

**OPINION 6**  
PAKISTAN FACES BITTER  
FALLOUT WITH TALIBAN

**WORLD 9**  
GAZA DEATH TOLL  
SURPASSES 26,000

**MONEY 10**  
GOVT HALVES BUDGET  
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Established 1864  
Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA  
Late City Vol. 34 Issue 26  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY JANUARY 27, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3



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## WOMEN POWER, MILITARY MIGHT ON SHOWCASE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India celebrated its 75th Republic Day on Friday with a grand display of its women power, rich cultural heritage, and military might, which included missiles, warplanes, surveillance gadgets, and lethal weapon systems. French President Emmanuel Macron graced the occasion as the chief guest. The Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path in the heart of the national capital commenced with President Droupadi Murmu taking the salute shortly after she and Macron, flanked by the Indian President's bodyguards, arrived in a traditional buggy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, several other Union ministers, the country's top military brass, foreign diplomats, and senior officials were among those who witnessed the impressive show. The event also featured a gravity-defying fly-past by helicopters and planes, with even dense fog failing to dampen the spirits of the spectators.



Women personnel in a marching contingent of the Delhi Police during the 75th Republic Day parade, at the Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Friday PTI

The themes of the celebrations were "Viksit Bharat" and "Bharat - Loktantra Ki Matruka" (India-Mother of Democracy). A 95-member marching contingent and a 30-member band contingent from France also participated in the parade.

Two Rafale fighters and an Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport aircraft from the French air force were featured in the celebrations. The event concluded with a jaw-dropping fly-past by 46 aircraft of the Indian Air Force. Two Rafale fighter jets,

flanked by a Phoenix multi-role tanker transport aircraft from the French air force, roared across the skies of Delhi as India celebrated its 75th Republic Day at a grand parade on Friday, with French President Emmanuel Macron gracing the occasion as the chief guest.

As around 95 French troops marched down Kartavya Path in the heart of the national capital, whizzing warplanes pierced the morning sky, prompting thousands of spectators to crane their necks in wonder and amazement. A 30-member band contingent from France also drew

attention at the grand parade. This marked the second time the French armed forces participated in India's Republic Day celebrations. In 2016, French troops became the first foreign military contingent to take part in the country's biggest ceremonial event.



President Droupadi Murmu and French President Emmanuel Macron riding in a special presidential carriage arrive at the Kartavya Path for the 75th Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Friday PTI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi acknowledges the crowd as he leaves after the 75th Republic Day function, at the Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Friday PTI

For the first time, an all-women tri-services contingent marched down Kartavya Path, reflecting the country's growing 'Nari Shakti' (women power). In another first, the parade was heralded by over 100 women artists playing Indian musical instruments such as sankh, naadsawram, and nagada instead of traditional military bands, kickstarting the celebrations. The first Army contingent leading the mechanised column was the 61 Cavalry, established in 1953. It was followed by 11 mechanised columns, 12 marching contingents, and a fly-past featuring advanced light helicopters of the Army Aviation Corps.

Continued on Page 2

## After Ayodhya, Time for Kashi

### Gyanvapi Mosque open to legal scrutiny

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■  
NEW DELHI/ VARANASI

With the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) stating in its report that the Gyanvapi Mosque in the Kashi Vishwanath premises was built after demolishing a Hindu Temple, the roads are seemingly being cleared to reinstall a similar temple. This move may evoke Ayodhya-type enthusiasm within the Hindu community, which has been fighting the case for decades, similar to the Ram Janambhoomi case. In a significant development that occurred a couple of days after the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the ASI report, released to both Hindu and Muslim parties on Thursday evening, confirmed the existence of a large Hindu Temple before the construction of the existing structure. "Indeed, this is a joyous moment for all of us and for

those showing their allegiance to Sanatan Dharma. Personally, I am very happy, as since my childhood, I used to visit almost every day to pay obeisance to Shiva and Parvati, but I could not worship the place where it is believed that Parvati Mata used to worship with holy Ganga water. The area remains under grills as the mosque is there, and now, tides are changing, and the pious place shall be restored to us," said Sita Devi, one of the petitioners in the Gyanvapi case, a resident of Varanasi near the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Sita was contacted over the phone by The Pioneer from Delhi. On Wednesday, a Varanasi district court had directed that the scientific survey report prepared by the ASI on the Gyanvapi mosque in July 2023 be supplied to all parties to the dispute. Judge AK Vishvesha ordered that all parties to the case



Muslims come out of Gyanvapi mosque after offering 'namaz' amid a tight security arrangements in Varanasi on Friday PTI

should have access to the report about the mosque. After the distribution of the ASI report, all parties will have the right to comment on the report's findings. Advocate for the Hindu side Vishnu Shakar Jain told the media and shared a few details of the ASI report supplied to both Hindu and Muslim parties. He mentioned that the findings clearly indicate that the mosque was built over an old temple. The ASI report, which included a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey, raises questions about the historical layers on the site. According to Jain, the current structure seems to have been built upon a pre-existing structure. "These are, in fact, inscriptions on the stone of a pre-existing Hindu temple that have been reused during the construction and repair of the existing structure," he added.

Continued on Page 2

## SBI removes Religare from fraud list

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

State Bank of India (SBI), a key lender to Religare Finvest Limited (RFL), has expunged RFL's record, previously marked as a fraud, from the Central Fraud Registry database. This action follows a court order dated December 18, 2023, issued by the Delhi High Court instructing SBI to revoke the fraud designation. SBI officially conveyed this decision to RFL on Friday. In March 2023, RFL, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Religare Enterprises Limited, successfully concluded a one-time settlement with 16 lenders through organic collections. The company made payments exceeding Rs 9,000 crore to the country's banking system. Presently, RFL is awaiting the removal of the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) imposed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in January 2018. Dr Rashmi Saluja, Executive Chairperson of RFL and CMD of RFL, said, "We are pleased to witness the positive



outcome of our efforts. The removal of the 'fraud' tag stands as a testament to the commitment and dedication of the Company's Board, management, and employees in resurrecting RFL and the Group from the brink in the aftermath of fraud perpetrated by the erstwhile promoters and their affiliates, and putting it on the path of growth and development. This is a pivotal step in the revival of RFL." Pankaj Sharma, Chief Executive Officer of RFL, said that these would open doors for a strategic path towards achieving growth. He said, "The announcement holds great significance for the company, as it will open doors for our strategic path towards achieving growth. RFL eagerly awaits the much anticipated removal of the RBI Corrective Action Plan (CAP) that was put into effect in January 2018." The Central Fraud Registry, established under the Reserve Bank of India (Frauds Classification and Reporting by Commercial Banks and Select FIs) Directions, 2016, serves as a web-based and searchable database, documenting frauds reported by commercial banks and select financial institutions, in accordance with the Master Directions on the classification and reporting of frauds.

## Nitish churns the political pot in Bihar

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Amid political uncertainty in Bihar, where Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is, in all likelihood, prepared to break ranks with his alliance partners RJD, Congress, and others, and realign with his "natural" ally BJP, former Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi indicated that doors are never permanently closed to anyone in politics. Ever since Nitish separated for the third time from the BJP in Bihar, Sushil Modi has, on numerous occasions, said that Nitish will not be welcomed back into the BJP fold. However, sources in both the BJP and the JD(U) indicated that a "dignified" realignment is being worked out against the backdrop of BJP leadership repeatedly tagging Nitish as a 'Paltu Ram'. BJP sources have asserted that the JD(U) joining their alliance will ensure a sweeping victory



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar offers 'jalebi' to school students during the 75th Republic Day celebration, at his official residence in Patna PTI

for the NDA in the Lok Sabha polls. In the 2019 elections, the NDA secured 39 out of Bihar's 40 seats. However, a faction of BJP leaders from Bihar is reluctant to align with the JD(U),

citing a perceived decline in Nitish's popularity. After Nitish severed ties with the BJP in 2022, the party initially declared that its doors were permanently closed to

Bihar's longest-serving chief minister. However, lately, party leaders have adopted a more conciliatory tone, especially as the INDIA bloc faces internal crises.

Amid this rapidly changing scenario, some political insiders from stakeholder parties suggest the possibility of the existing JD(U) breaking apart. One faction may align with the RJD, while another might join the BJP. Regardless, there seems to be no likelihood of the Assembly being dissolved, as the Bihar Assembly Speaker belongs to the ruling RJD, the largest party in Bihar with 75 MLAs. The BJP follows with 74, while Nitish Kumar's faction leads the State with a modest 43 legislators in the Assembly. On their part, JD(U)'s political adviser and spokesperson KC Tyagi has asserted that the JD(U) is the "architect of INDIA" and wishes to remain a part of the coalition, although developments in West Bengal and Punjab are causing concern. State BJP president Samrat Choudhary, who met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the party's principal strategist,

in Delhi on Thursday night, asserted that the talks focused on the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. "Our top leaders, like Amit Shah and national president JP Nadda, have publicly stated that the doors of the BJP are closed. As a party worker, I adhere to that stance. Nitish Kumar, to us, is a politician who changes his allies like clothes," said Choudhary. On Republic Day, Nitish attended the high tea ceremony at the Raj Bhavan in Patna, where his deputy Tejashwi Yadav was absent. The JD(U) asserted on Friday that the party is "firmly with the INDIA coalition" but emphasised the need for the Congress to engage in "introspection" regarding alliance partners and seat-sharing. Bihar State JD(U) president Umesh Singh Kushwaha made this statement, refuting rumours that his party, led by the chief minister, was contemplating a return to the BJP-led NDA.

Continued on Page 2

## INDIA cookie crumbles TMC locks horns with Congress in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Congress continued to criticise Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for behaving like a BJP leader, even as he complained about the Bengal Government's "non-cooperative" attitude towards Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. "I don't know what their attitude is towards the Yatra as part of the INDIA alliance. I am eager to understand more about the reasons behind their non-cooperative approach," said Choudhary, Pradesh Congress president. The Trinamool Congress administration, let alone participating in it, has denied permission for the Congress Yatra in Siliguri, as informed by the PCC leadership to The

Pioneer. The Congress had planned to organise a rally on January 28 as part of its Yatra in Darjeeling. However, the district administration has denied permission, citing a competitive examination scheduled for the same date. "There will be a competitive exam for recruitment in the State police on the given date, and the rally will disrupt the exams. Therefore, permission has been withdrawn," said a PCC member, quoting the State administration. As if the "imprudence" in Siliguri was not enough, the administration has also withdrawn the permission for the Behrampore Stadium on January 31. Rahul, who is to hold a rally at Murshidabad on February 1, was to spend the previous night there.

