to the vision of this monumental project. Upholding its long-standing legacy in quality, reliability, Casagrand's EPC venture Casagrand Contracts is honoured to be a part of this landmark project," said Casagrand Contracts Pvt Ltd COO Mandeep Singh. The first stage of development would encompass a 1,000 seater Convention Centre equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, a mall featuring 100 shops and a film theatre. A 50-room resort has also been planned. "We look forward to the collaborative journey ahead, one that will redefine the skyline and socio-economic landscape of this beautiful region" he added.

## Mahindra World City commits ₹1000 crore in TN to expand operations

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Mahindra World City Developers Ltd has pledged investments to the tune of Rs 1,000 crore in Tamil Nadu over the next five years towards taking up expansion of its first industrial cluster — Origins By Mahindra - Phase II at Mahindra - Phase II project. The company, part of the diversified conglomerate Mahindra Group, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the State government during the

recently held Global Investors Meet. As per the investment plans, about 2,000 new jobs were expected to be created in the region. The investment comes alongside the launch of Origins by Mahindra - Phase II at Eliambedu Village in Chennai, which would be the platform for this investment, a company statement here said. Spread across 307 acres, Origins by Mahindra has become a pre-

ferred industrial hub for several companies based out of Japan and Taiwan. It is located along NH-16 near Ponneri on the West of Chennai. Origins by Mahindra has also bagged the IGBC Green Cities Platinum rating, the statement said. "As we expand our footprint with Origins by Mahindra-Phase-II, the integrated cities and industrial clusters vertical of Mahindra Lifespaces continue to accelerate business efficiency and improve go to market with

plug and play infrastructure. Tamil Nadu's distinguished business environment further enhances our confidence in expanding our operations here," said Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd Managing Director and CEO, Amit Kumar Sinha. "Mahindra Lifespaces has been an integral part of Tamil Nadu business landscape and we applaud the Government's commitment to further business growth in the state," he said.



## No proposal to lift export curbs on wheat, rice, sugar: Goyal

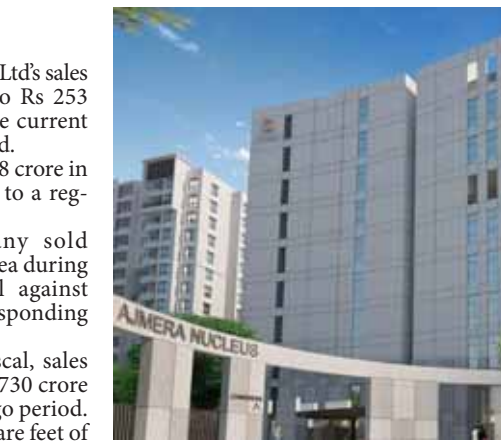
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said there is no proposal before the government as of now to lift export curbs on wheat, rice and sugar. He also said there is "no plan and no need" to import wheat and sugar. "There is no proposal as of now to remove export restrictions on wheat, rice and sugar. And India will not import wheat and sugar," Goyal told reporters. India had banned wheat exports in May 2022, non-basmati rice exports from July 2023 and extended curbs on sugar exports beyond October 2023, as part of measures to control rising domestic prices. He added that India is providing rice to friendly countries for their food security needs. The minister informed that India has provided rice to countries like Indonesia, Senegal, and Gambia.

## Ajmera Q3 sales bookings jump to ₹253 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ajmera Realty and Infra India Ltd's sales bookings nearly doubled to Rs 253 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal on better housing demand. Its sales bookings stood at Rs 128 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing earlier this week. The Mumbai-based company sold 1,03,573 square feet of carpet area during October-December this fiscal against 63,595 square feet in the corresponding period of the previous year. During April-December this fiscal, sales bookings grew 5 per cent to Rs 730 crore from Rs 694 crore in the year-ago period. The company sold 3,59,820 square feet of



carpet area during the first nine months of this financial year compared to 3,01,010 square feet a year ago. Ajmera Realty & Infra India Ltd Director Dhaval Ajmera said, "As we exit Q3 FY24, we are firmly on course to achieve our sales goal of Rs 1,000 crore for this fiscal". "The real estate sector has recently witnessed a noteworthy upturn, with the index reaching a 15-year high. This momentum was fuelled by a record number of property registrations in Mumbai and the MMR region," he said. This surge is propelled by substantial infrastructure development projects that are driving an upward trend in property prices, Ajmera said.

### BUSINESS BRIEF

#### SAMATHUVA PONGAL NARUVI

**VELLORE:** The celebrations 'Samathuva Pongal' - reflecting the diverse, harmonious significance of the harvest festival was presided over by GV Sampath, Founder Chairman, Naruvi Hospitals. The celebrations brought to the fore, the tradition and ethnicity of Tamil people. Dr Sampath and staff took part in the celebrations in traditional attire, reflecting the glory and pride of Tamil people. In his address, Dr Sampath said that the harvest festival was devoted to the farming community and the celebrations went beyond caste and religion and was a tribute to the harmony, equality of the Tamil people, both in Tamil Nadu and the diaspora.



#### LITTLE HEART CAMPAIGN

**GURUGRAM:** In a compassionate initiative dedicated to providing surgical interventions for children with congenital heart conditions, over 50 plus life-saving surgeries under the esteemed campaign "Little Heartlings" were conducted by Artemis Health Sciences Foundation. The campaign is a movement of compassion, healing, and hope, said Aseem Ranjan Srivastava, head of paediatric cardiac surgery, Artemis, in collaboration with Rotary and support from Sahyog Foundation & Yojiraj Sarkar Godarivale Trust, is organising a screening camp at Artemis Hospitals Sec 51 on January 15.

#### WOMEN ENGINEERS PROGRAMME

**NEW DELHI:** TalentSprint, an edtech firm, is advancing its mission to democratise quality education and career opportunities in deep tech. Launching the sixth cohort of the Women Engineers programme, supported by Google, the initiative aims to level the tech playing field and align with diversity, equity, and inclusion goals of global corporations. Offering 200 seats to first-year women engineering students nationwide, the programme provides a 100 per cent scholarship covering fees, along with an additional cash scholarship of Rs. 1,00,000. Google's VP Shiv Venkataraman emphasised the importance of inclusivity in technology, applauding TalentSprint's efforts to bridge gender gaps and shape a diverse future.

# No import restrictions on certain IT products: DGFT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has clarified that there are no import restrictions on certain IT hardware products such as desktop computers. In a circular to customs authorities and industry, the commerce ministry arm Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said only the import of laptops, tablets, all-in-one personal computers, ultra small form factor computers and servers is restricted and imports of these goods are allowed against a valid import authorisation. "The given import restriction does not apply to any other goods such as desktop computers, etc, under the tariff head 8471," it said. In international trade parlance,



every product is categorised under an HSN (Harmonised System of Nomenclature) code, or tariff heads. It helps in systematic classification of goods across the globe. HS Code 8471 includes products related to automatic data processing machines and units. It includes a mouse, printers, scanners, and CD drives.

In August 2023, the government imposed restrictions on certain IT hardware goods and later after domestic and foreign firms flagged their concerns, in October last year, it tweaked curbs on imports of laptops and computers and allowed importers to bring in shipments of these hardwares from overseas on a mere 'authorisa-

tion' upon detailing quantity and value. The new 'import management system' is aimed at monitoring shipments of laptops, tablets and computers into the country without hurting market supply or creating a cumbersome licensing regime. The importers are allowed to apply for multiple authorisations and those authorisations would be valid up to September 30, 2024. When asked about the issue on desktop computers, an official said that certain companies approached the DGFT that the customs is not allowing imports of desktops, so a clarification is issued on that. In a desktop computer, CPU and monitor are separate, but in all-in-one personal computers, CPU is in-built.



## D Mart Q3 net profit up 17 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Avenue Supermarts Ltd, which owns and operates retail chain D-Mart, on Saturday, reported a 17 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 690.41 crore for the third quarter ended December 31. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 589.64 crore in the October-December quarter a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by Avenue Supermarts. Its revenue from operations grew 17.31 per cent to Rs 13,572.47 crore during the quarter under review against Rs 11,569.05 crore in the corresponding quarter of the last fiscal. Avenue Supermarts' total

expenses rose 17.31 per cent to Rs 12,656.46 crore in the third quarter of this fiscal. Its total income in the December quarter increased 17.28 per cent to Rs 13,605.39 crore. The total number of stores stood at 341 as of December 31, 2023. Meanwhile, in a separate filing, Avenue Supermarts said its board has appointed Harishchandra M Bharuka as an Independent Director of the company. Promoted by Radhakishan Damani and his family, DMart retails basic home and personal products across markets, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, NCR, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Rajasthan.

# NOVAK PLANS TO START 2024 WITH AUSSIE TITLE

AP ■ MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA)

The injury update from Novak Djokovic was all good on the eve of his Australian Open title defence.

Djokovic hurt his wrist playing for Serbia in the United Cup last week and needed treatment twice during a quarter-final loss to Australia's Alex de Minaur.

"My wrist is good. I had time from the last match against de Minaur to my first match here to recover," he said. "I've been training well. Practice sessions pain-free so far. It's good. It's all looking good."

Djokovic has made it a habit to start the year with a title in Australia.

He's on a 28-match winning streak at Melbourne Park, where he has won an unprecedented 10 men's singles crowns. It's a major contributor to his record 24 Grand Slam titles.

And, so he feels right at home. He hosted "A Night with Novak and Friends" that drew almost a capacity crowd to Rod Laver Arena, where he got the jump on organizers by announcing he'd be playing the night match on Sunday - Day 1 of the first-ever 15-day Australian Open.

Both singles champions will play in the first of the night sessions: Djokovic's opener against qualifier Dino Prizmic will be followed by Aryna Sabalenka's first-round match against Ella Seidel. Fourth-seeded Jannik Sinner, who beat Djokovic in a month late last year, including in Italy's run to the Davis Cup title, will open play on the main show



court against Botic van de Zandschulp. That match will be followed by No. 8 Maria Sakkari's women's first round against Nao Hibino. Caroline Wozniacki, the 2018 champion who is returning to Melbourne Park for the first time as a mother, will open the night session at Margaret Court Arena. The first round will be staged over three days, with organizers hoping to cut back on the late finishes across the tournament.

