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HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY

## US SUPREME COURT PAVES WAY FOR EXTRADITION OF 26/11 ATTACKS MASTERMIND RANA

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major development, the US Supreme Court has paved the way for Pakistani-Canadian national and 26/11 attacks case accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana's extradition to India where he will face trial in the Mumbai terror strikes case. The US apex court early this week dismissed Rana's review petition (writ of 'certiorari') filed on November 13, 2024 challenging his extradition to India. With the rejection of his petition, Rana has exhausted all his legal options to evade his extradition to India. Now, Rana's extradition to India has become imminent. In the past, Rana had lost similar pleas, both in US Court of Appeals in San Francisco and several federal courts, to be sent to India for prosecution of charges in the November 26-29, 2008 attacks case, in which 166 people were killed and 300 others injured. During the hearing in his latest plea in December 2024, the US Solicitor General

Elizabeth B. Prelogar had made a strong case for rejection of Rana's review petition on the ground that the Lashkar-E-Taiba (LeT) operative was not entitled for relief from extradition to India. A former medical officer in the Pakistani army, Rana had migrated to Canada in 1990 where he became a citizen before moving to Chicago. As per US law, if he is not extradited to India, he will be deported to his home country Canada after the completion of his prison term in 2027. Rana is currently lodged in a Los Angeles prison for his involvement in plotting a terror attack on the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. Rana had contended that he was tried and acquitted by a federal court in Illinois (Chicago) on the charges pertaining to the 26/11 case, for which India sought his extradition. However, Prelogar had strongly opposed Rana's plea. Rana is accused of significant involvement in the 26/11 attacks case. Ajmal Kasab was among the ten Pakistani terrorists who had carried out brazen



Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana. The US Supreme Court has cleared Mumbai attack convict Rana's extradition to India, dismissing his review petition against the move. PTI

attacks on Mumbai. While nine of the ten terrorists were killed by the security forces during the attack, the remaining one-Mohammed Ajmal Kasab - was caught alive by the police at Girgaum Chowpatty on the intervening night of November 26-27, 2008. After his conviction in the case, Kasab was hanged to death in the 26/11 attacks case in Pune's Yerwada central prison on November 21, 2012. Rana is one of the two masterminds who are yet to be brought to justice, while the other is Sayed Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundhal, an Indian operative who worked for the Lashkar terror group. He was arrested in 2012 after being identified by Kasab and is currently behind the bars in Mumbai. Welcoming the impending extradition to India, senior advocate Ujjwal Nikam, who was the Special Public Prosecutor in the 26/11 attacks case, said: "This is major success for India because the Supreme Court of America has dismissed the review petition of Tahawwur Rana. Tahawwur Rana and David Headley are

the close links behind the terror attack of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. By extraditing Tahawwur Rana, India will get more information and evidence of the involvement of some of the Pakistani people, including the Pakistan security apparatus. I am very optimistic that the extradition of Tahawwur Rana will give more evidence about the involvement of some of the security apparatus of Pakistan," Rana is a close aide of the Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, who was also wanted by India for the 26/11 hit, carried out by 10 heavily armed Pakistan terrorists. In an amended criminal complaint in the Illinois court against Headley and his accomplice Tahawwur Hussain Rana, on October 21, 2009, the FBI had given details about the reconnaissance done by Headley in India and his links with Rahul Bhatt, whom he (Headley) had befriended during his trips to India. Bhatt and his fitness instructor friend Vilas Pandurang Varak had subsequently confirmed having

met Headley during his visits to India. It may be recalled that on September 26, 2023, the Mumbai crime branch sleuths had filed a 405-page supplementary charge-sheet against Canadian businessman of Pakistani origin Dr. Tahawwur Hussain Rana based on fresh evidence against him. Among other things, the supplementary charge-sheet had alleged that Rana had stayed in India for 11 days - from November 11, 2008 to November 22, 2008. Of these days, he spent two days in Mumbai, where he stayed at Hotel Renaissance at Powai. In its charge-sheet submitted before the trial court, the crime branch police had added Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) section 39A (offence relating to support given to a terrorist organisation) against Rana in the case. "We have gathered some fresh evidence against Rana in the form of statements and documents," a senior crime branch officer said.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto prior to their meeting at the Hyderabad House, in New Delhi. TI

### India-Indonesia sets new pace to bilateral ties

India and Indonesia on Saturday agreed to give a new momentum to the overall bilateral ties and especially concurred on working jointly in the areas of defence manufacturing and supply chains, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto for wide-ranging talks. Subianto, on a three-day visit to India, will be the chief guest at the Republic-Day celebrations at Kartavya Path on Sunday. In his media statement following the talks, Modi described Indonesia as an "important partner" of India in the 10-nation ASEAN bloc as well as in the Indo-Pacific, noting that both countries are committed to a rules-based order in the region. "We agree that the freedom of navigation should be ensured in line with international law," Modi said amid growing global concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region. "We held extensive discussions on various aspects of our bilateral ties," the prime minister said, adding that India and Indonesia have agreed to work jointly on defence manufacturing and supply chains.