Continued on Page 2





Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal interacts with schoolchildren  
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal inspects the Republic Day parade at Chhatrasal Stadium  
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



A mesmerising performance  
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



Security personnel at Kartavya Path  
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



Schoolchildren perform during the Republic Day parade at Chhatrasal Stadium  
Ranjan Dimri

# 54 aircraft give grand salute in Republic Day flypast

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The sky above Kartavya Path became a zone of fervent activity when 54 aircraft, including three from the French Air and Space Force, gave a fly past in a grand salute, during the 75th Republic Day ceremony that took place here on Friday.



Captivating the spectators, the contingent flew past with a booming sound and went on to perform several midair acrobatics. The pilots began with the 'Prachand' formation comprising one LCH in lead with two Apache Helicopters and Two ALH Mk-IV in echelon flying in five aircraft 'Arrow Formation'. It was followed by the 'Tangail' formation comprising one Dakota in lead with two Dornier aircrafts in echelon flying in 'Vic' formation. The 'Arjan' formation comprised one C-295 aircraft in lead with two C-130J aircrafts in echelon flying in 'Vic' formation. The 'Netra' formation comprised one AEW&C aircraft and two X Su-30 aircraft in echelon flying in 'Vic' formation. The 'Varuna' formation com-

## In a first, Delhi Police all women contingent takes part in parade

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's all-women contingent marched down the Kartavya Path on Republic Day for the first time in its history on Friday. The contingent was led by Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Shweta K Sugathan. The Delhi Police contingent comprised one female gazetted officer, three women sub-inspectors, 44 women head-constables, and 100 women constables, all draped in red 'safa'. The first all women contingent of the Delhi Police celebrated after their maiden Republic Day parade, by dancing to the drumbeats and distributing sweets on Friday over their historic achievement. A video of the members of contingent in their uniforms, waving their arms and danc-



ing cheerfully to the tune played by their band, went viral on social media. Sugathan had led the male marching contingents in 2023 too, when a woman officer led the male soldiers for the first time. "It was a goosebumps moment for all of us. As our contingent reached the Red Fort, we were welcomed by our senior officials with great zeal," Shweta Sugathan, 2018 batch IPS officer who

## Women, girls among first timers witness Nari Shakti at Republic Day parade

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A large number of first-timers, including girls and young women, attended the 75th Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path here on Friday with 'Nari Shakti' being an overarching theme for the celebrations this year. From Delhi to Rajasthan, they came with friends or family members to witness the landmark occasion. Ranubha Kunwar, 28, a native of Alwar district, attended the parade wearing a traditional Rajasthani attire. "This is the first time I have attended a Republic Day celebration in Delhi, and it was a wonderful experience. The display of 'Nari Shakti' was special for us women," she said. Kunwar said the Republic Day, besides being the 75th one, was also special for her as its chief guest French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were

in Jaipur on Thursday. Bharati Gurjar, a state civil services aspirant from Rajasthan, said she had arrived in Delhi three days ago, just to attend the parade here. "I have come along with my younger sister, we both attended for the first time. Everything about the parade was amazing, the synchronisation in the marching contingents, the colourful tableaux and vibrant cultural performances. You can't say which aspect one liked the most as everything was great," she said. Her sister, Sunidhi Gurjar, a first-year student of Miranda House at Delhi University, was also ecstatic about attending the ceremonial event for the first time. "India is our 'matrubhumi', motherland, and one feels a wave of patriotism here. India successfully hosted the G20 last year, we achieved the Chandrayaan feat and now with 2047 vision, we are going strong," Sunidhi said.

## Delhi Assembly Budget Session likely to begin from February 15

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Legislative Assembly budget session is likely to start from February 15 and continue till February 20. The Delhi budget this year will be the Aam Aadmi Party's last before the Delhi Assembly polls, which are due in February 2025, and the first for the incumbent finance minister Atishi. This time, the Delhi government is presenting the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 in February instead of March. In the forthcoming budget, the Kejriwal government is set to address several significant issues, placing particular emphasis on education, health, electricity, water, roads, and infrastructure. According to officials, Delhi Finance Minister Atishi will table the 2024-25 budget of the city government on February 16. A file of the budget session has been sent to Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for his approval, the officer added. In a press statement, the Delhi government said during the preparation of the budget, the government has sought suggestions from all stakeholders in Delhi, and good recommendations from them have been included in the budget. "The Delhi Government will also present the 'Outcome Budget' for the financial year



2023-24, showcasing the achievements and progress made in the previous fiscal year. Delhi is the only state in the entire country where the Kejriwal government presents the Outcome Budget every year. Through the Outcome Budget, complete transparency is provided to the people of Delhi regarding the public expenditure of the previous budget. In a way, the Outcome Budget serves as a report card of the performance of various departments based on the allocated funds in the previous fiscal year," it said. "Expect allocation of funds, to initiate entrepreneurship programs in colleges similar to schools Demonstrating a clear commitment, the government has highlighted education and health as key priorities for the upcoming financial year, emphasizing their importance for all residents of Delhi, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds," officials said. "Additionally, the budget allocates special attention to crucial areas such as water, roads, urban development, and various developmental projects. These aspects have been identified as top priorities for the forthcoming fiscal year, reflecting the government's proactive approach towards addressing the diverse needs of the city and its residents. There is also an expectation of substantial allocation of funds for various developmental projects within Delhi," it said. The Delhi government has been preparing the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 for the past 20 days. On January 6, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal chaired the first high-level meeting regarding the budget. During the meeting, the CM held detailed discussions with all ministers on the upcoming budget's priorities.

## CAQM delays implementation of stricter curbs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas on Friday decided to delay implementation of stricter measures to curb pollution in Delhi-NCR despite the 24-hour average AQI in Delhi breaching the 400-mark for the second time in three days. Meanwhile, Cold conditions and thick fog continued in Delhi on Friday during the celebrations of 75th Republic Day as the minimum temperature in the city settled at 4.7 degrees Celsius, officials said on Friday. The maximum temperature was recorded at 20.4 degree Celsius, a notch below the normal. Ridge saw the maximum temperature at 21.9 degree Celsius. The night and morning witnessed as cold day conditions on Friday. People got some respite in the day time due to sun light. Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 409 at 4 pm, a level requiring authorities to invoke stricter curbs under Stage III of the Centre's Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to control air pollution. The CAQM sub-committee



for operationalisation of GRAP convened an emergency meeting and took stock of the air quality situation, projected AQI and meteorological forecasts, a statement said. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), a dip in temperature and foggy weather allowed accumulation of pollutants in Delhi on Friday. Forecasts by the IMD and the IITM suggest an improvement in Delhi's air quality from Friday itself. It is expected to be in the 'very poor' category in the coming days, the statement said. "Therefore, the committee decided to monitor the situation before considering invocation of stringent actions under Stage III of GRAP," it said.

## Sustained efforts being made to develop Delhi into global city: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, in his Republic Day speech, on Friday said the central and the local governments are making sustained efforts to develop Delhi into a global and inclusive city. Saxena highlighted various achievements of Delhi, including in the fields of public transport, health, power sector and ration supply, in his speech. In the last few years, Delhi has made significant progress in the power sector, he said. "The demand for power is being met without any load shedding," The LG also lauded various agencies including Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Public Works Department (PWD), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Police among others, workers and employees of

Delhi-NCR for readying Delhi to successfully host the G-20 Summit. The government is committed to giving top priority to health services and making them available to the people, Saxena said. "Delhi has modernised its public transport system. I am proud to inform you that by 2025, 85 per cent of the public transport buses will be electric in Delhi. That is a big achievement on the global level," he said. The Centre has extended special financial assistance under the FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) scheme, he said. Efforts are being made for all the sections of society aiming for inclusive development and 72 lakh beneficiaries have received subsidised foodgrains from fair-price shops, the LG said. "The number of 'One Nation, One Number Card' beneficiaries is the highest (in the country)," he said. The government is also committed to tackling air and water pollution and conservation of the Yamuna river, Saxena said.

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G20

# Bypass project all set to decongest Ayodhya

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
After Maharishi Valmiki International airport and redevelopment of Ayodhya Dham Junction Railway Station, it is now upcoming 67.57-Km Ayodhya bypass green project project that is all set to boost the economy and at the same time decongest the Ayodhya city in Uttar Pradesh, which has now attained the status of the one of the most popular tourism and economic hubs in the country after the opening of Ram Mandir on January 22.  
The Commerce and Industry Ministry on Friday said that the bypass green project in Uttar Pradesh was planned and implemented under the PM GatiShakti initiative with an aim to "cover key districts such as Lucknow, Basti, and Gonda. This project will facilitate improvement in connectivity to economic, social and logistics nodes, including tourist and pilgrim sites, across these three districts." Ayodhya is situated between two economic hubs (Lucknow and Gorakhpur) and major commodities such as leather,



engineering goods, building materials, iron and steel, pass through the city therefore the construction of this bypass route will facilitate uninterrupted freight flows and decongest the city.  
Since the consecration of an idol of the new Ram Lalla at the Ayodhya temple on January 22 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the authorities are expecting the city to be the major hub of religious and economic activities. In fact since the D-Day, the city has witnessed the arrival of at least over two lakh devotees and tourists.  
The Ministry said that the project will improve multimodality with integrated infrastructure such as Railway

# Naari Shakti on Republic Day at Kartavya Path



**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Exhibiting the prowess of 'Naari Shakti', 265 women on motorcycles performed various stunts to showcase bravery, valour and determination during the 75th Republic Day parade here on Friday.  
Women personnel of the Central Armed Police Force deployed across the length and breadth of the nation provide 'Sarvatra Suraksha', read a message of unity and inclusiveness at the Kartavya Path during the parade. The women bikers of the CRPF, BSF and SSB exhibited the strength of Indian values, including yoga.  
The 'commandant abhivadan' display was carried out by Assistant Commandant Seema Nag. It was followed by a display of 'Lakshita' by HC Rita

Bisht and seven others. 'Sarvatra Suraksha' was displayed by CT Amandeep Kaur and 25 others armed with the latest weaponry.  
Inspector Promila Sethi and 21 others showcased the tech edge of the forces while CT Anupam with 15 others represented women deployed on the borders providing security.  
Exhibiting 'Naari Shakti', Inspector Sheena Khatoun and 13 other personnel represented women deployed in the hinterland of the country.  
Three different teams led by Inspector Soniya Banwri, CT Anita Bharti, and CT Rekha performed different poses of yoga while riding the bikes demonstrating balance and giving the message of a disciplined lifestyle and mental prowess.