Djokovic won 27 of his 28 matches in Grand Slams last year, losing only the Wimbledon final to Carlos Alcaraz. He's determined to go one better than that in 2024 and would like an Olympic gold

medal in Paris to go with it. Asked Saturday if the so-called Golden Slam - all four majors plus Olympic gold - was in his reckoning for this season, Djokovic said it's no secret that he wants to win every major he contests. "It's no different this year," he said. "I'm just hoping I can start the season in a way that I have been starting my seasons, most of my seasons, throughout my career: with a win here in Australia, in Melbourne. My favourite place, no doubt."

Djokovic has won four of the last five Australian titles - the only one he missed was the one he wasn't allowed to contest. He was deported from

Australia on the eve of the 2022 tournament because he wasn't vaccinated for COVID-19.

That's why he considers his victory last year, capped with a straight-sets win over Stefanos Tsitsipas, his best. "I hope that, yeah, I'm going to be able to, if not play at the level that I did last year, then be very close to that," Djokovic said, "because that was one of the best tennis levels that I've played, ever played."

Alcaraz is seeded No. 2 in Australia, and so can only face Djokovic here if they both make the final. The chance to beat Djokovic at Rod Laver Arena is one the 20-year-old Spaniard would savour.

"It's an extra motivation for me. I'm an ambitious guy. I always want to play against the best players in the world to see what is my level," he said. "Obviously, it's a good test, playing against him in the places that he's almost unbeaten."

"Yeah, knowing those stats, it's an extra motivation, for sure."

Alcaraz missed the Australian Open last year and then lost to Djokovic in the French Open semi-finals before his victory at Wimbledon gave him a second career major.

Djokovic had won the title in the four previous Wimbledon campaigns he'd entered.

The 36-year-old Serbian star is staying well grounded in the routines that have delivered unprecedented results at Melbourne Park.

That, he said, would include visits to the Botanical Gardens on the opposite bank of the Yarra River to Melbourne Park.

"I'm not superstitious. I do obviously like to visit certain places that have brought me luck and make me feel good," he said. "For example, the botanical gardens, it's a wonderful park where I like to spend time and just be by myself in nature, just grounding, hugging trees, climbing trees and stuff. I love to do that." He won his first Grand Slam title in Australia in 2008, and the back-to-nature concept has been a theme here ever since.

"So, I've done that for, yeah, last 15 years," he said. "Whether that's secret of success here in Australia or not, I don't know, but it has definitely made me feel good."



## Malaysia Open: Satwik, Chirag one step away from second Super 1000 title

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Asian Games gold medallists Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Saturday beat world champions Korean pair of Seo Seung Jae and Kang Min Hyukdished in straight games to advance to the Malaysia Open Super 1000 men's doubles final in their first tournament of the season.

The Indian duo, ranked second in the world, scripted a remarkable comeback after being down and out in the second game, saving six game points during an eight-point burst to waltz their way to a 21-18 22-20 win over their Korean opponents in a thrilling semifinal clash.

Satwik and Chirag thus stood just one step away from their second Super 1000 title, having won the first one at the Indonesian Open in June last year. It was the same Korean pair which the Indians had defeated in the semifinals last June. Overall, Satwik and Chirag now have a 3-1 head-to-head record against world no. 3 Seo and Kang.

The match was marked by short and snappy rallies as Satwik and Chirag showed better anticipation and execution to lead 9-5 in the opening game.

However, a couple of long shots from the Indian pair and some clever stroke play helped the Koreans take four straight points.

Chirag then produced an exceptional return, leaving the Koreans wondering what hit them. Another superb play at the net ensured the Indians a two point cushion at the break.

The Koreans made it 12-13 after pouncing on a few weak returns from the Indians, who,

however, pulled away again to 17-13 with a thunderous smash from Satwik and a flick serve from Chirag.

Seo went for a flick serve to set up a point but went wide twice next to hand four game points to the Indians, who wasted two of them before Seo sprayed one into the net.

In the second game, Seo and Kang were more alert with their defence and focused on placements and they found the gaps in more occasions. They also dominated the flat exchanges to move to 9-4.

Some exciting fast paced rallies ensued but the Korean pair managed to hold on to a 11-6 lead at the interval.

If Seo looked the better player in the opening game, Kang stepped up in the second and soon the Koreans were six points up at 17-11 in a jiffy as the Indians looked a tad subdued.

Chirag committed a few errors and soon, the Koreans grabbed six game points as a third game looked eminent but then there was a twist in the tale.

Down 14-20, Satwik and Chirag showed nerves of steel as the Koreans looked overcautious and sprayed into the net a number of times.

The Indians, on the other hand, rediscovered their touch just in time and they reeled off eight straight points to leave the Koreans stranded.

Satwik and Chirag has been the most successful Indian players in the circuit last year, having won the Asian Games gold, titles in Asian Championship, Indonesia Super 1000, Korea Super 500 and Swiss Open Super 300. They also reached the finals of China Masters Super 750 in November last year.



## Sidhu clinches 17th Paris Olympics spot for India

PTI ■ JAKARTA

India's Vijayveer Sidhu clinched a 17th Paris Games quota place for the country while winning a silver medal in the men's 25m rapid-fire event at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers here on Saturday.

The 21-year-old team bronze-medallist at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year, joins senior country-mate Anish Bhanwala in securing a Paris berth in the 25m rapid fire.

Anish had bagged the Olympic quota with a bronze medal in the Asian Championship in Changwon, Korea, last year.

Vijayveer did not have to wait for a medal to secure a quota place. He earned it by qualifying for the final in fourth place with a score of 577.

Four out of the six finalists on Saturday were eligible for quota places and the youngest, who hails from Chandigarh, did it in style by shooting 28 in the elimination round to clinch silver behind Kazakhstan's Nikita Chiryukin, who shot 32 for the gold medal.

"I am very very happy. We trained very hard in the camps and also after coming here. The range is quite similar to the Delhi (Karni Singh) range. I am not too happy with my quali-

cation score and we know the areas we need to work on after we come back, but very happy with the way I shot the finals. "I want to dedicate this to my parents, family and friends and of course to my coaches for the support," said Vijayveer.

Rapid-fire pistol is traditionally a strong event for India as Vijay Kumar had bagged a silver at the 2012 London Olympic Games. Before the 2020 Olympics, Anish had looked a strong contender to book a Tokyo berth but had missed out during the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi in 2021.

If both Vijayveer and Anish get the opportunity to represent the country at the Paris Olympics, it will be the first such instance in the rapid-fire shooting.

Indian shooters have so far bagged four Paris Olympics quota places in Jakarta, with Esha Singh (women's 10m air pistol), Varun Tomar (men's 10m air pistol), Rhythm Sangwan (women's 25m sports pistol) besides Vijayveer nailing the spots here.

India are leading the charts with 12 gold, 10 silver and eight bronze medals, followed by China with seven gold.

**QUOTA BEFORE MEDAL FOR VIJAYVEER:** Vijayveer

shot 289 in the rapid-fire round on Saturday morning to total 577 in the qualification round. He finished fourth among the 31 medal contenders in fray to enter the six-shooter final. Kazakhstan's Chiryukin topped the qualification with a solid 584 while Korea's Jong-Ho Song, who won bronze, was second and Japan's Dai Yoshioka was third. Two more Koreans made up the top six finalists. Korea had already exhausted their two-quota limit in earlier competitions and the Japanese Dai was also a Paris quota holder before entering this competition. That helped Chiryukin and Vijayveer secure the two available Paris spots.

**SIFT, ASHI WIN SILVER-BRONZE IN 50M RIFLE 3P:** Asian Games gold medallist Sift Kaur Samra, Ashi Chouksey made it a silver-bronze finish for India in the women's 50m rifle 3P individual final.

Three Indians Indians — Sift, Ashi and Olympian AnjumMoudgil — had earlier entered the final with Ashi shooting 588 to qualify in fourth place, while Anjum and Sift shot 586 each to take the sixth and seventh qualifying spots. China's Miao Wannu was top of the pile with 589 in qualification.

## Japan beat Czech Republic 2-0 in FIH Olympic Qualifier

PTI ■ RANCHI

Former Asian Games champions Japan were made to toil hard by lower-ranked Czech Republic before they secured a fighting 2-0 win in their opening Pool A match of the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifier here on Saturday.

Even though Japan, who won the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, controlled the proceedings for a major part, they managed to breach the resolute Czech defence only twice.

Miyu Suzuki opened the scoring for Japan in the fourth minute scoring from a rebound from their second penalty corner before Shihori Oikawa scored from the spot in the 40th minute.

Credit must also go to Czech Republic goalkeeper Barbra Cechakova for keeping her side in the hunt with numerous saves throughout the match. Japan's dominance can be gauged from the fact that they earned as many as eight penalty corners in the entire 60 minutes as against their opponent's



one. It was expected to be a cakewalk for world No. 15 Japan against Czech Republic who are ranked 31st.

But it didn't turn out to be so despite Japan dominating the match. The Czechs sat back and defended their citadel while looking for counter-attacks to surprise the Japanese.

The Czechs did manage to make a few circle entries but lacked in finishing. Japan will next play Germany on Sunday, while the Czech Republic will be up against Chile.

## India keep mighty Australia at bay till 50th minute before losing 0-2

PTI ■ AL RAYYAN (QATAR)

India kept former champions Australia at bay till the 50th minute before eventually losing their AFC Asian Cup football tournament opening group match 0-2 in a gritty performance here on Saturday. Australia were the overwhelming favourites to win the Group B match and nobody gave India a chance but Igor Stimac's men denied their mighty opponents any success in the first half and then five minutes into the second session, dishing out a superb defensive show.

The Indians, though, ran out of steam later on in the face of waves of attacks from the rampaging Australians, who won the title in 2015 and are ranked 25th in the world as against 102nd of Stimac's team.

Jackson Irvine (50th minute) and Jordan Bros (73rd) scored for Australia to take home full three points from the match at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium. India, however, did better than their 0-4 loss to Australia in a group match in the 2011 Asian Cup.

The Indians would not be too disappointed by the margin of loss. Perhaps, they would be happy to have conceded just two goals, which may prove beneficial later on when the third-place team is decided from

the group. The top two teams from each group, along with four best third-placed sides from across six groups, progress to the knockout round of 16. A knock-round berth will be a huge achievement for India.