# Modi dons Bandhini turban at 75th Republic Day celebrations

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
On the occasion of India's 75th Republic Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to wear a multi-coloured 'Bandhini' turban safa with the predominant colour yellow, which symbolizes Lord Ram. Bandhini is a type of tie-dye textile popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The fabric is decorated by plucking the cloth with fingernails into many tiny bindings that form a figurative design. The yellow colour in his turban holds great significance in many ways.  
PM Modi recently led the rituals at the Pran Pratistha ceremony of Shri Ram Lalla in the newly-built Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22. The yellow colour in his turban holds great significance in many ways.  
Along with the Rajasthani Bandhini print turban, PM Modi wore a white kurta and pyjama with a brown Nehru jacket. The turban with a long trail had shades of yellow, saffron, pink and red. This entire ensemble perfectly reflects his love for the nation, its religious beliefs, and the ideology of unity in diversity. PM Modi's turban was first seen when he arrived at the National War



Memorial this morning to honor the bravehearts of the Indian armed forces.  
Last year too, Modi wore a multi-coloured Rajasthani turban and complemented it with pants and kurta. Later that year, on the 77th Independence Day, he opted for a vibrant Rajasthani-style turban, with multiple colours and a lengthy tail.  
In 2019, Modi sported a multi-coloured turban as he gave his sixth Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort after returning to power for a second term with a thumping majority.  
For his maiden Independence Day in 2014, he had opted for a bright red Jodhpuri 'bandhej' turban. In 2015, Prime Minister Modi chose a yellow turban covered with multi-coloured

# UP has highest number of colleges in country: AISHE survey

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of colleges in the country, followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka, according to the government's All India Survey for Higher Education 2021-22. The AISHE survey was released by the Ministry of Education late night on Thursday.  
The top 10 states in terms of number of colleges in India include Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana and West Bengal, each having at least 30 or more colleges per lakh population.  
According to the survey report, in Uttar Pradesh, there are 8,375 colleges - up from 8,114 colleges in the previous year - and there are 30 colleges for every one lakh population.  
The states and Union Territories which have a high number of colleges per lakh



population are -- Karnataka (66), Telangana (52), Andhra Pradesh (49), Himachal Pradesh (47), Puducherry (53) and Kerala (46).  
"Maharashtra comes second with 4,692 colleges. Karnataka comes at the third position with 4,430 colleges whereas Rajasthan is at the fourth position with 3,934 colleges. Tamil Nadu comes at the fifth position

with 2,829 colleges followed by Madhya Pradesh with 2,702 colleges," the report said. "Andhra Pradesh is at the seventh position with 2,602 colleges and at eighth position Gujarat has 2,395 colleges. Telangana is at the ninth spot with 2,083 colleges followed by West Bengal which has 1,514 colleges," it added.  
The Ministry of Education has been conducting AISHE since 2011, covering all higher educational institutions located in India and imparting higher education in the country. The survey collects detailed information on different parameters such as student enrolment, teachers' data, infrastructural information, financial information, etc.  
There are 45,473 colleges registered under AISHE belonging to the 328 universities (affiliating). Of these 42,825 responded in the survey year 2021-22. The survey report pointed out that more than 60 per cent colleges are general in nature, 8.7 per cent colleges are specialised in education or teacher education, 6.1 per cent colleges are engineering and technology institutions, 4.3 per cent nursing colleges and 3.5 per cent medical colleges.  
While 2.7 per cent colleges offer arts courses, 2.4 per cent are dedicated to pharmacy courses, 0.7 per cent science

# Rafale jets, French transport aircraft grace 75th Republic Day parade

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Two Rafale fighter jets flanked by a 'Phoenix' multi-role tanker transport aircraft of the French air force roared off Delhi's sky as India celebrated its 75th Republic Day at a grand parade on Friday with French President Emmanuel Macron gracing it as the chief guest.  
As soon as around 95 French troops marched down the Kartavya Path in the heart of the national capital, the whizzing warplanes pierced the morning sky making thousands of spectators crane their necks in wonder and amazement.  
A 30-member band contingent from France also drew attention at the grand parade.  
It was the second time the French armed forces participated in India's Republic Day celebrations.



In 2016, French troops became the first foreign military contingent to participate in the biggest ceremonial event in the country.  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the guest of honour at the prestigious Bastille Day Parade in Paris in July last year.  
The Indian Air Force's Rafale fighter jets and a tri-services marching contingent took part in the Bastille Day parade.  
As the French marching contingent marched down the

# EC tableau showcases India glory as 'mother of democracy'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Election Commission's Republic Day parade tableau on Friday rolled down the Kartavya Path showcasing "India - Mother of Democracy". The Election Commission's tableau was on the theme of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and according to the poll body, it depicted the conduct of "free, fair, inclusive, accessible and participative elections". The Lok Sabha election is considered the world's biggest peacetime logistics exercise of movement of people and material.  
The front of the tableau shows an inked finger pressing a but-



ton to cast a vote on an electronic voting machine (EVM). It also depicts the magnitude of the parliamentary elections, which is due shortly and in which nearly 96 crore people will be eligible to cast their vote in 12 lakh polling stations.  
Nearly 1.5 crore personnel will be deployed for conducting polling.  
People from different sections of society have been depicted standing in a queue, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country.

# Over 200 FTII alumni condemn violence against students

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Over 200 FTII alumni have written an open letter in solidarity with the students of the premiere institute after an alleged attack on them by right-wing activists over a banner decrying the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid.  
The letter has been signed by 207 former students of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), including Oscar winner Resul Pookutty, film editor Anupama Chandra, filmmaker Prateek Vats and actor Shardul Bhardwaj.  
"It is painful to see the students of this great film school being assaulted with impunity. We, as a community of film professionals, educators, and artists of both national and international acclaim, extend our support



to the FTII student community at this tough and testing moment," the letter said.  
The incident at the Pune-based film institute took place on Tuesday, a day after the grand consecration ceremony of the Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.  
According to police, some 12 to 15 unidentified persons

were among those who were attacked. The alumni group said they "unequivocally condemn" the violence perpetrated on the students of the film institute.  
"FTII students had organised discussions and screenings on their campus as part of their academic commitment. That intruders were allowed to attack the students is inexcusable," the open letter said.  
It said the inaction of the police in investigating and taking action against those responsible for the violence was even "more inexcusable". "We appeal to the police and all relevant authorities to take prompt action against those who perpetrated violence against the students and who entered with the intent to vandalise property on the campus of FTII,

Pune." "We hold the institute in great affection and regard, and owe to it the rigorous training that turned us into film professionals," it added.  
A FIR was registered against unidentified persons at Deccan police station under Indian Penal Code sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 427 (mischief causing damage) and other relevant provisions, the police said.  
The police has also registered an FIR against three students under Indian Penal Code sections 153B (1) (Imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration) and 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs).

# UP tourism launches campaign

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
With an aim to showcase the rich culture, history, and attractions of Uttar Pradesh, which is basking in the glory for being home of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the State Tourism Department in collaboration with Glance, an InMobi group AI first lock screen has launched a grand national photography campaign "UP Close and Personal" aiming to bring the best of the region.  
Appreciating the initiative, Meshram said, "Uttar Pradesh is the heart of India, and we want people all over the world to see its beauty and glory."

# Constitutional rights being eroded: Kharge

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday alleged that the fundamental and basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution to every Indian are slowly being "eroded" and the government is using emotional issues to divert attention and hide the truth from citizens.  
Kharge said that the Congress has resolved to fight for the protection of the Constitution, democracy and justice. In his message to the citizens on the 75th Republic Day, Kharge said it was on this day India became a Republic breaking the chains of feudalism and colonialism.  
He said the Constitution was based on the values of Indian civilisational values of Justice, dignity, equality and equal treatment to all. This is the foundation for the social, economic, and political transformation of our country, he said.



Justice, equality, fraternity, freedom, brotherhood, secularism, and socialism are India's foundational pillars, he asserted. "The Constitution ensured fundamental rights, social justice, and political rights to every citizen. Today, these pillars are under attack from the government itself," Kharge alleged. "The founding fathers of our Constitution Pandit (Jawaharlal) Nehru, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Sardar Patel, Babu

selves included Dalits, Tribals, Women, Farmers, and Labourers. Today they are facing assault by the government which is using emotional issues to divert attention and hide the Truth from citizens," Kharge said.  
He said poverty is increasing with 7.5 crore people falling back into poverty under the current central dispensation led by the BJP.  
"The truth is that due to inflation and falling income, the savings of families are the lowest in 50 years. The truth is that unemployment is at its highest in 45 years, snatching the future of our youth," he said.  
"The truth is that today all Constitutional institutions are being hijacked. The truth is that 146 opposition MPs are thrown out of Parliament and important laws are passed without discussion," he said, adding, even media has been forced to become the government's mouthpiece.

# India, France in talks over financing mechanism for Jaitapur nuclear plant

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
India and France are trying to move forward on elements related to putting in place a financing mechanism and localisation component for the 9,900 MWe Jaitapur nuclear power plant in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district.  
Responding to questions on civil nuclear cooperation between India and France and whether the Jaitapur project was put on pause, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra said the French power company EDF and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) were discussing elements such as a financing mechanism and localisation component of the project.  
"The two entities on both sides -- EDF and NPCIL -- are essentially trying to move for-

ward on these issues and a whole lot of progress has been made," the foreign secretary said. The first memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the Jaitapur nuclear project was inked in 2009 with French nuclear supplier Areva, which went bankrupt.  
In 2016, the EDF and NPCIL signed a revised MoU, and an "industrial way forward" in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron.  
In 2020, the EDF submitted its techno-commercial offer for the project. The French company plans to supply six European Pressurized Reactors (EPR) of 1,650 MW each, considered the most advanced and largest nuclear power plants ever developed.  
The Foreign Secretary said discussions were ongoing between EDF and NPCIL to ensure that "what we put on the ground is financially viable, cost effective and has a localisation component."  
"But we are doing so under a very strong strategic commitment to the partnership on civil nuclear energy space," Kwatra said. "So, from our side the perspective on the principles in which we view this partnership, the specifics, the way we take it forward is absolutely clear," he added.  
Kwatra said small and modular reactors (SMR) was a relatively new space in terms of discussions between the two countries.