Stimac had told his players before the Australia match to remain compact defensively and avoid giving away set-pieces if they want to deny the physically and technically much superior Australians from scoring goals. His wards executed his plans to the "T" in respect to the first instruction but was less successful in the second as the Australians got enough set pieces, though most of them were corner kicks, to score. But to the credit of the Indians, they did not concede any goal from the set pieces. For almost the whole first 45 minutes, the Indians sat really deep with all the 11 players, including captain Sunil Chhetri, defending in their own half as the rampaging Australians did all the attacking.

With no Indian attack bothering him, Australia captain and goalkeeper Mathew Ryan stationed himself near the centre line and egged his team-mates for most part of the first half.

India, though, got one golden chance to stun the mighty Australians in the 16th minute but Chhetri missed it. Nikhil Poojary

worked on the right flank and sent a beautiful cross and Chhetri sneaked out of three defenders to head the ball towards the Australian goal but it went wide.

The vociferous crowd, mostly Indian supporters, in the 45,000-capacity stadium could not believe it, so too the Indian dug out. But, it was the Australians who were all over the place as they came in waves of attacks and crosses from both the flanks as the Indians crowded in their box and threw in their bodies at times to block the shots. Defensive mainstay Sandesh Jhingjan sustained a cut on his right forehead after an aerial duel in the first half and he played with a bandage.

Connor Metcalfe had a golden opportunity to give Australia the lead in the 21st minute but his shot from the top of the box was deflected by Indian goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, who initially committed the mistake of kicking into an opponent from a backpass. After having overwhelming share of ball possession in the first session, the Australians were not to be denied too long as they took the lead in the 50th minute through an Irvine strike. Considering the valiant vigil in the first half, it was a soft goal conceded by the Indians. Sandhu came out of line to connect to a high cross from the right.



## Luton grabs controversial late goal to rescue vital point at Burnley

AP ■ BURNLEY (ENGLAND)

Carlton Morris scored a controversial late goal to give Luton a 1-1 draw at Burnley in the Premier League on Friday. Morris headed home a cross from Alfie Doughty in the second minute of second-half stoppage time after Zeki Amdouni had put the home side ahead in the first half. Burnley claimed its goalkeeper James Trafford was fouled but the video review allowed Morris' goal to stand.

"When needs must stick the two big fellas up top and we'll cause carnage," Morris said. "I'm just pleased to get on the end of it. We deserved something from the game." Both sides struggled to win points in the first half of this season but Friday's game was an entertaining encounter that belied their lowly status.

Although Luton started the brighter of the two sides, it was Burnley that took the lead after 36 minutes when Amdouni scored for the second game in a row. The Switzerland forward side-footed home from close in after good work from Wilson Odobert on the left flank.

Luton was aggrieved to be behind but it got the point it deserved in the dying seconds at Turf Moor thanks to Morris' disputed goal.

"There's a clear attempt to stop the goalkeeper getting up," Burnley manager Vincent Kompany told TNT Sports. "It doesn't take anything away from the performance by Luton, I thought they were incredible today. But it's just a moment there where the referee has to get it right." Burnley remained second from bottom, four points behind 18th-place Luton and three points ahead of last-place Sheffield United.

## Emma beats Elise to win Hobart International

AP ■ HOBART (AUSTRALIA)

Second-seeded American Emma Navarro claimed her first WTA Tour title in her first final Saturday when she beat two-time champion, top-seeded Elise Mertens 6-1, 4-6, 7-5 to win the Hobart International. The 22-year-old Navarro outlasted Mertens of Belgium in a gruelling final that lasted 2 hours and 48 minutes to continue her extraordinary rise over the past 12 months.

She is the second-straight American champion after Lauren Davis in 2023. Navarro was ranked No. 149 this time last year but the New York-born and based player now has risen to No. 31. She also made the semi-finals in Auckland last week in an impressive start to 2024.

## Madhya Pradesh emerges overall champion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Beach Games 2024, the first multi-sports beach games in India, organized at the pristine blue flag certified Ghoghla Beach in Diu concluded with landlocked Madhya Pradesh emerging overall champion, topping the medal tally with a total of 18 medals, including an impressive haul of 7 golds. This remarkable feat not only showcased the sporting prowess of Madhya Pradesh's contingent but also highlighted the depth of talent fostered within the state.

Maharashtra won 14 medals including 3 gold, while Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and hosts Dadra, Nagar Haveli, Diu & Daman secured 12 medals each. Assam won 8 medals, out of which 5 were Gold.

In a thrilling turn of events, Lakshadweep secured the gold medal in Beach Soccer, marking a historic achievement for the pristine island territory. They beat Maharashtra 5-4 in the well contested final. Lakshadweep's victory not only added to the diversity of medal winners but also underscored the inclusive and

nationwide impact of the Diu Beach Games 2024.

Sporting excellence took centre stage from January 4-11, as 1404 athletes, all under the age of 21, from 28 states and Union Territories, supported by 205 match officials, participated in a diverse range of disciplines.

The games were structured into 2 sessions each day. The Morning Session, starting from 8 am and concluding at noon, followed by the Afternoon Session, commencing at 3 pm. This scheduling not only optimized the athletes' performances under suitable weather conditions but also allowed for a dynamic and engaging viewing experience for the enthusiastic audience.

From the strategic showdowns in Tug of War to the breath-taking feats of Sea Swimming, the martial artistry of Pencak Silat, the acrobatic displays of Mallakhamb, the fast-paced action of Beach Volleyball, the strategic battles of Beach Kabaddi, and the electrifying kicks and goals of Beach Soccer, each sport brought its unique energy to the

## FIRST EVER BEACH GAMES HELD IN DIU



# INDIA EYE SERIES WIN OVER AFGHANISTAN

PTI ■ INDORE

A series win over Afghanistan is still not counted among the grandstand cricketing feats, but a clutch of players will be eager to achieve that here on Sunday in the second T20I as it can transform them into contenders from sidekicks. India had won the first game at Mohali by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead. It is then imperative for Jitesh Sharma, Washington Sundar and Axar Patel to produce a defining effort against the Afghans to keep themselves within the selectors' sight as the move to find a perfect squad for the T20 World Cup has gathered steam. That India will not play another T20I series ahead of the marquee event in June increases the gravitas around their performance against Afghanistan. Jitesh has all the reasons to place himself among the frontrunners as the wicketkeeper batter has overtaken Ishan Kishan in the pecking order since replacing the latter from the fourth T20I against Australia at Raipur last year. The Maharashtra man has struck a couple of useful 30s down the order,

but he would not have missed the need for a bigger knock to cement his claim. In the often-fickle selection landscape of Indian cricket, Jitesh, at 30, would know very well that only constant performances can help him save that frontrunner status. Tilak Varma offers a very similar case. The left-hander had made an excellent start to his T20I career last year, making 39, 51 and 49 not out against the West Indies in an away three-match series. But since then, Varma has tapered off. The next 13 innings have produced only one more fifty, against a below par Bangladesh in the Asian Games, with three 20-plus scores and one 30-plus knock dominating the rest of the outings. Those numbers are certainly not enough for the 21-year-old to land inside the larger scheme of things, and the effort to turn him into a part-time off-spinner too seemed to be having a feeble life. However, it remains to be seen whether Varma can retain his place in the side as star batsman Virat Kohli is available for this match after skipping the first game. After missing out on the 50-over

## FRINGE PLAYERS LOOK TO IMPRESS; KOHLI TO RETURN



World Cup with an injury, Axar now seem to be back in the thick of things in both red and white ball formats. On Friday, the left-arm spinner was included in the India squad for the first two Tests against England, and he dished out a fine spell at the PCA Stadium on Thursday night as well — 4-0-23-2. So, the Gujarat man will be eager to weave on the pattern and contribute to a series triumph here. Sundar too has earned a recall but has not set the stage ablaze so far on his return. He will also eye a change in the second match. The hope in the hearts of Jitesh and Varma might just have received a fillip as the Indore pitch often gives plenty of assistance to batsmen, as they can expect a fruitful outing here. But it mandates Axar and Sundar to be at their absolute crafty best. The former had shown how to tame unhelpful conditions through that admirable spell at Mohali. However, it will be immature to take this Afghan side for granted. They have the wherewithal to hurt India on their day. The young Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Azmatullah Omarzai and the experienced Mohammad Nabi can tear

apart a bowling unit as mercilessly as any other. Despite the absence of star spinner Rashid Khan, the Afghans have the services of Mujeeb ur Rahman, who was in good rhythm in the first match, Naveen-ul-Haq and Fazalhaq Farooqi. If they can fire in unison, it will not be far-fetched to expect cracker of a contest.

### SQUADS:

**INDIA:** Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Ravi Bishnoi, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, Mukesh Kumar. **AFGHANISTAN:** Ibrahim Zadran (captain), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (WK), Ikram Alikhil (WK), Hazratullah Zazai, Rahmat Shah, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Karim Janat, Azmatullah Omarzai, Sharafuddin Ashraf, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad, Naveen Ul Haq, Noor Ahmad, Mohammad Saleem, Qais Ahmad, Gulbadin Naib, Rashid Khan.



## Rajat hit 111; India A play draw against England Lions

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Rajat Patidar hit a commendable 111 but Sarfaraz Khan missed out on a hundred by just four runs as India A and England Lions played out a draw in the two-day warm-up match, here Saturday. The Indians resumed the day at 123 for one and lost Pradosh Paul (21) at 130 before Patidar and Sarfaraz (96) put on a 70-run stand for the third wicket. The partnership ended when Callum Parkinson removed Patidar, who hit 18 fours and a six. Sarfaraz then joined hands with KS Bharat (64) and put on a brilliant 121-run partnership to allow India to take a healthy lead.



### WARM UP GAME

The stand was eventually ended by Dan Mousley, who got rid of Bharat at 331, followed by Jack Carson dismissing Sarfaraz 10 runs later. The Indians came up with

another effective 50-plus-run partnership, as Dhruv Jurel (50), who earned his maiden India Test call-up on Friday night, tagged along with Manav Suthar (26) for a 57-run stand.

Jurel became the sixth wicket to fall for the side at 398, as India A lost a couple more wickets to end the day at 437 for eight, earning a lead of 229. For the Lions, Parkinson and Carson grabbed a couple of wickets each, while Mousley was economical. Earlier, opting to bat first, the visitors were dismissed for 233, with Mousley (60) being their top scorer. For the Indians, Manav Suthar was the star with the ball, with figures of three for 45, whereas Tushar Deshpande turned out to be the most economical one for the side. The two teams will now clash in three unofficial four-day Tests starting Wednesday here.