# Bihar will achieve 10 lakh Govt jobs target: Governor

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar was committed to providing 10 lakh government jobs to the state's youths, and the target would be achieved soon, Governor Rajendra V Arlekar said on Friday. Addressing the Republic Day function at the Gandhi Maidan in Patna in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav, he said the state has so far provided government jobs to 3.63 lakh people and the recruitment drive is continuing. "The Bihar government will soon achieve the target of

providing 10 lakh government jobs... The state government is working in this direction as 3 lakh more posts in different departments have been created. The government has so far provided jobs to 3.63 lakh people in the state, and the recruitment drive is on," he said. Apart from government jobs, the state government was also working to create 10 lakh employment opportunities for people in other sectors, and has already created 5 lakh such opportunities, he added. "The state government recently approved financial



assistance of Rs 2 lakh each to about 94 lakh poor families for entrepreneurship and self-employment under the Chief Minister Small Entrepreneur Scheme. The government is committed to the overall development of the socially

and economically weaker sections of the society," the governor said. "The government recently raised the quotas for deprived castes from 50 to 65 per cent in state government jobs and educational institutions... And has requested the Centre for placing these legislations in the ninth schedule of Constitution to make them immune to legal scrutiny," he said. The governor also spoke about different social welfare measures undertaken by the state government. "A check has been imposed on crime and this will continue in the future too. There is an environment of social and communal harmony in Bihar," Arlekar said. The governor also thanked PM Narendra Modi for the Centre's decision to confer Bharat Ratna on former CM Karpoori Thakur. "Thakur's entire life was dedicated to the poor and deprived. This prestigious award is a tribute to his lifelong dedication to the upliftment of the underprivileged sections of society and his relentless fight for social justice. I express my gratitude to the PM for conferring Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur," he said.

## Focus on SC, ST, poor, women progress, says Chhattishgarh Governor

PTI ■ RAIPUR



Chhattisgarh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Friday said his government's fundamental principle is to pay utmost attention to the development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, economically disadvantaged, women, youth, children and farmers. In his Republic Day address to the state at Police Parade grounds in the capital Raipur, Harichandan said Chhattisgarh must be transformed into a region, free from Naxal influence, characterized by robust law and order, tranquillity, and a bastion of development. "The success of our democracy is deeply rooted in the perpetual commitment of every individual, mutual cooperation, active participation in the development of the state and the country, and a strong desire for progress in science and technology," he said. On the other hand, we also acknowledge the significant contribution of our ancient culture and spiritual awareness, he said.

Ji's dream of building the state of Chhattisgarh," he said. Chhattisgarh must be transformed into a region, free from Naxal influence, characterised by robust law and order, tranquillity, and a bastion of development, said the governor. With the strategy of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, and Sabka Prayas', every objective for the betterment of Chhattisgarh will be achieved, he said. Harichandan paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr B R Ambedkar, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. "I also acknowledge the current President of India Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi who have demonstrated through their leadership that individuals from ordinary families can rise to the highest positions in the country and make significant contributions," he said. It is a fortunate coincidence that the central and state governments have initiated numerous people-centric policies, schemes, and programs in collaboration, aiming to implement them swiftly, he said.

Inspired by the philosophy of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, the pioneer of 'Ekatma Manavvad' (integral humanism), one finds meaningful motivation for the conscientious fulfilment of duties towards humanity and the nation, he said. "My government's fundamental principle is to pay utmost attention to the comprehensive development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, economically weaker sections, women, youth, children, farmers, rural populations, and forest dwellers," he said. "All of us together need to fulfil Atal Bihari Vajpayee



## Forces bringing peace in Manipur, says DGP

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur DGP Rajiv Singh on Friday said the state and central forces are working in coordination to bring tranquillity and peace in the north-eastern state. He also said the state and central forces have coordination committees at the state and district levels to normalise the situation in the violence-hit state. "We (State and central forces) are always in constant touch. We have coordination committees at the state headquarters and district levels and have several video conferences," the DGP said on the sidelines of a Republic Day programme. "For me, all forces are equal. We are working together with state and central forces in coordination and trying to bring a normal situation as soon as possible" Singh said. On the ongoing probe into the killing of the SDPO Moreh, Singh said

"Investigation is going on and some people have been arrested. I would not be able to divulge details here. Let the police work." Moreh SDPO Chingtham Anand was shot dead by suspected militants in Tengnoupal district in October last year. Asked about the current situation in Moreh, Singh said "It will get better with the cooperation of the public and leaders of both the communities." More than 180 people have lost their lives since ethnic violence broke out in the state on May 3 last year, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mostly in the hill districts.

## BJP trying to lure our leaders: Shivakumar

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Accusing the BJP of trying to lure his party's leaders and legislators, state Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Friday indicated that he too was not silent and that many leaders from the saffron party are in touch with him. His comments came a day after former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar rejoined the BJP quitting Congress. He had joined Congress, ahead of Assembly polls last year, after being denied ticket by the BJP to contest the elections. "I'm in talks with several (BJP) leaders, many are looking at us, I don't want to reveal names," Shivakumar told reporters here as he accused BJP of making all efforts to lure Congress leaders into the party. "Whom have they left? They are trying every one, I don't want to take names. But we too know the job, I'm not speaking now that's all, if not

(their) houses would have become empty by now, but we are remaining silent that's all," he added. On some BJP leaders claiming to be in touch with several Congress leaders and legislators, Shivakumar said, "Don't they know that I'm too in touch with them. Have they left me? Should I read the list...Let's not do it now." Noting that Shettar had joined Congress unconditionally after quitting BJP accusing it of insulting and ill treating him, Shivakumar said, considering his stature being a senior leader, Congress gave him ticket to contest Assembly polls and despite him losing the polls by a margin of about 35,000 votes, the party made him an MLC. "Denying a loyal party worker the ticket, we gave him a ticket and treated him with respect....We were aware about BJP leaders contacting him from the last two-three months, and he kept saying he will not go. Day before



yesterday I had spoken to him, but all of a sudden, he announced quitting the party," he said. Shettar may have quit the party, but Congress is like an ocean, the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee chief said hundreds of people may come to the party, and hundreds may quit, but no one can do anything to Congress. "We have won 136 seats on

our strength in assembly polls. Because of our own mistakes we might have lost seven to eight seats, or else our calculation was over 141 seats." He further said, Shettar quitting the Congress may cause "just one day's embarrassment to the party before the media, but the party workers are happy about him going out, as it will help them in organising Congress much better." "Congress will give the seat vacated by Shettar to a loyal Congress worker and fight it out....Congress is like an ocean, we are least bothered (about Shettar joining BJP)," he added. Shivakumar also said that Congress MLA Laxman Savadi, who too had joined the party quitting BJP ahead of Assembly polls, has assured that he will remain in the Congress and work for the party. "He (Savadi) is a leader of the party and will be an asset to the party," he added.

## Nagaland CM for talks on India Myanmar border fencing

PTI ■ KOHIMA

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Friday said the decision of the Centre to fence the India-Myanmar border needs thorough discussion before being implemented. Asked by reporters about the state's stand on the issue,

Rio said the government has to consult the people. "If the need be then we have to work out a formula on how to solve the issue for the people and prevent infiltration as well, because Nagaland is bordered by Myanmar, and on both sides there are Nagas," he said.



Rio, an ally of the BJP, said that while many people live on the Indian side, their farms are on the other side. "Therefore there has to be a workable formula," he added. Union Home Minister Amit Shah last week said the government will end the free movement of people at the

India-Myanmar border, and fence it completely so that it can be protected like the country's boundary with Bangladesh. Deputy CM Y Patton had on Monday said that the Nagaland government will hold meetings with other northeastern states that share

a border with Myanmar, and then approach the Centre on the issue. Various Naga civil society organisations and also the NSCN-IM have opposed the Centre's decision, saying that it would "divide" the Nagas living on two sides of the border.

## Mizoram has zero tolerance to smuggling: Governor

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Mizoram governor Hari Babu Kambhampati on Friday said the state government has zero tolerance towards all kinds of smuggling. Addressing the Republic Day function after unfurling the tricolour at Lammul in Aizawl, he said the Excise and Narcotics Department is working relentlessly to combat the menace of drug trafficking and drug abuse. "Stringent measures are being taken to stop the illegal smuggling of areca nuts by law enforcing agencies and the government," he said. The government was also working to check malpractices at various police check-gates, and instructions have been issued in this regard, he added. Maintaining that good governance reduces irregularities, enhances the self-respect of people and enables them to optimally utilise their talents and capabilities, Kambhampati said that the state government was determined to get rid of the scourge of corruption. "The fight against corruption will be made comprehensive and effective. The



mission to eliminate corruption from public life and government services will be implemented with greater zeal," he said. Kambhampati said that over the next five years, the state government will focus on responsible and responsive administration, ensuring steady and sustainable development in all sectors, supporting industries, ensuring access to social security and social equity, youth welfare and development, and

protecting the environment. He also said the government was committed to improving the financial condition of the state. "It will be our endeavour to set things right through fiscal consolidation, proper fiscal management, austerity measures, pruning non-development expenditure and resource management and mobilisation," he said. The governor said the government will accord utmost importance to agriculture and allied sectors since more than half of the state's population depends on it. "It will be our endeavour to make agriculture both production-centric and income-centric. A separate allocation of funds targeting farmers engaged in agriculture and allied sectors will be provided in the budget," he said. Remunerative prices for four important commercial crops -- ginger, turmeric, chilies and broomsticks -- will be fixed and procurement will commence from this financial year for which an amount of Rs 110 crore has been already earmarked, he added.

## Rajasthan CM meets Raje at her residence

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Friday called on former chief minister and senior BJP leader Vasundhara Raje at her residence. Sharma reached Raje's home at Civil Lines and stayed for nearly 20 minutes. Raje was among the frontrunners for the chief minister's post after the BJP returned to power last month. However, the party leadership chose first-time MLA Sharma for the post. Since then, Raje has distanced herself from the party. She skipped the Cabinet expansion ceremony on December 30 and was also absent from a dinner for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party MLAs at the BJP office on January 5. Sharma's meeting with Raje is seen as an attempt to normalise relations ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

## Six die in Nagaland coal mine accident

PTI ■ KOHIMA

At least six workers were charred to death and four critically injured in a fire accident inside an illegal coal mine in Nagaland's Wokha district, an official said. The incident took place at Richanyan village under Bhandari sub-division of Wokha district around 1pm on January 25, Bhandari MLA Achumbemo Kikon told PTI here on Friday. Kikon, who is in Bhandari to

take stock of the situation, said the workers, all from Assam, were engaged in digging inside the illegal rat-hole mine when there was a fire killing six of them and critically injuring four others. The injured were rushed to a hospital in Dimapur, an official said. Expressing concern on such illegal coal mines in Bhandari, the MLA urged the state department to take stringent steps to stop such mines.

## Goa to tie up with non-profit body for healthcare: Rane

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa minister Vishwajit Rane on Friday said the state government was collaborating with a non-profit organisation to foster a robust and resilient healthcare landscape in keeping with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of self reliance. The collaboration with NATHEALTH, which has a diverse membership ranging from providers to tech companies, will fortify and elevate the role of the state's health sector in GDP, employment and digital transformation.

## IIT-J tech to reduce traffic, road accidents

PTI ■ JODHPUR

The IIT-Jodhpur has developed a cutting-edge technology that it claims can reduce traffic congestion and road accidents. The Novel MAC-based Authentication Scheme -- developed by the institute's computer science and engineering department -- aims not only to enhance vehicle security and intelligence but also address multifaceted challenges prevalent on Indian roads. It can contribute to road

safety by enabling secure and real-time exchange of data on road conditions, accidents and traffic jams among vehicles. This information can help drivers make informed decisions and avoid hazards, according to a professor associated with the technology's development. The data collected and shared through the Internet of Vehicles network can also be analysed to identify accident-prone areas, patterns of risky behaviour or road conditions that require improvement -- leading the authorities taking

proactive measures to address these. This technology is a groundbreaking solution to enhance the security and the efficiency of the Internet of Vehicles, said Debasis Das, an associate professor in the computer science and engineering department. "With this technology, we have strived to address critical challenges in data protection, communication overhead and security vulnerabilities," he said, adding that NoMAS can also help protect vehicles from theft and unauthorised use.

## Mumbai pace of development inspiring: UNGA chief

PTI ■ MUMBAI

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) president Dennis Francis on Friday said he was inspired by the liveliness, energy and pace of development in Mumbai and shared that he has watched Hindi movies. The visiting dignitary made the comments during his meeting with Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, a release from the CM Office said. UNGA is the main policy-making organ of the United Nations.

Francis lauded the pace of infrastructure and housing development in Mumbai. Mumbai played an important part in India's industrialisation, he said. He recalled his country Trinidad and Tobago's close ties with India. He said the speaker's chair in the Trinidad assembly has been gifted by India, according to the release. The UNGA chief said he was a geography student and India was part of his studies. He said he has watched Hindi movies.



Climate change is an important matter in Maharashtra, Shinde told Francis, elaborating that his government has taken steps like plastic ban, bamboo plantation, green hydrogen policy and deep cleaning campaign in Mumbai, according to the release. Strengthening self-help groups was also important, he said. "Vada pav" and 'jalebi' were among the food items on the menu during the meeting, the statement said.

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It is hereby informed that despite this notice if the operation for the said locker is not initiated by **MS. URMILA** and **MR. PRADEEP KUMAR NAGAR** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2024 at around 12 p.m.**



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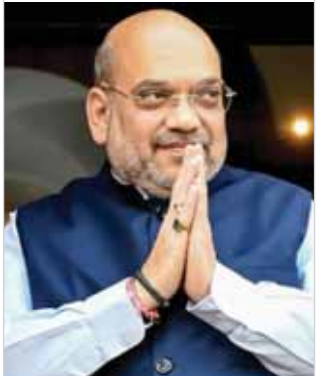
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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Peace in paradise

The decline in number of terror incidents in J&K is a good indication to initiate the electoral process

There is an overall decline in terror activities and related fatalities in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has pointed out. There has been a notable 66 per cent reduction in terror-related incidents and an 81 per cent drop in civilian deaths in the region, he said. Though this data has triggered a debate on the connection between the abrogation of Article 370 and its implications on the security situation in J&K, it can be safely said that the war on terror is far from over. The number of civilian deaths and terror incidents may have fallen but the figure is still rather large to call it the 'Heaven on earth', as it is often referred to. Article 370 granted special autonomy in governance and decision-making to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, even allowing it to have its own Constitution and flag. However, on August 5, 2019, the Narendra Modi-led Government decided to abrogate Article 370 and reorganise the State into two Union Territories – Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. One of the primary arguments for revoking Article 370 was the anticipation of improved security conditions in the region. The reported 66 per cent decline in terror incidents suggests that normalcy is slowly but surely returning to J&K. Ending terrorist activities is crucial for restoring peace and stability not only in Jammu and Kashmir but also in the broader context of national security.



However, it is essential to critically analyse the factors contributing to this decline. Some argue that the increased presence of security forces, coupled with strict counter-terrorism measures, has played a pivotal role in curbing extremist activities. Civilian casualties have been a deeply concerning aspect of the conflict in J&K, often causing widespread unrest and protests. The reduction in civilian deaths suggests a positive shift towards protecting the lives of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. While the reported decline in terror incidents and civilian deaths is promising, it is important to acknowledge that challenges persist. Critics argue that the restrictions imposed on communication and movement in the aftermath of the Article 370 revocation have led to a stifling environment for the residents of Jammu and Kashmir. Concerns about human rights violation and their impact on daily life remain significant issues that need careful consideration. Now that things are returning to normal as per the Government's claim, it is time to reinstate the political process in J&K and allow political parties to restart their activities. Besides, the recent Supreme Court directive to the Election Commission of India to conduct Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 2024 poses a major challenge for the security agencies. To hold free and fair elections there poses yet another challenge as the trouble-makers would like to disrupt the process with all their might. But only after a democratically elected Government is installed in Kashmir can we call it peaceful.

### PICTALK



Artists perform during the 75th Republic Day celebrations in Kullu

## Pakistan faces bitter fallout with Taliban

Pakistan deserves little sympathy for the violence it is suffering. Sowing the wind in Afghanistan, Pakistan is reaping the whirlwind



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

The bitter falling out between Pakistan and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers is one of the striking ironies of contemporary history. Islamabad could not have done more for the Taliban. It was instrumental to their establishment. Its support in the form of the training and arming of their troops, and stiffening of the latter's ranks with the deputation of Pakistan Army's officers and men, enabled them to establish their first regime over most of Afghanistan in September 1997.

During the US-led campaign against the Taliban in 2001, Pakistan airlifted, with American consent, a large number of its army personnel and agents of the Directorate-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), along with top commanders and fighters of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, from Kunduz in November 2001. It, of course, did not, in keeping with its usual duplicitousness, tell Washington DC that Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders and rank-and-filers would also be evacuated. Pakistan's support continued in an enhanced and expanded form after an alliance, spearheaded and guided by the United States, post 9/11, ousted the Taliban from Afghanistan in December 2001. Pakistan harboured their leaders, allowed them to function freely in its territory, and, besides arming and training their troops, provided them with sanctuaries in the border areas from where they could foray into Afghanistan. The Taliban would not have survived without Pakistan's support. All this, of course, should not obscure the fact that relations between the latter and Afghanistan were bitterly hostile until Islamabad's provision of support to the Afghan mujahideen following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The hostility became manifest immediately after Pakistan's independence in August 1947 when Afghanistan was the only nation to oppose Pakistan's entry into the United Nations. It also actively supported armed separatist movements in the Pashtun inhabited territory and Balochistan in Pakistan. The primary bone of contention



between the two countries has been the Durand Line, which was drawn by Sir Mortimer Durand, a British diplomat and civil servant, and Abdul Rahman Khan, emir of Afghanistan, on 12 November 1893, as the official boundary between India (of which Pakistan was then a part) and Afghanistan. Subsequent to Abdul Rahman Khan's death, Afghanistan ceased accepting it as the legal border as more Pashtuns, the dominant Afghan ethnic group, lived on the Pakistani side. Kabul wanted the line shifted eastward towards the Indus River to bring Pashun-majority areas in Pakistan within its fold, and free movement of people across it till then. To this end, it had supported armed ethnic Pashtun and Baloch secessionist elements in Pakistan. The latter, on its part, has persistently tried to have an Afghan government that was subservient to it and allowed it to use Afghan territory to gain strategic depth in its confrontations with India. The antagonism had infected the populations of both countries. There were attacks on their respective diplomatic establishments on the soil of the other, leading to a break in their diplomatic ties between 1961 and 1963, and border clashes. It is now clear that the Taliban share their country's



THE PRIMARY BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES HAS BEEN THE DURAND LINE, WHICH WAS DRAWN BY SIR MORTIMER DURAND, AND ABDUL RAHMAN KHAN, EMIR OF AFGHANISTAN, IN 1893

historical stand on the Durand Line, which, if anything, has become a bigger source of tension and conflict than perhaps at any time earlier. There have been armed clashes between the border forces of the two countries leading to periodical closure of border crossings including the principal ones at Torkham and Spinboldak. The clashes have been caused not just by the border dispute but an overall deterioration of the relations between the Taliban and Pakistan resulting from Pakistan's allegation that Kabul was supporting the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which has been carrying out violent terror strikes on its soil. At a press conference on November 8, 2023, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister, Anwar ul-Haq Kakar, launched a scathing attack on the Taliban saying that their support to TTP had contributed to a major increase in violence in his country, causing the death of 2,867 Pakistanis since the Taliban captured power in August 2021. According to Afghanistan's TOLO news, the Taliban administration spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, has denied the allegation and stated, "We will not allow anyone to use Afghanistan's soil to threaten other countries. Pakistani authorities should understand their responsibilities." Not sur-

prisingly, the dispute continues, aggravated by cross-border terror strikes in Pakistan and the latter's airstrikes against the TTP's bases in Afghanistan. Things have worsened by Pakistan's campaign to deport what it describes as foreigners without valid visas or registration documents as refugees. The principal victims are Afghans, numbering nearly four million, who have poured into the country since the Soviet Union's invasion of their country. According to reports 450,000 of them out of a total number of 1.77 million such people (according to the Pakistani authorities) have left Pakistan. The condition of those who have been forced to leave is miserable, and the uncertainty of those living in the shadow of deportation must be nerve-wracking. The inhumanity of Pakistan's campaign is unpardonable, particularly given the horrible human rights situation and the gender apartheid prevailing in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Pakistan deserves little sympathy for the violence it is suffering. The monster it has created is striking back. As the Old Testament (Hosea 8.7) says, "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." (The author is a Consulting Editor, at The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### PRADHAN MANTRI SURYODAYA YOJNA

Sir — India's solar power has an installed capacity of 70 GW today, 15% of the total installed power. The aim is for 400 GW of solar power capacity by 2030 or half of the total power capacity. Riding on this overall plan, the PM Suryodaya Yojna of Jan 2024, envisages Roof Top solar power for 10, mln homes now and to reach 40 GW capacity by 2026 from 11 GW on date. This is the first scheme to set a target for the number of households rather than the amount of electricity to be generated. A report by the Council on Energy, estimates 250 million households across India have the potential to deploy 640Gw of solar energy capacity on rooftops. We gained some experience in programmes for toilets, drinking water and cooking gas and yet rooftop solar power to less affluent households requires initiatives. Incentives such as subsidies, tax holidays, quicker depreciation, and duty concessions can promote unconventional energy setups, but these can not continue forever. The solar sector needs improved technologies, both for cost reduction and effective scaling up. Such high-quality research backup is not with us today and we depend on others for up-to-date technical plants. With dated know-how, we can produce power at an unviable cost while we keep spending on subsidies. We need to be pragmatic in obtaining collaborative technologies in such futuristic endeavours, while we set up our research institutions.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

#### FASCINATING URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Sir — To propel urban development in India, prioritize the establishment of eco-friendly infrastructure in cities. Implement smart waste disposal systems, invest in sustainable public transport networks, and promote green building practices. Accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles by developing a robust charging infrastructure, providing financial incentives, and integrating EV-

#### Republic day pledge



In a nation significance of the Constitution can never be undermined. It serves as a backbone of laws and principles that guide a nation's citizens, shape identity and provide a framework for governance. Drawing inspiration from it why doesn't every individual draft a personal constitution as well? Drafting a personal constitution profoundly impacts one's life at a per-

sonal level. The personal constitution outlines values, goals and commitments that form the foundation of an individual's identity. The process of drafting a personal constitution involves personal inspection, self-discovery and personal growth. It catalyzes self-discovery and empowerment. It is not just a set of rules but a roadmap to a purpose-driven life. Rules like prioritising well-being, building meaningful connections, staying loyal to friends, and challenging comfort zones should be in everyone's constitution as per situations and circumstances. This Republic Day let's pledge to draft a personal constitution and encourage others to do so. This will ensure that everyone becomes a better version of themselves and lives harmoniously.