## Kaif all round show gives Bengal 128 runs first innings lead

PTI ■ KANPUR

Having bowled a magical spell of 4/14, Mohammed Kaif stepped up with the bat at No. 9 with an unbeaten 45 to help Bengal take the first-innings lead of 128 runs against hosts Uttar Pradesh on day two of their Ranji Trophy Group B match here on Saturday. Resuming at 95/5, Bengal folded up for 188 under challenging conditions at the Green Park, with veteran India seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar returning excellent figures of 8/41. Uttar Pradesh, who were dismissed for 60 in the first innings, responded with resilience in the second essay to be 46 for no loss at close on day two. Samarth Singh and Aryan Juyal remained unbeaten at 21 and 20, respectively as UP trailed by 82 runs. Day 3 promises an intriguing contest as the home side will look to overcome the deficit and assert dominance, while Bengal bowlers will be desperate to seize the early initiative. Earlier on Saturday morning, Bengal lost three wickets for 15 runs. But Kaif showed the way, emerging as the top-scorer with 45 not out off 79 balls. Tailenders Kaif and Suraj Sindhu Jaiswal (20) added the much-needed 52 runs for the ninth wicket to take Bengal to a fighting score. Kaif smashed four boundaries and two sixes. After the dismissal of Suraj, Kaif partnered with Ishan Porel (10) and added another vital 26 runs for the last wicket to take the hosts to a respectable total. **MUMBAI DOMINATE ANDHRA:** At the Sharad Pawar

Cricket Academy BKC, 41-times champions Mumbai asserted their dominance against Andhra. After posting a formidable total of 395 in their first innings, Mumbai bowlers showcased their prowess, restricting Andhra to 98/3 at stumps on day two, trailing by 297 runs. The day's highlight was Mumbai's lower order, led by Tanush Kotian and Mohit Avasthi, who orchestrated a stellar recovery from being 281/6. Overnight batter Kotian, with his composed knock of 54, provided the stability required to anchor the innings, while Avasthi made a crucial 53 to frustrate the Andhra bowlers. **BRIEF SCORES:** **IN MUMBAI:** Mumbai 395; 137.2 overs (Bhupen Lalwani 61, Tanush Kotian 54, Mohit Avasthi 53; Nitish Reddy 5/64). **Andhra** 98/3; 37 overs (Prasanth Kumar 59 batting). Andhra trail by 297 runs. **IN KANPUR:** Uttar Pradesh 60 and 46 for no loss; 18 overs. **Bengal** 188; 58.2 overs (Mohammed Kaif 45 not out, Sayan Ghosh 41; Bhuvneshwar Kumar 8/41). UP trail by 82 runs. **IN PATNA:** Bihar 108; 38.4 overs (Bipin Saurabh 49; Ravi Kiran 5/21, Vashudev Bareth 3/21). **Chhattisgarh** 211/1; 66 overs (Rishabh Tiwari 98 batting, Ashutosh Singh 81 batting). Chhattisgarh lead by 103 runs. **IN GUWAHATI:** Kerala 419; 113.4 overs (Sachin Baby 131, Rohan Kunnummah 83, Krishna Prasad 80, Rohan Prem 50; Mukhtar Hussain 3/82, Rahul Singh 3/56). **Assam** 14/2; 5 overs. Assam trail by 405 runs.

## We will not complain if pitches in India spin from ball one: Pope

PTI ■ LONDON

England vice-captain Ollie Pope said his side won't complain if India offer pitches assisting spin from the first ball itself during their five-match Test tour beginning on January 25, as he believed that it was up to the host country to prepare tracks that suited their players. The 26-year-old Pope, a right-handed middle-order batter, did not shy away from the thought that the nature of pitches will be a hot topic of discussion during the series. "There will be a lot of outside noise. And pitches can be a massive talking point. But you have to remember the two teams are playing on the exact same wicket, so we just need to be as well-equipped as we can," Pope was quoted as saying by 'The Guardian'. "In England, we might leave more grass on the pitch to suit our amazing seamers, so it's no surprise if India do the same to suit their spinners," he said before England flew out to Abu Dhabi for a training camp ahead of the Test series. The nature of pitches made the headlines recently after India won a Test against South Africa in Cape Town inside two days. India captain Rohit Sharma had said that he did not mind playing on pitches like in Newlands "as long as everyone keeps their mouth shut when they come to India and don't talk too much about Indian pitches". Pope, who has scored 2136 runs from 38 Tests since his debut in 2018, also did not mind low-scoring Test matches, saying they are "amazing to watch". "I actually think low-scoring Test

matches (where the ball has the edge over the bat) are pretty amazing to watch," he said. "I saw a fair bit of South Africa versus India and it was great: guys scoring seriously tough runs and the ball flying through. "The scores could be similar in India but if the pitches spin from ball one we won't be complaining. It's about finding a method to combat it." Pope was part of the touring England team that lost 1-3 to India three years ago, and he had struggled with the bat. He could pass 20 in four of his eight innings but 34 was his highest score. "We had some young guys on that tour. Myself, Zak Crawley, Ben Foakes - it was our first India tour and we were probably taken by surprise when it turned from ball one (after the first Test). But if we had read the pitch well enough and quickly enough..." he recollected. "I look at the guys who were most successful, Rohit Sharma and Rishabh Pant, they didn't rotate strike a huge amount. That's tough to do on those pitches, you can't just work spin around like in England. You need a really solid defence but also four and six options, to hit the spinners off their length." Further talking about the challenges while playing in India, he said, "The danger ball last time was the one that went straight on - the ones that spun almost spun too much. "It's like in England when the (seaming) ball goes past your outside edge, you play it well with soft hands or miss it. It's a case of being at peace with being beaten - that's almost a win if you're covering (lbw and bowled)".

## Nothing new or foreign to me: Smith on opener role in Tests



PTI ■ SYDNEY

Gearing up to open batting for Australia in Tests, Steve Smith on Saturday asserted that it was not a new role for him since he has the experience batting at No. 3 and he likes the challenge of facing the new ball. Smith will be replacing now-retired David Warner as the opener for the upcoming home Tests against the West Indies. Warner played his final series earlier this month at home against Pakistan. Although the likes of Cam Bancroft, Marcus Harris and Matt Renshaw were tipped to take Warner's spot, the former two were surprisingly omitted from the squad, while the latter has been named as a reserve in

the team. With Smith set to open alongside Usman Khawaja, he said that he had been waiting for a long time to bat up the order, especially since Marnus Labuschagne has been batting at No. 3 lately. "Since Marnus has been back playing at No.3, I've been waiting to bat for quite a long period of time. I don't like waiting to bat, so I thought why don't I put my hand up and have a crack up top? That way, you can get Cameron Green in and you're playing your best six batters," he told Fox Sports. "I am (excited). I like facing the new ball. If you look back to the 2019 Ashes, I was in pretty early there most of the time where I was facing the new ball." "I batted No.3 from a number of years as well and was in early and did pretty well against the new ball. So, it's nothing new or foreign to me. I enjoy getting in there and getting amongst it, and I'm looking forward to that challenge." Smith opened for Sydney Sixers against Sydney Thunders during their recent Big Bash League clash but failed to produce any fireworks, getting dismissed for a golden duck.



## Kallis: Modern day batters are not patient anymore

PTI ■ PAARL (SOUTH AFRICA)

Patience isn't a virtue that Jacques Kallis finds in modern day batters who, he said, would mostly try to hit out of trouble on pitches which aren't easy to bat. Kallis, a modern day legend with 45 Test hundreds, only second to Sachin Tendulkar, said that jury is still out on whether offensive batting on decisive track is the way to go. India's Test match against South Africa in Cape Town ended inside two days in just over 106 overs. Has the philosophy of Test match changed with batters becoming tad too aggressive? "I think it has changed. The guys aren't as patient anymore if there's a bit of movement,"

Kallis said, referring to Newlands track, in an exclusive interview with PTI. "Earlier, guys use to ride it out to get through that period. Now guys are trying to hit out and it's completely different way of playing it. Is it good or bad? Time will tell," he said, giving an open-ended answer. Talking about the wicket on offer in the second Test in which South Africa were all out for 55 in their first innings and India lost last six wickets without adding a run, Kallis, who is from Cape Town, felt that pace wasn't an issue at Newlands. "I don't think it was the quickest I have seen but it is uneven bounce and sideways movement. The moment you get uneven bounce it makes it tough."

PTI ■ PAARL (SOUTH AFRICA)

## Jurel work ethic stands out: Sangakkara

Dhruv Jurel's impressive work ethic and his quest for excellence stood out when he played for Rajasthan Royals, the IPL team's Director of Cricket Kumar Sangakkara said after the youngster received his maiden call-up in the Indian Test squad for the upcoming England series. The young Uttar Pradesh batter-keeper stole limelight during the last IPL. He had risen through the ranks with impressive red ball performances for his state in domestic cricket and is currently an India 'A' regular. "I'm feeling very proud and happy because one of our key motivators and performance indicators in the IPL is to produce players for India and we have produced quite a lot over the years," Sangakkara replied to a PTI query on Saturday. "Jurel is the latest addition. He is a brilliant young man, a very good

player and has worked really hard to get where he has," said the former Sri Lanka captain, who is here to oversee Paarl Royals. But did he expect Jurel to get a red ball call-up so soon? "I think it is up to the selectors on how they want to construct their red and white ball teams. Our job is to produce the best players, so they get their opportunities in any format," Sangakkara said. Asked what he thought has helped Jurel make rapid strides, he replied: "His work ethics and demeanour stand out. He came in at a very difficult position for RR (last season) and scored so many runs. "He is a matchwinner in short format, but this is a real test of his technique, character and his application to be in the Test side," said the former keeper.