Gourja Soni | Delhi

friendly urban planning. Enhance waste management across cities under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan by encouraging community participation in recycling, enforcing effective waste segregation, and deploying technological solutions for streamlined waste collection. Foster collaborations between public and private sectors to ensure the successful implementation and scalability of these initiatives for a greener and more sustainable urban landscape.

Mahi Khandelwal | Ujjain

#### BLOW TO INDIA BLOC

Sir — Putting an end to the rumour Mamata Bannerjee clearly stated that Bengal to go all in for the 42 seats in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This news comes after Punjab Chief minister and AAP Leader Bhagwat Mann's decision to go solo and win all 13 LS seats in Punjab. INDIA bloc seems to receive a blow as slowly the winds turn with the regional

Sumit Saha | Dhenkanal  
Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Climate emergency in the time of military conflicts

There must be concerted global action towards restoring peace, and thereby climate, as both are intricately linked

If we don't end the war, war will end us, the quote from H. G. Wells summarises the realities of Climate Emergency, exacerbated by today's military politics. On the one hand, we have companies adapting their business operations, farmers shunning environmentally harmful farming, innovators finding ways to reduce emissions and policymakers trying to channelise finance for addressing climate change. On the other, we have wars erupting in unforeseen corners of the world that have the potential of reversing any positive impact created by efforts towards climate restoration. The enormity of the carbon footprints of a war is evident in a cursory look at data. It is estimated that the carbon footprint of the Iraq War was 141 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent emissions, 21 EU member states emitted less CO2 equivalent in 2019, to put the numbers in context. Only the first year of the Ukraine war generated ~120 million tonnes of CO2, roughly the equivalent of the emissions of Belgium. The emissions from restoration efforts post-war are worse. It



is estimated that the carbon cost of rebuilding the conflict-torn West Asia could be higher than emissions from many countries taken together. Even if reporting of military CO2 emissions is excluded from climate treaties citing implications on national security, however UNFCC advocates for fixing up the responsibility of warring parties towards the resulting emissions. Managing conflicts during energy transition: It is obvious that as the dominance of fossil fuels wanes, the economies dependent on it may get anxious. Take the example of Russia, which has been the top exporter of coal, oil and gas all these years, the Arab and the Middle East's prosperity thrived on oil. So that the fact that places are conflict hot spots in the times of an

influence the political leadership of the most powerful nations of the world due to interlocked economic interests as well as its credibility of a history of peaceful co-existence and engagement with the world. People-to-people connect: The world is far more interconnected today than the Cold War era during which concerted efforts for people-to-people connect through exchange programs were made. Mobilising public opinion through technology forces leaders to prioritise climate over power. The efforts by large corporations to carbon proof their value chains, incremental expenses from individuals to shift to electric vehicles, austerity in lifestyle – be it flying less or eating less meat or taxes imposed on cross border trade as contributions towards keeping the temperature rise below 2°C and further reduce it to 1.5°C, will go down a hungry bottomless pit unless there is concerted global action towards restoring peace and thereby climate. (The writer is a novelist an international development advisor and a Chevening scholar; views are personal)



SAIRAM



## FIRST COLUMN

### ATTAINING INNER BLISS AND SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT

Getting into samadhi is difficult but not impossible. And all the effort is worth it



SWAMI CHARNASHRIT

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, finding moments of tranquility and inner peace can seem like an elusive quest. However, ancient spiritual practices offer a path to achieving a state of profound concentration and tranquility known as samadhi. Derived from Sanskrit, samadhi translates to "union" or "absorption," and it is considered the pinnacle of mental focus and spiritual realization in various Eastern philosophies.

#### The Significance of Samadhi:

Samadhi holds immense importance in spiritual traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and yoga. It is often described as a state of deep meditation where the practitioner experiences a profound connection with the divine, the universe, or their inner self. In this heightened state of awareness, the mind transcends ordinary thoughts and distractions, leading to a sense of unity and oneness.

One of the primary goals of attaining samadhi is to overcome the fluctuations of the mind and achieve a sustained state of inner peace. This state is believed to bring about a profound transformation, fostering a deeper understanding of the self and the interconnected nature of all existence. Practitioners often report feelings of bliss, clarity, and a heightened sense of purpose after experiencing samadhi.

#### How to Attain Samadhi:

Attaining samadhi requires dedicated practice, discipline, and a sincere commitment to the spiritual journey. Here are some key steps that can guide seekers on the path to achieving this transcendent state:

1. **Meditation Practices:** Engage in regular meditation sessions to calm the mind and cultivate mindfulness. Concentration techniques, such as focusing on the breath or a mantra, can gradually lead to a heightened state of awareness.



2. **Yoga and Breath Control (Pranayama):** Incorporate yogic practices and pranayama (breath control) into your routine. These practices help harmonise the body and mind, creating a conducive environment for experiencing samadhi.

3. **Self-Reflection and Contemplation:** Take time for self-reflection and contemplation. Explore the nature of your thoughts, emotions, and desires. Understanding the workings of the mind is a crucial step on the path to samadhi.

4. **Mindful Living:** Extend mindfulness beyond meditation by practising it in your daily life. Cultivate awareness in every action, whether it's eating, walking, or interacting with others. This continuous awareness gradually deepens the meditative state.

5. **Guidance from Spiritual Teachers:** Seek guidance from experienced spiritual teachers who can provide insights and support on your journey. Learning from those who have traversed the path to samadhi can offer valuable wisdom and encouragement.

Samadhi is not merely a destination but a transformative journey towards self-realization and spiritual fulfilment. By integrating meditation, yoga, mindfulness, and guidance from seasoned practitioners, individuals can inch closer to the profound experience of samadhi. As the mind transcends its ordinary state, the seeker discovers a sublime connection with the infinite, paving the way for a life imbued with inner peace and purpose.

*(The writer is a spiritual guide, views are personal)*

# Holistic learning for student growth

The focus needs to be on nurturing and strengthening students' individual abilities, which will help them strengthen their mental and emotional well-being



DINESH PRASAD SAKLANI

The time spent in school is a crucial period for every individual, marked by dynamic growth and development. This period is also important as children and adolescents steer through the student life, encountering numerous experiences that shape them as individuals. This journey of school life also poses several challenges that are both unique and demanding, especially in the present-day context, where students face many challenges related to developing skills in academics, educational and career choices, and dealing with the stress and anxiety related to examinations and competitions.

They also need to stay updated about technological advances and adapt to the rapidly evolving world of work. These concerns affect the overall development of the students, impacting not only their academic performance but also their mental health and well-being. Along with the cognitive aspects, holistic development also focuses on the affective aspects, which include an individual's social and emotional skills, attributes, positive social interactions, support perceived, adaptability and perspective-taking, among others, which serve as protective factors against stress. The purpose of any education system is not only to foster academic learning but also the all-round development of children.

As students go through their academic journeys, they also lay the foundations of a progressive society. Thus, the focus on this period and on ensuring the holistic development of the students is a concern of national importance. Consistent efforts are being made by the country to bring about awareness and support in this regard with a special focus on the younger population. An initial step in this direction was taken by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, who addressed these concerns through 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' and 'Mann Ki Baat' talks with citizens and students. He inspired the students to become AatmaNirbhar self-reliant.

With a focus on socio-emotional concerns during interaction with students, the Hon'ble Prime Minister emphasised taking responsibility for oneself and overcoming difficult situations through individual efforts. In one such interaction, he motivated the young listeners, "We have to face temporary setbacks in life but always remember—the capacity to overcome them resides within us." The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), emphasises the uniqueness of each student and the need to nurture their individual strengths and abilities towards making them self-reliant. With a holistic approach to education, the policy also focuses on the socio-emotional aspects along with academics. The policy further outlines the aim of education as not only 'cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st-century skills'. It lays emphasis on building the skills of the students in the areas of social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions including personal competencies. This will prepare students to deal with all life situations. In attempts towards supporting students to become self-directed and resilient in their approach, under the 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' the Ministry of Education launched 'Manodarpan' on 21st July 2020 (<https://manodarpan.education.gov.in>). The prime objective of the initiative is to provide psychosocial support to students,



teachers and families for mental health and emotional well-being. Students' holistic development and well-being are addressed through National Toll-free Helpline (844-844-0632) and 'Sahyog' live sessions telecast on PM e-Vidya channels and 'NCERT Official' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NCERTOFFICIAL/streams>).

As students progress from the foundational to secondary stages of schooling, they need a secure, warm, caring, and nurturing environment in order to develop and strengthen their competencies and skills. Hence, the role of parents and teachers is crucial in making students 'AatmaNirbhar' so that they can deal with various challenges in life.

However, external support, although crucial, is not sufficient to overcome difficult life situations. It is also important to empower students so that they are able to take charge of their own learning, set goals, make decisions and take responsibility for their own educational journey. Resourcefulness is crucial for students to utilise a variety of educational materials and platforms for independent learning. Self-reliance encourages students to be innovative in their approach to learning. It promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to adapt to new challenges.

Our teachers need to create opportunities for students to practise self-discipline, as it supports students in making conscious choices that are aligned with their set goals. Students also need to realise that self-discipline encompasses perseverance, persistence, focus, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to manage time optimally. It helps in achieving goals despite challenges or distractions. But how does one build self-discipline? Although it seems like a daunting task, small steps in the right direction such as setting clear goals, identifying and prioritising tasks, distancing one from distractions, following a routine of proper sleep, nutrition and exercise and maintaining an organised learning space, can lead us to our final goal. Practising self-disci-

pline helps in gaining confidence in one's abilities and is a source of reinforcement to achieve the goals.