Sangakkara believes that the grammar of cricket in terms of evaluation of talent will change because of T20s but Test cricket will still retain its pristine charm. "Red-ball cricket will always be relevant. At the end of the day, we are producing good cricketers and good cricketers can adapt to any format." Just like the adage 'there are thousands of ways to skin a cat', Sangakkara wants people to find their own method. "The format itself need not be played in one specific way. We have seen how much it has changed and it is exciting to see the changes in Test cricket," he said. "The players that are coming through now, they are flexible and adaptable and exciting to watch. They add so much in terms of excitement and short repertoire deliveries,"

he said. With single franchise owning multiple teams (IPL, SA20, CPL, ILT20), Sangakkara believes the day isn't far when football club like contracts round the year will be offered to the players. "That could be a great possibility and all the stakeholders, ICC and the home boards will have to make some tough decisions on how we will keep cricket relevant. "Because if the sport is not relevant and you are not getting the spectators to the stadium, that's when the sport is in trouble," Sangakkara said, sounding a mild warning for ICC. But, he maintained that cricket as a game is in pink of health. "The game is very healthy and is on the cusp of going in a new direction. Now, it is about making sure it addresses the needs of all its stakeholders — the public and the players. The fans dictate the direction in which the sport heads," he signed off.



"It's never too late. Don't focus on what was taken away. Find something to replace it, and acknowledge the blessing you have"  
— Emma Watson



# An opulent culinary affair

Indulge in a Gastronomic Extravaganza with Live Music, Diverse Cuisines, and Chef's Specialties at Elan, The Lodhi, New Delhi. By **SHARMILA CHAND**

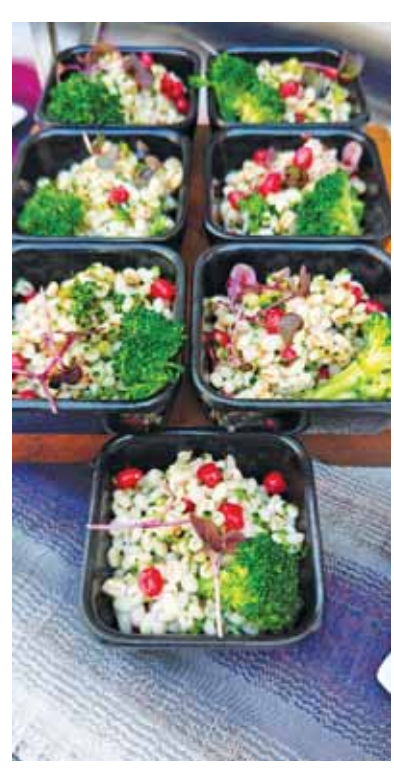
An elegant ambience, limited covers, well laid out seating, thoughtfully curated menu, sparkling beverages, attentive service, outstanding live music, make Elan's Alfresco Brunch affair a delightful experience in the heart of the capital. On a sunny afternoon, we settled for a table close to the beautiful Champa tree in the well manicured greens. Within a few minutes, we are tapping our feet and singing jingle bells in tune with the beautiful live singers. The picturesque garden is the perfect setting for gastronomic journey, buzzing with several live cooking stations, where chefs take the spotlight, showcasing their expertise through a diverse array of dishes. We look around and realize there is a choice of several cuisines, including Indian Street food, Continental, Pan Asian, Japanese, Chinese, and North Indian delicacies. The guests have plenty to celebrate global flavours, well crafted cocktails and a separate section for kids' goodies. We start with piping hot Tom Yum Soup - robust with flavours and perfectly done with all the condiments. We forgo the starters like Bara Kebab, Amritsari Fish, etc and choose to have more of salads as they look exotic and healthy. The reason being, the ingredients chosen are offbeat, for example, there is Pearl Barley with Broccoli - mild and easy on the palate. The combination of Orange, Blueberry, Strawberry, Romain in pretty carvings, is delicious. Mediterranean Chicken Cous Cous with lemon dressing is the show stopper at the table. While some cannot stop raving about Beetroot Cured Salmon with herb green and sour cream, though it has tough competition with Prawn, Avocado, Mexican, Confit cherry tomato salad. With tasting few more salads, like Minted Melon Feta with Cured Ham, we move on to everybody's favourite course - street food of India. So sure enough, gol gappas lad up at the table with two options of water - one slightly sweet reddish in color and other green to die for. Everybody votes for the sour and spicy green one, and have several rounds of the same. Next is the crispy aloo tikki, palak patta chaat, dahi and papri chaat, all done to perfection with



**"AT ELAN, THE LODHI, NEW DELHI, SUNDAYS ARE A FEAST FOR THE SENSES. WITH A SCENIC SETTING AMIDST LUSH GREENS, THE BRUNCH PRESENTS A GRAND SYMPHONY OF GLOBAL CUISINES INCLUDING AN ARRAY OF LIVE COOKING STATIONS WHERE OUR CHEFS SHINE. FROM THE SIZZLE OF BARBECUE COUNTERS TO THE ARTISTRY OF TEPPANYAKI, THE AROMAS AND HEARTINESS OF WEBER GRILLS, AND THE ALLURE OF MADE-TO-ORDER PASTAS AND PIZZAS, EVERY BITE IS A FLAVORFUL JOURNEY"**

— VIJAY THAPLIYAL  
Executive Chef, THE LODHI

right proportion of chutneys and yoghurt mixed. Soon we realize, now is the time for some bubbly beverage. Guess what, we all turn out to be Rose Wine lover. So no conflict here, the chilled Rose adds beauty to the sparkling white table linen. Chef Vijay Thapliyal, the Executive Chef of The Lodhi, walks in to check if we are doing fine, and commands us to go for Grills from Teppanyaki station, next. We are quite full after the hearty chaat round but it's too early in the day to even take a pause, we have not even reached the real food round. Hence we walk towards the Grill counter and choose our favourites from seasonal veggies, Taco spicy cottage cheese steak, salmon steak, Sea bass, prawns, rosemary marinated chicken and more. Vijay advises us to have generous accompaniment of lemon butter, mustard cream, honey mustard with these grills; choose teriyaki sauce, tonkatsu or Oyster sauce and they truly turn out outstanding. Indulge in a culinary extravaganza with Live Pasta, Pizza counters, in multiple options, not to miss out the Lebanese Mezze Platter. There is a decent selection of veg and non veg sushis in the display, though they would have been of a better texture had they prepared sushis at the live counter. We all loved the preparation and huge choice of Dim Sums, thin covering and great filling. In the main course, the Indian cuisine stands out, both in terms of taste and the choice of dishes. Sarson ka saag was melt in the mouth with fresh ground masalas, paired with hot makka rotis served with white butter. Kadi pakora and Punjabi style meat curry rendered the feel of comfort food while Patiala Murgh



was lapped up with Mutton Biryani. Veg lovers could not stop raving about Kale Chane ka pulao - different and nicely flavoured in ghee. Dosa and idly lovers were not disappointed as there were several varieties being offered, including Egg Dosa. Finally, to satisfy our sweet cravings, there was a delightful selection of desserts, including in-house ice creams. Elan takes pride in meticulously crafting each pastry to look pretty and tantalise the taste buds of its guests. For dark chocolate lovers, the best bet is 'Smoked dark chocolate coffee cake' for the strong real hardy flavour.

**TO CONCLUDE**

From chaat platters to delicate French pastries and world cuisine, paired with a decent mix of beverages, there's something for everyone here, creating a memorable gastronomic experience. Spend a relaxed afternoon in the company of your loved ones over a sumptuous meal.



**FARM FRESH RUCOLA SALAD: ORGANIC BEETS WITH BALSAMIC DRESSING**

**INGREDIENTS:** Beetroot 100 gm; Orange 60 gm; walnut 60 gm Sugar 5 gm; Sundried tomatoes 5 gm; Fresh rucola 80 gm; Goat cheese 60 gm; Micro greens - to garnish  
**METHOD:** For Dressing Mix vinegar, olive oil, and mustard oil in a bowl. And whisk vigorously till it emulsifies into a pouring consistency. Add salt and pepper as the taste and keep it aside.  
For Salad

- Roast the whole beetroot till it gets tender and thinly slice it.
- Clean and wash the salad leaves, put them in a colander to drain the water.
- In the mixing bowl, add fresh rucola leaves, orange segments, sugar crunchy walnuts, mix gently.
- Arrange the sliced beetroot in the serving plate
- Place the mixed salad on top of the plated beetroot slices.
- Drizzle the balsamic dressing on top.
- Make quenelles of goat cheese, place neatly on three sides of the plate.
- Sprinkle the black pepper, garnish with micro greens. Serve.



YOU KNOW, ALL THAT REALLY MATTERS IS THAT THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE ARE HAPPY AND HEALTHY. EVERYTHING ELSE IS JUST SPRINKLES ON THE SUNDAE  
— PAUL WALKER

# TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO OVERCOME TINNITUS



An international research team has shown that the debilitating impact of tinnitus can be effectively reduced in just weeks by a training course and sound therapy delivered via a smartphone app MindEar. The HEALTH PIONEER shares details

The team from Australian, New Zealand, French and Belgian universities reports these findings in Frontiers in Audiology and Otology, offering some hope for millions affected by tinnitus who have been told that there is nothing they can do about it; face long queues waiting for treatment, or can't afford the costs of specialist support. The researchers said that the initial trial worked with 30 sufferers, of whom almost two thirds experienced a 'clinically significant improvement'. The team are now planning larger trials in the UK in collaboration with the University College London Hospital. The app is available for individuals to trial for themselves on a smartphone.

"About 1.5 million people in Australia, 4 million in the UK and 20 million in the USA have severe tinnitus," says Dr Fabrice Bardy, an audiologist at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland and lead author of the paper. Dr Bardy is also co-founder of MindEar, a company set up to commercialise the MindEar technology.

"One of the most common misconceptions about tinnitus is that there is nothing you can do about it; that you just have to live with it. This is simply not true. Professional help from those with expertise in tinnitus support can reduce the fear and anxiety attached to the sound patients experience," he says.

"Cognitive behavioural therapy is known to help people with tinnitus, but it requires a trained psychologist. That's expensive, and often difficult to access," says Professor Suzanne Purdy, Professor of Psychology at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. "MindEar uses a combination of cognitive behavioural therapy,



## What is Tinnitus

It is not a disease in itself but is usually a symptom of another underlying health condition, such as damage to the auditory system or tensions occurring in the head and neck. Tinnitus is common, affecting up to one in four people. It is mostly experienced by older adults but can appear for children. For some, it goes away without intervention. For others, it can be debilitatingly lifechanging: affecting hearing, mood, concentration, sleep and in severe cases, causing anxiety or depression.

mindfulness and relaxation exercises as well as sound therapy to help you train your brain's reaction so that we can tune out tinnitus. The sound you perceive fades in the background and is much less bothersome," she says. "In our trial, two thirds of users of our chatbot saw improvement after 16 weeks. This was shortened to only 8 weeks when patients additionally had access to an online psychologist," says Dr Bardy.

## Types of related researches in offing

Evidence suggests that tinnitus is caused by changes in neural networks in the brain, so many research efforts are aimed at testing the benefit of magnetic or electrical stimulation of the brain.

Here are some examples of current research topics:

**ELECTRIC STIMULATION:** Cochlear implants have been shown to suppress tinnitus, in addition to restoring functional hearing in those with severe-to-profound hearing loss, but they are not suitable for the majority of tinnitus sufferers who have significant acoustic hearing. Researchers are using non-invasive electric stimulation on parts of the inner ear to suppress tinnitus while not damaging acoustic hearing.

**BIMODAL STIMULATION:** Acoustic stimulation may be combined with other types of electric stimulation on the tongue, head or neck areas, or vagus nerve to provide long-term relief for tinnitus.

**DEEP BRAIN STIMULATION (DBS):** This procedure is normally used to treat people with certain types of movement disorders or neuropsychiatric conditions. Some people being treated with DBS found that the procedure unexpectedly reduced their tinnitus symptoms. Unlike rTMS, DBS is invasive and involves surgery to implant electrodes deep within the brain. While early results on the use of DBS for tinnitus have been encouraging,



more research is needed to determine if the procedure is warranted for treating tinnitus alone.

**REPETITIVE TRANSCRANIAL MAGNETIC STIMULATION (RTMS):** In this painless, noninvasive procedure, short magnetic pulses are delivered to the brain using a device called an electromagnetic coil. Preliminary trials of rTMS have yielded mixed results, so researchers are now studying the ideal coil placement and frequency of tinnitus.

**MEDICATIONS:** While there are currently no medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for treating tinnitus, researchers are testing a number of options. Researchers have identified a drug that reduces tinnitus in mice, and they are working to develop second-generation versions that may one day prove effective in people.

**GENETIC RISK FACTORS:** Tinnitus and hearing impairment affect many older people. Scientists are reviewing a large genetic database of people with tinnitus and age-related hearing loss to identify genetic risk factors for both conditions. Determining genetic associations with age-related hearing impairment and tinnitus may have a broad impact on risk prediction, prevention, screening, and treatment.

**PERSONALIZED TREATMENT:** Tinnitus symptoms are diverse, with different people hearing different sounds in different patterns. The results of brain imaging studies in people with tinnitus also vary considerably from person to person. Using data gathered from study participants who are tracking their tinnitus using a smartphone app, along with brain imaging data, scientists are working to characterize the many forms that the condition can take. They aim to describe distinct tinnitus profiles and to identify the most effective treatment approaches for each one.

## Why does it work?

Even before we are born, our brains learn to filter out sounds that we determine to be irrelevant, such as the surprisingly loud sound of blood rushing past our ears. As we grow, our brains further learn to filter out environmental noises such as a busy road, an air conditioner or sleeping partners.

Most alarms, such as those in smoke detectors, bypass this filter and trigger a sense of alert for people, even if they are asleep. This primes the fight-or-flight response, and is especially strong for sounds we associate with bad prior experiences.

Unlike an alarm, tinnitus occurs when a person hears a sound in the head or ears, when there is no external sound source or risk presented in the environment, and yet the mind responds with a similar alert response.

The sound is perceived as an unpleasant, irritating, or intrusive noise that can't be switched off. The brain focuses on it insistently, further training our mind to pay even more attention even though there is no risk. This offers the pathway for patients. By training and actively giving the tinnitus less attention, the easier it becomes to tune out. MindEar aims to help people to practice focus through a training program, equipping the mind and body to suppress stress hormones and responses and thus reducing the brain's focus on tinnitus.

Although there is no known cure for tinnitus, there are management strategies and techniques that help many sufferers find relief. With the evidence of this trial, the MindEar team are optimistic that there is a more accessible, rapidly available and effective tool available for the many of those affected by tinnitus still awaiting support.

## HEALTH NEWS

### VEGANUARY 2024: GIVE 'PLANT-BASED CHALLENGE' A TRY

January is the 'Veganuary month', as announced by Veganuary, a global non-profit organization advocating plant-based food. With an aim to bring in more people into the vegan fold, it has kicked off a 'Plant-based Challenge' offering over 10 free meal plans, a digital celebrity cookbook, a vegan starter kit, access to a global Facebook community, a podcast series, and a YouTube series with 31 supportive videos.

The initiative is already finding huge takers given that famous food joints have offered a range of vegan food cuisine.

For instance, Yoga Bar is launching a new vegan pancake mix. Suhasini Sampath, CEO of the Yoga Bar says, 'We are thrilled to be the part of Veganuary and offering delicious, cruelty-free, plant-based options that empower individuals to make mindful choices.'

Hard Rock Café is joining Veganuary by introducing a vegan menu in India as its Vice President, Operations at JSM Corporation Pvt Ltd. says, "By participating in Veganuary, we hope to inspire more people to try a plant-based lifestyle and also showcase the creativity and versatility of vegan and vegetarian cuisine."

Vijay Makwana, CEO of Blue Tribe Foods- the leading plant meat brand in India- echoes similar views: "Blue Tribe is excited to unveil our brand new range of plant based treats. Our new melt in your mouth, fully vegan marinated Soya Chaap will leave you hooked forever." Similarly, Sonal Barmecha, Founder of Sante Spa Cuisine- the nation-

al chain of fine dining restaurants- opines, "Veganuary 2024 resonates deeply with our values at Sante Spa Cuisine, reflecting our unwavering dedication to health, taste, and conscious dining." The Hatti Kaapi chain of cafes has launched new products for Veganuary including Gingerbread Cookies, Millet Cake, Millet Cookies and Plum Cake. "Hatti Kaapi is promoting sustainable eating choices for the better good of the planet. We are proud to be celebrating Veganuary again this year," says Dr. Vidya Chakravathy, Director - Innovation & Technology. Arvind Dadu, MD, Anand Sweets, shares, "At Anand Sweets, we've always believed in the goodness of nature. From Badam Barfi to Kajju Roll, our timeless mithais have always been crafted with love and authenticity, making them inherently vegan."

Veganuary is also running an innovative month-long poster campaign in Bengaluru metro trains, displaying thought-provoking messages. Registrations for the campaign are open on the Veganuary India website, where participants commit to trying a vegan diet for 31 days in January. Those signing up receive a comprehensive package of free resources, including daily emails covering nutrition, shopping guides, fitness, recipes, and more.

The vegan movement encourages individuals worldwide to adopt a vegan diet fostering a global mass movement for the betterment of the planet, human health, and animal welfare, sums up Prashanth Vishwanath, India Director at Veganuary.

### TATA 1MG, VITONNIX UK LAUNCH VITAMIN SUBLINGUAL SPRAYS

Tata 1mg, a digital healthcare platform, has joined hands with Vitonnix UK, a health and wellness innovation, to introduce a range of vitamin sublingual sprays. This sublingual spray is applied directly under the tongue, thereby enabling the vitamins and supplements to be absorbed directly through the mucosal lining of the mouth which has a very rich blood supply. The first phase of the launch includes four remarkable products: Vitamin D, Multivitamins, Biotin, and the star of the lineup, Melatonin. Saurabh Goel, Vice President -

Category Management at Tata 1mg said, after meticulously evaluating Vitonnix UK's extensive research and development efforts, we are confident that these products will empower individuals to take charge of their health in a new and convenient way." Satish Subramani, Managing Partner for Vitonnix UK, added, "these sprays represent a significant advancement in how individuals in India approach their nutritional needs. These offer a convenient, effective, and trusted solution that aligns with the evolving health preferences of consumers."

### 'DOCTORBRIDGE' FROM S KOREA'S DENTAL BRIDGE

To advance facial aesthetics treatments in India, Dbridge India, a subsidiary of South Korea's Dental Bridge Co. Ltd has launched their platform "Doctorbridge" to link medical device manufacturers with end-users, especially doctors. Their unique strategy involves establishing a robust online ecosystem and

prioritizing continuous clinical education, fostering knowledge exchange among doctors on a global scale. Dental Bridge is a major player in the Korean facial aesthetics market, and their subsidiary DBRIDGE India is bringing the latest trends and techniques for those aspiring to achieve the coveted 'Korean Glass Skin' look.

# Ensure It Is Healthy Millets In Your Platter

Food and beverage producers in India are adopting millets in a big way, ASHIM SANYAL notes even as he called for a cautionary approach ensuring to save the power of the coarse cereals before ultra-processed millets crash our diets

Millets belong to the family of cereals, but because of their coarse texture, they were often seen as playing a second fiddle to their rich cousins, rice and wheat. Millets are more resilient to water scarcity and can thrive in semi-arid regions, making them a sustainable choice for Indian agriculture. Millets have been in vogue since the Indus Valley civilization. They find mention in the Yajurveda too. Economic benefits of millets are obvious — they are cheaper to grow and store. These hardy crops are drought-resistant and require very less water to grow. Some can grow on their own as weeds, even in rocky terrains. Rice, in comparison, guzzles water, while wheat too needs far more water than a millet crop. Millets also don't require expensive fertilizers and pesticides.

To promote millets in restaurants and hotels, the Ministry of Tourism is taking several steps such as establishment of millet experience centres, creating awareness on health benefits about dishes made out of millets amongst Indian and International chefs, meetings with hotel associations and hotel chains. Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has implemented the Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry for Millet-based products (PLISMBP) during 2022-23 to 2026-27 with an outlay of Rs. 800 crores.

**Is nutrition content in millets in danger of being misused?** All good for this neglected produce in the Year of the Millet. However handing over a nutritious product basket (Millets have many, many varieties) to companies on a plat-



ASHIM SANYAL

ter spells danger of misuse of the basic nutritional factors of millets as we have noticed classic dangerous transformation of such healthy diets into Ultra Processed Foods by brands killing all or most of the nutritional elements for enhanced taste, flavor, color, shelf life and child attraction which will do away with the ultimate expected gains of this being a health master. That is why the most successful grains of our times are rice and

wheat. They triumphed chiefly because their modern varieties are tasty; also, they can be consumed in polished, refined forms without the inconvenience of chewing on a class of indigestible carbohydrates known as fibre.