**Apart self-discipline, what else do children need to practise?:** It is the understanding of one's own strengths, areas of development, emotions, and thoughts. Taking care of oneself, enhancing skills, adopting a growth mindset, and maintaining social relationships and family interactions are some of the ways of building resilience. All children need to understand that resilience helps in adapting to challenging situations in life by showing behavioural and emotional flexibility. Especially in the context of examinations where students come across many challenges, resilience acts as a critical attribute that impacts their ability to overcome academic struggles and setbacks. It helps them maintain a positive outlook.

Schools are spaces where students spend the majority of their formative years and provide opportunities to develop a wide range of skills. In addition to academics, schooling also involves appropriate nurturing of socio-affective development, i.e., self-reliance, self-discipline, taking initiative, independence of thought, understanding relationships with people and the environment, responsible action, etc. To foster academic learning and socio-emotional development, schools need to understand their students and ensure that all of them are treated fairly, valued, and exposed to a wide range of personal and social learning experiences. Teachers can also help in building peer support amongst students by facilitating open communication and cultivating empathy. Positive relationships with peers contribute to a student's sense of belonging and emotional well-being. While school plays an important role, a supportive and nurturing family environment is also crucial for building self-reliance and resilience among students. Examinations are often seen as a major cause of concern among students at all stages of education across the country, sometimes evoking extreme anxiety and stress

related to the fear of evaluation and results. Various measures have been taken by the government towards tackling this pertinent concern. In 'Pariksha Pe Charcha', the Hon'ble Prime Minister has often discussed creating a stress-free environment for youngsters facing the exam years. The much-acclaimed book Exam Warriors (2018) tackles examinations in terms of student mental health in our country's context. In continuing the efforts towards reducing the fear of evaluation among students, the NEP, 2020 has introduced a holistic perspective in assessment with the Holistic Progress Card, a 360-degree, multidimensional report that reflects in great detail the progress as well as the uniqueness of each learner in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, including aspects of self-evaluation.

**What is the reason behind this stress?:** While it is difficult to identify any one reason behind the stress experienced by students, it is important to recognise that examinations bring with them a sense of being evaluated. However, one must try to not take them as the criteria that define our capabilities. Evaluations and assessments are integral components of life that provide valuable opportunities for growth, self-reflection, and improvements in various dimensions of life.

We often focus on external criteria of assessment and evaluation, using them as our benchmark for progress. Self-reflection, often overlooked in this context, helps us identify our personal progress and hindrances more effectively. Going beyond the traditional academic evaluations, through thoughtful introspection, one can discover valuable insights about self. The more one knows about oneself, the lesser dependence one has on the external criteria of evaluation. By recognising the reciprocal relationship between self-reflection and personal growth, we not only enhance our cognitive capacities but also cultivate emotional intelligence.

*(The writer is Director NCERT; views are personal)*



WHILE SCHOOL PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE, A SUPPORTIVE AND NURTURING FAMILY ENVIRONMENT IS ALSO CRUCIAL FOR BUILDING SELF-RELIANCE AND RESILIENCE AMONG STUDENTS

# Effective airshed management can curb pollution

For reaping benefits from airshed management, the Government must fast-track the compilation of emission source data at all levels supported by adequate funding

Intensive multi-pronged strategies to fight pollution have come to a nought as is evident by worsening environmental conditions and climate change. Currently, 60 per cent of Indian cities have air that is over seven times more polluted than the permissible limits and is routinely ranked among the world's worst when it comes to air pollution. According to the 2023 World Air Quality Report by IQAir, 39 out of 50 of the world's most polluted cities are present in India, with high 2.5 particulate matter (PM) levels. Worse still, according to the Air Quality Life Index Indians, on average, lose 5.3 years of their life, because of air pollution. Given these conditions, a broad initiative that can address air pollution in large



KOTA SRIRAJ

geographical areas is the urgent need of the hour. Airshed management is one such concept that has the potential to resolve the pollution crisis on a large scale by addressing the issue on a regional rather than local basis. Airshed is defined as a common geographic area where pollutants get trapped, creating similar air quality for all. A report by the University of Surrey in association with the Delhi Pollution Control

Committee (DPCC), CSIR-NEERI underlined the importance of Airshed management in tackling pollution.

Air pollution by nature is never local but transcends borders and regions. The annual problem of air pollution faced by Delhi NCR on account of crop burning by neighbouring states of Punjab & Haryana is an apt example. The University of Surrey report pointed out that specially appointed Airshed councils can help local, regional and central agencies coordinate efforts in fighting air pollution. In order to demarcate Airsheds, India must assimilate emission quantification with the help of the network of 438 continuous air quality monitoring systems aided by the 883 manual stations set up by the

Central Pollution Control Board across various cities. This will help establish an accurate multi-pollutant inventory and enable the division of cities into Airsheds of various sizes. This must be followed by analysing meteorological data to evaluate variations and similarities at the local and regional levels and finally air quality modelling must be done to understand the pollution dispersion. Once delineated in this manner, based on Airshed size, the city administrators can manage the Airshed locally and if the size is bigger interstate collaboration can be resorted to manage the Airshed effectively. Airshed management has paid rich dividends across the world. For instance, Airshed management practices in



Mexico and Los Angeles combine scientific evidence with innovative governance in addition to effective coordination between various agencies to reduce vehicular and other emissions. The Airshed management in California is yet another example wherein the partnership between California Air Resources Board and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) helps monitor and reduce air pollution across the districts in the state.

India can emulate these examples and manage Airshed effectively in order to control pollution levels in areas where the AQI is critical such as the non-attainment cities (NACs). Cities are declared NAC if over a 5-year period, they consistently do not meet the national ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM 10 (Particulate matter that is 10 microns or less in diameter) or N02 (Nitrogen Dioxide). India currently has 131 NACs. To tackle the air pollution in NAC, the government launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in 2019 for non-attainment cities.

The NCAP aimed to reduce PM levels by 20-30 per cent by 2024, compared to 2017 levels, but so far progress under the

programme has been underwhelming – only 39 out of the 131 cities have done appropriate studies to track down sources of pollution and less than 50 per cent of the total funds allocated under the NCAP (Rs 652.61 crores) have been utilised. With the pollution source data collection on a slow track, the design of the airshed too is lagging behind. India must bolster collective motivation and incentives to promote airshed air quality management. Currently, states are designing their own action plans for air pollution management that are essentially city-level based and not at rural, district and regional levels. India is mostly collecting urban emissions data which is inadequate if effective Airshed management is to be imple-

mented because it requires regional data. The bigger challenge however is ensuring collaboration and coordination between state governments when an Airshed constitutes multiple states. To ensure that India benefits from Airshed management, the government must fast-track the compilation of emission source data at all levels. Besides this, India must also establish effective Airshed Committees that can help in interstate and inter-departmental coordination. These committees would be the first port of call to resolve any issue of jurisdiction, regulatory overlap or any other form of dispute relating to planning or regulation relating to air quality in the region.

*(The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)*





# Gaza death toll surpasses 26,000

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The International Court of Justice was set to read out its decision on Friday on whether to order Israel to halt its offensive in Gaza as the Health Ministry announced that deaths there had surpassed 26,000 since the Israel-Hamas war began. South Africa accused Israel of genocide and asked the court in The Hague, Netherlands, for interim orders, including that Israel halt its offensive in Gaza. Israel swiftly rejected the filing and asked the court to throw out the case. The Health Ministry in Gaza said Friday that 26,083 people have been killed and more than 64,400 wounded in the enclave since the Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel, when militants from Gaza killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Thursday that Israeli fire struck a crowd of people waiting for humanitarian aid at a roundabout in Gaza City on Thursday, killing at least 20 and wounding 150. The Israeli military says it was looking into the reports. **CURRENTLY:** ■ Israel vows to fight Hamas all the way to Gaza's southern border. That's fuelling tension with Egypt. ■ How genocide officially became a crime, and why South Africa is accusing Israel of committing it. ■ Georgia lawmakers, in support of Israel, pass a bill that would define antisemitism in state law. ■ The US and the UK sanction four Yemeni Houthi leaders over Red Sea shipping attacks. Here's the latest: **MORE THAN 26,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN**

**GAZA SINCE THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR STARTED, HEALTH MINISTRY SAYS RAFAH:** The number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the start of the Israel-Hamas war has surpassed 26,000, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Friday. The ministry said the total number of dead is 26,083, with 64,487 Palestinians wounded since the start of the war on October 7. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its death toll, but has said about two-thirds of those killed were women and children. In the past 24 hours, 183 people were killed and 377 others were injured, ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra said in a statement. Israel's blistering ground and air offensive has decimated vast swaths of Gaza during the near-



ly 4-month-old war. The conflict broke out on October 7 when Hamas militants stormed southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted some 250. **SOUTH AFRICA ISSUES A STATEMENT AHEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT'S INTERIM RULING EXPECTED FRIDAY** **CAPE TOWN:** South Africa's foreign ministry said in a statement that it was seeking an interim ruling that "Israel immediately cease its military operations in Gaza, take reasonable measures to prevent the genocide of Palestinians, ensure that the displaced return to their homes and have access to humanitarian assistance, including adequate food, water, fuel, medical and hygiene supplies, shelter and clothing." The statement late Thursday also said Israel should "take necessary steps to punish those involved in the genocide and preserve the evidence of genocide." Israel has denied the allegations of genocide. South Africa will be represented at the ruling at The Hague by Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor, who spoke with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken by phone Thursday, according to the State Department. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said Blinken spoke about the need to protect civilians in the war in Gaza and ensure there was humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians, while working toward lasting regional peace that "ensures Israel's security and advances the establishment of an independent Palestinian state." "The secretary reaffirmed support for Israel's right to ensure the terrorist attacks of Oct.

## UN court ruling on Israel genocide allegation

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

The United Nations' top court is set to rule Friday on a call for Israel to halt its military offensive in Gaza, when it issues a preliminary decision in a case accusing Israel of committing genocide in the tiny coastal enclave. Joan E. Donoghue, president of the International Court of Justice, will read out the highly anticipated decision made by a panel of 17 judges in a case that goes to the core of one of the world's most intractable conflicts. Friday's ruling, however, is only an interim one; it could take years for the full case brought by South Africa to be considered. Israel rejects the accusation and has asked the court to throw the charges out.