The world has always demonstrated that between taste and health, people will talk more about what is healthy and then eat what is tasty. This is bound to be exploited by the industry in case of millets too with added sugar, salt or saturated fats to suit consumers' pallets adding to the already surging Non Communicable Diseases. By converting them as Ultra Processed Foods, the danger levels of NCDs as unhealthy foods will mount on unsuspecting consumers that "they

are having millets as healthy foods". Millets will survive with the grand push, of course, but in a niche market as unhealthy Ultra Processed Foods.

## Is the food industry adopting millets the right way?

Food and beverage producers in India are adopting millets in

a big way. You can find millets in a range of products, from biscuits to beer. From packaged foods to breweries to restaurants, large companies are putting up ambitious plans to introduce millet-based packaged foods, beers and restaurant menus or boost their existing millet portfolios. Products include millet noodles, millet cookies, millet namkeen and millet pasta. In fact, the glorification of millets as a healthy alternative to rice and wheat will inspire the broader market to corrupt these ancient grains. For instance, the ready-made ragi, jowar, bajra dosa, paratha, dalia, khichdi, poha, upma or even atta etc of the future will be more rice and sugar than the millets itself in their

Ultra Processed form. This is typically what is being done by brands now. Add a small percentage of healthy millet, load it with maida and sugar and name it superfood. Imagine a sugary juice or an aerated sugary drink with a minuscule morsel of millet will become a good food officially. Immediate examples which we will be savoring soon can be expected to be our daily bread or cornflakes or poha or pundhi or even cakes with a Front of Pack Label claims of Ragi or Jowar or Bajra Healthy - "Gluten free healthy super start of the day" claims with 5 or 6 gms by weight of the millet! After all, laboratories can produce anything to induce your taste buds.

## Serve the world a health basket of millets

Food processing companies have started incorporating millets into a wide range of



products, from snacks and breakfast cereals to baked goods and ready-to-eat meals. Besides, the government has included millets in the Public Distribution System and the Mid-Day Meal Schemes in schools. No doubt our Prime Minister needs to be applauded for promoting sustainable diet and consumption globally. Besides his recognition of India's capacity to serve the world with millet baskets will boost our exports and economy. However we have to recognize that in this era of Non Communicable Diseases, the corporate houses and brands have to be cautioned not to mislead the consumers with misleading claims / advertising of millet magic and make millets a truly healthy option. (The writer is Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Consumer VOICE. Views expressed are personal)

# Savor the flavors of Greece



With pristine white alleyways, like the picturesque streets of the Greek Isles, a plethora of various dishes and ample space, the new kid on the block, 'Parra-By the House of Khubani' is the talk of the town. By **SHARMILA CHAND**

Spread over an expansive area in the main restaurant and an impressive rooftop space, the bustling market views and the food are both compelling enough to visit, as I discovered during a recent meal. I choose to walk up to the third floor (not take the lift) and step in to be pleasantly surprised by the décor accents with terracotta tiny pots placed in the wall arches all around. I realize the interiors have been thoughtfully done keeping natural elements in mind, accentuated by pretty lamps with jute material, making it a tranquil design haven. "We aim to redefine dining in the area," I'm told by the founders, the well known names in f&b industry, Madan brothers, Sharad and Naresh, renowned for their hospitality outfits like Khubani, Habibi, and Imperfecto, "The idea is to offer Greek aesthetic and cuisine combined with live grills at the terrace for diners to enjoy laid back lunches or simply party and unwind at the main restaurant with ample space, making it ideal for families and big groups." We head towards the table at one end of the restaurant, and soon the very talented, soft spoken chef at the helm, Dipender joins us.



## CUISINE

The menu is very extensive and balanced, offering Mediterranean, European, bit of Mexican and Progressive Indian. "We want our diners to taste dishes from various regions and that gives us a lot of leverage to cater to all kinds of palates and for me to enjoy experimenting without any limitations," chuckles Dipender with a smile. Meat lover friends at the table are excited to see an exclusive section of Turkish dishes, mostly non veg and that gives them a reason to celebrate. I start my meal with pomello salad and Japanese Ramen Bowl. The tangy, citrusy juice of the salad is the perfect accompaniment to the warm mildly flavoured bowl. It doesn't take long for me to polish the salad plate and bowl clean! Next up is the popular Mezze Platter where chef has added his own twists and touches to make it slightly different. "Instead of the usual chickpea hummus, I have taken black eye pea and added curry patta in baba ganoush," he tells. Both taste good for a change, though I missed my usual chickpea option, as I find it to have a more definite, earthy flavor. But we are going through a very interesting phase where chefs are happily experimenting and well traveled adventurous diners lapping up the innovative ideas. Chef Dipender's thought process of offering food with a twist can be seen in interesting starters as well. There is Avocado Dahi Puri where golgappa is

filled with avocado relish, wasabi yoghurt mousse, perked up with raspberry chaat masala and spices. An absolute crowd puller! Then there is Chermoula Fish Tikka. Again he has made it unique by crossing all boundaries. So it is marinated with African sauce, a mix of herbs and spices, added Japanese horse radish aioli and garnished with pickled radish which gives nice pungency and sweetness to the entire dish. The taste, just as expected, is quintessentially sweet and sour! Coming to the Turkish section, my friends are encouraged to taste Chicken Adana Kebab and Lamb Adana as these are chef's specials. Lamb Beyti Kebab is the winner here - it is ground lamb, grilled on a skewer and served wrapped in lavash, topped with tomato sauce and yoghurt. The dish is named after Beyti Guler, the owner of the popular restaurant Beyti in Istanbul. He was inspired to create his own dish in 1961 after witnessing Swiss Butcher Moller's method of preparing meat, when he was visiting Switzerland. So that's how chef drew his inspiration preparing with a touch of fusion. Even if you are not a fan of Baos, the Shaanxi Style Pulled Lamb Bao and Truffle Mushroom Bao might convert you. They are a perfect blend of Asian flavors with

cumin-flavored pulled lamb and truffle oil-infused mushrooms. From the European choices, Plancha River Sole is one of chef's favourites which he calls a fusion of Asian and Italian. He pan fries the Sole and edamame, shitake, pak choy are tossed in style of aglio pasta. In this he adds parmesan to lend the dominant flavor and cooks it well with broth and spices to make a nice red curry sauce. We find its aroma so inviting with oodles of flavor. And then the Indian affair where chef has tried to incorporate signature dishes from various regions of India. So there is Ghee Murg from Mangalore. Boneless chicken pan fried slowly, braised in ghee. He serves it with Pathiri roti, taken from Kerala cuisine, delicious roti made with rice flour and coconut milk. He takes great pride in his Sindhi Gosht, a tender goat loin, charcoal broiled, served with Rogni naan and green chutney. This preparation won over all the non veg friends. How could we not taste matar paneer which did not look anything like what one is used to seeing matar paneer? The plating came as a shock. It is presented in layers with cottage cheese having stuffings of cumin green pea rilette and believe it or not, it is baked before serving! You have to taste the rich red pepper gravy and real-



ize its 'makhani' texture. I simply devoured it with lachcha parantha. Courgette Kofta is another delight. Young zucchini balls are cooked in northern spices and kofta gravy. We like the specific taste of Amaranth crust as it lends a nice crunchy flavor besides being super healthy. The Kofta is as homely as it is gourmet. Delhi Chicken Tariwala is for those who may complain about the lack of any comforting dish in the menu. No experimentation done here, so go ahead and have it your way with garlic naan and cucumber salad. Kashmiri Morel Pilaf is a worthy pick with generous use of dry nuts and hot spices, bites of morel mushroom stuffed with paneer khurchan, served with korma gravy and walnut raita on the side.

## DESSERTS

Coming to desserts, by the time we browse through the decent selection on the menu, chef pitches in with pretty looking Ghevar. No it is not the usual style. He has given it a twist by adding fresh raspberry rabri and dry nuts to garnish it. We barely stop wowing at the creaminess of the rabri, when Coconut Pannacotta lands at our table. It is again very unique, in a combo flavor of coconut served with fresh passion fruit orange chutney. It comple-

ments the creaminess of coconut milk with sweet and tangy flavor. Despite a full stomach, I savour every bite. The coconut and passion fruit pairing takes the dish to divine levels.

## DRINKS

Parra's bar is impressive, offering a captivating curation of handcrafted cocktails. The mixologists infuse botanical nuances, fresh fruits, creating an immersive experience with every intoxicating blend. One of my dining companions opts for Barbados Fever - dark and white rum with luscious strawberry, passion fruit, mango juice topped up with fizzy soda. I go for standard Tropical guava with notes of fresh guava doing the trick. You also have a selection of all kinds of whiskeys, gin, wine, beer, vodka and champagnes too! For weight watchers, smoothies are a perfect blend here and milk shakes to pamper the kids.

## TO CONCLUDE - QUICK TAKEAWAY

Young Parra is a winner in both ambience and offerings. If you're looking for a swish dining experience in an ambience that's distinguished, food that is beyond ordinary then add this to your list of places to dine. The flavours shine through in all the dishes which is no mean feat.



**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week brings a blend of opportunities and challenges. Expect a notable increase in financial gains from diverse sources, enhancing your economic stability. However, be prepared for a hectic schedule that might lead to stress. Work-related travel could also be on the cards. Midweek, brace yourself for some unexpected shifts in your situation. Embracing change and releasing unproductive bonds can open doors to a more meaningful and enriching life journey. As the week progresses, you might find yourself strongly drawn to material pursuits, seeking possessions that offer more illusion than substance. Caution is advised against initiating new projects now, as hasty decisions could lead to setbacks. Maintaining a positive mindset may prove challenging, but it's crucial to avoid falling into a spiral of negativity.

**Lucky number** 11 | **Lucky colour** Emerald  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

In the days ahead, you'll find yourself at the center of a joyful and rejuvenating journey. A harmonious balance will emerge between your thoughts, spirit, and body, positively impacting your social image. You'll embrace a newfound courage and optimism, signaling the end of an old phase and the start of something new. This could mean changes in your daily routine, career, or even a new mode of transport, inviting fresh experiences. As the week wraps up, expect a wave of happiness within your family. This period might also introduce a significant partnership, whether in love, business, or a new agreement. Overall, a sense of deep contentment and spiritual peace will envelop you, enhancing every aspect of your life.

**Lucky number** 15 | **Lucky colour** Tangerine  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, your focus should be on cultivating inner resilience rather than physical prowess. It's a time to master your emotions and desires through a strong sense of self-discipline. This inner fortitude will be your guiding force, helping you navigate through deceptive appearances to understand the true nature of the challenges you face. Guidance may come from an insightful and perceptive individual, likely a woman, whose wisdom and understanding you admire. Consider seeking her counsel or emulating her approach to life's decisions. Additionally, this period calls for a heightened sense of spiritual awareness. Engage in practices like meditation or quiet reflection to connect with your inner self. Letting go of unrealistic fantasies and daydreams is crucial now, as they may hinder your progress toward your true goals.

**Lucky number** 5 | **Lucky colour** Plum  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, your innate creativity and determination are key to unlocking financial opportunities. You possess a unique gift for bringing your visions to life, harnessing an inner strength that guides you. As you navigate through the week, your decisions are likely to lead to positive outcomes. Your natural ability to articulate your thoughts and ideas will leave a lasting impression on those around you, paving the way for a successful week. Despite encountering some obstacles and delays around midweek, your perseverance and unwavering resolve will steer you through. These challenges won't dampen your spirit; instead, they'll reinforce your commitment to your goals. Anticipate receiving news from distant places, adding an exciting dimension to your week. This period promises not only financial gains but also a sense of emotional fulfillment.

**Lucky number** 6 | **Lucky colour** Navy Blue  
**Lucky day** Monday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week marks a period of significant decision-making in both your personal and professional spheres. Your resilience and ability to confront life's challenges head-on will be evident. Expect to navigate through some interpersonal tensions, requiring a thoughtful and wise approach. Embracing new perspectives and reconsidering long-held beliefs will be beneficial, especially as you encounter shifts in your career, living situation, and close relationships. A sense of urgency for personal growth and introspection might arise. As the week progresses, a shift towards a more positive and serene state is likely. You'll find yourself in a more comfortable and stable financial position, fostering a desire for a more indulgent lifestyle. Your compassionate nature will shine through, as you'll feel inclined to extend support to those in need.

**Lucky number** 10 | **Lucky colour** Burgundy  
**Lucky day** Friday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, expect a whirlwind of activities encompassing various aspects of your life, from personal finances to career pursuits. Initially, your focus will be drawn towards home-related matters. For those seeking a life partner, this period might bring significant developments. Midweek, anticipate some journeys that could offer new perspectives. Your professional life will intensify, as you strive for excellence in your work, dedicating extra hours to refine your abilities and achieve your ambitions. A joyful family event, possibly welcoming a new member, may also occur. As the week concludes, your efforts will start bearing fruit, leading to a notable improvement in your financial situation. Job seekers can look forward to an enticing job proposal from a reputable organization. This is a time to savor your achievements and embrace a sense of contentment.

**Lucky number** 7 | **Lucky colour** Sea Green  
**Lucky day** Friday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week, you'll find numerous reasons for joy and contentment. Life is unfolding beautifully, with a sense of brightness and forward momentum. You'll carry a positive and vibrant aura, attracting others with your ability to see the silver lining in every situation and spread cheer. Midweek, you might encounter some challenging moments that could cause concern, but remember, these are just fleeting shadows in an otherwise luminous journey. Soon, a wave of positive changes will bring a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. You'll be pleasantly surprised by your own progress, realizing how much effort you've put into achieving your goals. The work you're engaged in is likely to yield impressive outcomes, bringing recognition, success, and possibly connections that reach beyond your current horizons. Keep moving forward with optimism and determination.

**Lucky number** 8 | **Lucky colour** Fuchsia  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week you'll find yourself brimming with enthusiasm, ready to embrace new challenges with open arms. You're navigating a path that beautifully balances your personal and professional life, showcasing your adeptness in handling multiple roles. Midweek brings moments of joy and togetherness with loved ones, marked by celebratory events that could range from personal achievements to welcoming new beginnings in your living space. These moments will fill you with contentment and a sense of accomplishment. As the week progresses, your resolve and unwavering spirit become apparent. Your ability to stay determined in the face of challenges serves as an inspiration to those around you, underlining your journey toward success. This period is a testament to your strength and the positive energy you radiate.

**Lucky number** 3 | **Lucky colour** Aquamarine  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

This week, you'll find yourself embracing life with a grand and generous spirit. Your professional endeavors are likely to flourish, leading to significant financial rewards. This prosperity enables you to indulge in your desires and generously meet the needs of your loved ones. Your open-mindedness extends beyond your family, reflecting a deep-seated kindness towards others. In your personal life, you may notice an increased demand for your attention and support, particularly from your partner. However, you're more than ready to respond with wholehearted generosity. Joy within your family is heightened, possibly due to a young family member achieving notable success in their career or academic pursuits. It's a period that calls for attentiveness to both physical and emotional health, ensuring a balanced and fulfilling week.

**Lucky number** 4 | **Lucky colour** Rose Pink  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

During this significant phase of personal growth, your actions will lay the foundation for future achievements. Progress might unfold gradually, yet your resilience and capacity to handle substantial tasks will shine through. Harness your inner strength to accomplish your goals, and your efforts are likely to be acknowledged and appreciated. Utilize your diverse skills effectively this week, as they will draw admiration for your perseverance and ability to inspire others. Your effective communication will resonate well with both superiors and colleagues. As the week concludes, expect a surge of innovative ideas, enhancing your productivity in your chosen field. This period also brings an invigorating energy, enhancing your zest for life and deepening connections. Embrace this time to relish and enrich your experiences.

**Lucky number** 2 | **Lucky colour** Pink  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

Your recent efforts in securing employment have been commendable, yet the outcomes you seek haven't materialized so far. Your dedication and enthusiasm are evident, but it appears that financial rewards might be elusive in the immediate future. However, don't lose heart. As time progresses, the likelihood of encountering more fruitful opportunities increases, and a significant achievement seems on the horizon. You can expect encouragement and support from elder family members or mentors, who are eager to see you excel. Remember, what you truly merit is bound to come your way. This period calls for patience; enduring efforts often lead to lasting and meaningful success. Visualize yourself on the verge of a breakthrough, as triumph is within reach, promising not just immediate gains but long-term fulfillment.

**Lucky number** 9 | **Lucky colour** Mustard  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

This week you'll find yourself drawn towards practices that enhance inner peace, such as deep relaxation techniques and mindful reflection. Your home may become a center for peaceful and positive gatherings. However, midweek could bring some challenges in your personal relationships, leading to potential misunderstandings or disagreements with those closest to you. It's a crucial time to reassess your life's direction and clarify your ambitions. Remember, your perspective plays a significant role in your well-being. If you focus on what's lacking, you might miss the abundance that's already present. It's important to recognize and break free from any negative thought patterns. This period calls for courage and resilience; it's not a time to lose hope but to confront challenges with strength.

**Lucky number** 13 | **Lucky colour** White  
**Lucky day** Saturday

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**ASTROTURF**  
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

# Unfold untapped power within and reshape destiny

Greetings to valued readers on the solemn occasion of Makarsamkranti, a festivity celebrated across India, though called by varying names in different regions. It is timed with solar ingress in Capricorn sign, the natural signifying sign for India as a nation. Based on planetary position at the time of solar ingress, astrologers try to foresee how the year ahead is expected to unfold for the country. The question here is: Are we so helplessly fated? Can conscious efforts redefine destiny?

Every being is born unique, each carrying a bag full of positive and negative tendencies, coming as it may as Karmic carryover from the past. That drives our thought process, every being reflecting varying desire and mind trends. We, thus, are all born with a restricted vision. Our ego then identifies itself with inherent tendencies, and passionately pursues it as if that would be its end game. It doesn't



allow space necessary to look beyond its limits for reality check. For the above reason, the ordinary mortals can hardly access 5 to 7 percent of their mind space, the rest remaining unexplored. Even that, if we could use optimally, makes it possible to negotiate the callings of life with ease. The irony, however, is that we fritter away our energy and clutter mind space, unnecessary brooding or contemplating over inconsequential thoughts. We are hardly left with enough to do justice to our priority preferences. Evidently, with a restricted vision, we fail to look at issues in the right perspective due, and with obvious consequences. Consequently, for those caught up with run of the mill, it becomes difficult to escape the call of destiny indications. The believers then are tempted to run for occult practices to mitigate their suffering. The charlatans then grab the opportunity and drive you crazy, to serve their vested interest.

puja. Do you agree?" There is nothing as such. A look at her chart reveals that she is a victim of her own impaired thought process. The Sun is placed adverse to mischievous Neptune, which makes her stuck to delusory self-beliefs and perceptions, distanced from ground realities. She is not open to look beyond for a reality check. The Sun, incidentally the lagna lord is also ill-disposed off to Uranus, which makes her eccentric and erratic. She is self-willed and wishes to live on her own exclusive terms. Mars occupying the lagna extends its aspect on mind signifying Moon and Saturn. That makes her impulsive, irritable, and argumentative. Also, she would be habitually suspicious of other's intent and will have self-doubts. Moon and Saturn together speak of a negative mindset, which given an adverse situation could cause depression. Mars placed adverse to Jupiter speaks of her inflated ego, which binds her to self-

defined dos and don'ts. Anything happening beyond, it becomes difficult for her to digest. She had imagined a lucrative job after having completed her course abroad, which is not coming about. Confronted with an unexpected situation, she has gone into depression. In the process, her thought process has become incoherent, and sense of reasons has temporarily taken a back seat. Consequently, she would be hallucinating, calling for immediate psychiatric help.

"Sir, will psychiatric help improve her thought process?" They asked. Well, it will certainly soften her in immediate terms. It then needs to be followed by dhyana process under the guidance of a proven Guru. It will make her self-reflect, identity and acknowledge inherent mental frailties. Having become aware thus, the inherent tendencies could be addressed through fresh

educative inputs. Her scope of vision will then expand. It will be interesting to note here that Einstein is believed to have used 10 to 14 percent of his mind power to create history. Truth remains that the power within all of us is immense. If through conscious efforts we could reach out the whole landscape of mind, it would know no limits. You may then be able to successfully navigate the course of life with ease and comfort. So said Swami Vivekanand: "The history of the world is the story of few men who had faith in themselves. Faith calls out divinity within. You can do anything. You fail in life not because destiny would be so scripted. It is because you do not strive sufficiently to unfold immense power within."

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