While the case winds its way through the court, South Africa has asked the judges "as a matter of extreme urgency" to impose so-called provisional measures to protect Palestinians in Gaza. Top of the South African list is a request for the court to order Israel to "immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza." It is also asking for Israel to take "reasonable measures" to prevent genocide and allow access for desperately needed aid. In a statement Thursday, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayeh said he hoped the decision would "include immediate action to stop the aggression and genocide against our people in the Gaza Strip ... And a rapid flow of relief aid to save the hungry, wounded and sick from the threat of slow death that threatens them." Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy said Thursday that Israel expects the court to toss out the "spurious and specious charges." Israel often boycotts international tribunals and UN investigations, saying they are unfair and biased. But this time, it took the rare step of sending a high-level legal team - a sign of how seriously it regards the case and likely the fear that any court order to halt operations would be a major blow to the country's international standing. An Israeli official said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu huddled with top legal, diplomatic and security officials on Thursday in anticipation of the ruling. He said Israel is confident in its case but discussed "all scenarios." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was discussing confidential meetings. Israel launched its massive air and ground assault on Gaza after Hamas militants stormed through Israeli communities on October 7 killing some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducting another 250. The offensive has decimated vast swaths of the territory and driven nearly 85 per cent of its 2.3 million people from their homes. More than 26,000 Palestinians have been killed, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run enclave said on Friday. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its death toll, but has said about two-thirds of those killed were women and children. The Israeli military claims at least 9,000 of those killed in the nearly four-month conflict are Hamas militants. UN officials have expressed fears that even more people could die from disease, with at least one-quarter of the population facing starvation. Marieke de Hoon, an associate professor of international law at the University of Amsterdam, said she thinks the court is unlikely to throw the case out Friday since the legal bar South Africa has to clear at this early stage is lower than the one that would be applied for ruling on the merits of the accusation.

"The standard ... Is not, has there been genocide? But a lower standard," she said. "Is it plausible that could have been a risk of genocide that would invoke Israel's responsibility to prevent genocide?" But De Hoon also does not expect the world court to order an end to Israel's military operation. "I think that they will shy away from actually calling for a full cease-fire, because I think they will find that beyond their abilities right now," she said in a telephone interview. Provisional measures by the world court are legally binding, but it is not clear if Israel would comply with any order. Top Hamas official Osama Hamdan, meanwhile, said his group would abide by a cease-fire if ordered and would be ready to release the hostages it is holding if Israel releases Palestinian prisoners. How the US, Israel's top ally, responds to any order will be key, since it wields veto power at the UN Security Council and thus could block measures there aimed at forcing Israel's compliance. The US has said Israel has the right to defend itself, but also spoken about the need for the country to protect civilians in Gaza and allow more aid in. The genocide case strikes at the national identity of Israel, which was founded as a Jewish state after the Nazi slaughter of 6 million Jews during World War II. South Africa's own identity is key to it bringing the case. Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Black people to "homelands" before ending in 1994.



## 2023 marked by milestones in US-India ties: Blinken

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Greeting the people of India on the occasion of the country's 75th Republic Day, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that the US was looking forward to further deepening the vibrant people-to-people ties and advancing the ambitious agenda for cooperation between the two nations. The top American diplomat noted that 2023 was marked by important milestones in the comprehensive global and strategic partnership between the two nations. Blinken said the Constitution of India continues to provide an enduring framework for

the world's largest democracy and a foundation for its global leadership. "As President (Joe) Biden has said, our relationship with India is one of the most consequential in the world. The past year has been marked by important milestones in our comprehensive global and strategic partnership, including our cooperation throughout India's successful G20 Presidency and at the G20 Leaders' Summit," Blinken said on Thursday in his Republic Day message to India. "In the year ahead, we look forward to further deepening the vibrant people-to-people ties between our countries and advancing our ambitious agenda for cooperation on our most vital priorities. I warmly extend my best wishes to the Indian people as they celebrate this special occasion," he said. Earlier in the day, State Department's deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said India is a key strategic partner of the United States and one that it looks forward to expanding their collaboration in several key areas. "This was quite indicative during Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's state visit here to the United States this past summer. So this is an area we'll continue to work on in close coordination with our Indian partners," Patel said in response to a question at a State Department briefing.

## China confirms conviction of a British businessperson on espionage charges

AP ■ BEIJING

Beijing confirmed on Friday that a longtime British businessperson in China had been sentenced to five years in prison in 2022 on an espionage charge. Ian J. Stones was convicted of being bought off to provide intelligence to "external forces," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said when asked about the case at a daily briefing. He did not provide any specific details about the charges. Both the United Kingdom and United States governments have warned about the risk of detention under China's national security laws. A Japanese pharmaceutical company employee was detained last year on suspicion of spying. A new version of the law that took effect July 1, 2023, has heightened concerns about operating in China. Stones' case was not publicly known until reported Thursday by The Wall Street Journal. The American business newspaper said that Stones is about 70 years old and has worked in China for about 40 years. His employers included General Motors and Pfizer before he set up a consulting firm, Navisino Partners, about 15 years ago, the Journal said. Foreign business organisations and governments called for greater clarity last year on what foreign firms are allowed to do under what is now known as the anti-espionage law. Of particular concern are tighter restrictions on the transfer of data to other parties, and what data is considered related to national security under the law. Raids on the offices of three



foreign companies, two consultancies and one due diligence firm, have further unnerved the business community. The British government warns about the risk of arbitrary detention in China and the broad scope of the national security law. "You may be detained without having intended to break the law," it says in its foreign travel advice for the country. The US travel advisory says that Chinese authorities "appear to have broad discretion to deem a wide range of documents, data, statistics, or materials as state secrets and to detain and prosecute foreign nationals for alleged espionage." It says that foreigners who have been detained for alleged national security law violations include businesspeople, former government officials, academics, journalists and relatives of Chinese involved in legal disputes. Stones appealed his conviction, but a court upheld the original ruling in September, Wang said. He said that the case was handled "in accordance with the law, ensuring the legitimate rights and interests of both Chinese and foreign parties involved."

## UN: Global trade disrupted by Red Sea attacks

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The UN trade body sounded an alarm on Thursday that global trade is being disrupted by attacks in the Red Sea, the war in Ukraine, and low water levels in the Panama Canal. Jan Hoffmann, a trade expert at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development known as UNCTAD, warned that shipping costs have already surged and energy and food costs are being affected, raising inflation risks. Since attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea began in November, he said, major players in the shipping industry have temporarily halted using Egypt's Suez Canal, a critical waterway connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and a vital route for energy and cargo between Asia and Europe.

The Suez Canal handled 12 per cent to 15 per cent of global trade in 2023, but UNCTAD estimates that the trade volume going through the waterway dropped by 42 per cent over the last two months, Hoffmann said. Since November, the Iranian-backed Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading to the Suez Canal. The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that has been at war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled government since 2015, support the Palestinians and have vowed to keep attacking until the Israel-Hamas war ends. The United States and Britain have responded with strikes against Houthi targets, but the rebels have kept up their attacks. Hoffmann, who heads the trade logistics branch at



Geneva-based UNCTAD, told a video press conference with UN reporters that the Houthi attacks are taking place at a time when other major trade routes are under strain. The nearly two-year war since Russia's February 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine and other geopolitical tensions have

reshaped oil and grain trade routes including through the Black Sea, he said. Compounding difficulties for shipping companies, Hoffmann said, severe drought has dropped water levels in the Panama Canal to their lowest point in decades, severely reducing the number and size

of vessels that can transit through it. Total transits through the Panama Canal in December were 36 per cent lower than a year ago, and 62 per cent lower than two years ago, Hoffmann said. Ships carry around 80 per cent of the goods in world trade, and the percentage is even higher for developing countries, he said. But the Red Sea crisis is causing significant disruptions in the shipment of grains and other key commodities from Europe, Russia and Ukraine, leading to increased costs for consumers and posing serious risks to global food security, Hoffmann said. This is especially true in regions like East Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia, which heavily rely on wheat imports from Europe and the Black Sea area, he said.

Hoffmann said early data from 2024 show that over 300 container vessels, more than 20 per cent of global container capacity, were diverting or planning alternatives to using the Suez Canal. Many are opting to go around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa, a longer and more costly trip. Hoffmann said ships transporting liquefied natural gas have stopped transiting the Suez Canal altogether because of fears of an attack. As for costs, he said, average container shipping spot rates from Shanghai have gone up by 122 per cent since early December, while rates from Shanghai to Europe went up by 256 per cent and rates to the US west coast by 162 per cent. "Here you see the global impact of the crisis, as ships are seeking alternative routes, avoiding the Suez and the Panama Canal," Hoffmann said.

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea said on Friday it was hosting a visit by a Chinese government delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, as it continues its efforts to strengthen ties with Beijing and Moscow in the face of deepening confrontations with Washington. The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Sun's delegation arrived in the capital, Pyongyang, on Thursday after crossing the land border between the countries. The report didn't provide further details about the visit. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been trying to boost the visibility of its partnership with China and Russia as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his regional footing by joining a united front against the United States. Kim travelled to Russia's Far East in September for a rare summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin and some experts say he is also likely seeking a meeting with Chinese

## Chinese foreign minister visits North Korea



President Xi Jinping. While Kim has prioritized his ties with Russia, which has raised concerns about an arms cooperation that would help fuel Putin's war on Ukraine, the North Korean leader has also invited senior Chinese officials to major state events in recent months while vowing

to strengthen bilateral relations. A Chinese delegation led by Vice Premier Liu Guozhong attended the celebrations for North Korea's 75th founding anniversary last September, shortly before Kim's trip to Russia. In July, Kim invited Chinese ruling party official Li Hongzhong and

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to a major military parade in Pyongyang, where he rolled out his most powerful, potentially nuclear-capable missiles targeting the United States, South Korea and Japan. Sun met with North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Pak Myong Ho last month in Beijing where they discussed strengthening bilateral ties and coordinating over unspecified "issues of common interest." Pak then also met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as they pledged to expand friendly exchanges and strengthening "strategic cooperation" in 2024, as the countries mark their 75th anniversary of establishing bilateral ties. Sun's visit to North Korea comes as US national security adviser Jake Sullivan was planning talks with Wang in Bangkok this week in the latest high-level talks between Washington and Beijing amid tensions over trade, technology and China's assertive foreign

policy in the region. As North Korea's major ally and economic lifeline, China is a crucial partner for Kim's efforts to revive an economy crippled by decades of mismanagement and US-led sanctions over his nuclear weapons and missile program, which he has aggressively expanded in recent years despite limited resources. As permanent members of the UN Security Council, both China and Russia have been thwarting US-led efforts to increase sanctions on the North over its intensified weapons testing activity in recent months, underscoring a divide deepened over Russia's war on Ukraine. Washington and Seoul have been urging Beijing to use its economic leverage on North Korea to help persuade Kim's government to return to nuclear disarmament negotiations, which have stalled since 2019. Experts say trade activities between North Korea and China are gradually expanding since North Korea eased its pandemic restrictions and reopened the border last year.