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### BALANCE OF ART, SCIENCE, LITERATURE, REGION IN LIST

## Government announce Padma Awards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday conferred with civilian awards including Padma Vibhushan awarded to former Chief Justice of India JS Khehar, noted doctor DN Reddy and Kathak danseuse Kumidini Lakhia and violinist L Subramaniam. Padma Vibhushan was also posthumously awarded to Osamu Suzuki, noted writer MT Vasudevan Nair and folk singer Sharda Sinha. As many as 19 persons were awarded Padma Bhushan including noted journalist A Surya Prakash who served as Chairman of Prasar Bharti



(L-R): Justice Khehar, Sharda Sinha, A Surya Prakash and Sadhvi Rithambhara

and had a stint with 'The Pioneer' as consulting editor and columnist as well as founder Director of Pioneer Media School. Noted economist Bibek Debroy, former Lok Sabha Speaker Manohar Joshi, former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi and noted singer Pankaj Udhas were also conferred the prestigious Padma Bhushan. Sadhvi Ritambhara, the firebrand leader of the Ayodhya Ram Temple movement, Hockey goal keeper PR Sreejesh, film director Shekhar Kapoor and veteran journalist Rambahadur Rai, actress Shobana were also given Padma Bhushan.

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## President Murmu bats ONOE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday advocated for the "One Nation One Election" initiative, asserting it has the potential to redefine "good governance" in the country by promoting consistency in governance, preventing policy paralysis, mitigating resource diversion, and alleviating financial burdens on the state. In her address to the nation ahead of the 76th Republic Day, she emphasised the government's ongoing efforts to "eliminate remnants of a colonial mindset that have lingered in the country for decades" and cited the replacement of the British-era criminal laws with three new



modern laws. "We have been witnessing concerted efforts to change that mindset... Reforms of such magnitude require an audacity of vision," she said. Highlighting the significance of the proposed bill aimed at synchronising election schedules across the country, Murmu noted, "The 'One Nation One Election' plan can offer numerous benefits, including enhanced governance and reduced

financial strain." In discussing legal reforms, she pointed out the need to replace the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Indian Evidence Act with new laws reflective of Indian traditions. She mentioned the introduction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, which prioritise the delivery of justice over mere punishment and place a strong emphasis on addressing crimes against women and children. Reflecting on the significance of the Constitution, the President highlighted the progress achieved over the past 75 years. "At the time of Independence,

many parts of the country faced extreme poverty and hunger. However, we maintained a belief in ourselves and created conditions for growth," she said.

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## Clean Yamuna in three years, metro rides for youth and 50,000 jobs: BJP

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday came bearing nine poll-promises for the people of the national Capital by releasing the third and the final part of Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) 'Sankalp Patra' including development of Yamuna river front, ownership rights for residents of unauthorised colonies, 50,000 government jobs, metro and bus rides available throughout the day and Rs 10 Lakh life insurance for gig workers for the upcoming Delhi assembly elections. Addressing a press conference, the senior BJP leader also launched an all out attack on AAP chief and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, asking him to take a dip in Mahakumbh in Uttar Pradesh to wash out his sins and called him the biggest liar he has ever seen in his political career. Releasing the manifesto titled 'Viksit Delhi Sankalp Patra 2025', Shah mocked the ruling



Union Home Minister Amit Shah along with Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, Delhi BJP incharge Baijayant Panda and others releases third part of BJP's manifesto for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

party's seven-year-old promise to clean the Yamuna River and take a holy dip in it. "If Kejriwal cannot take a dip in the Yamuna, he should at least go to the Kumbh and wash away his sins. And he can come after three years and take a dip in the Yamuna river, with his family, that we will get cleaned," Shah remarked. He also said that while Kejriwal makes fake promises, Modi government delivers

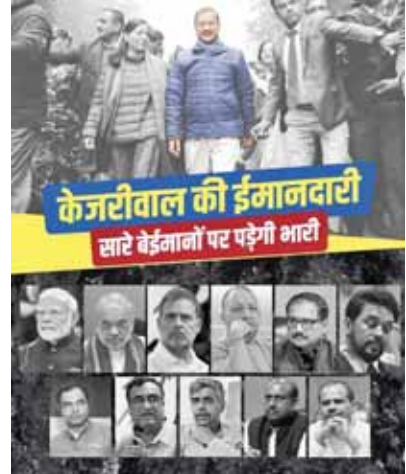
Announcing the poll promises made in the third part of the manifesto, Amit Shah said, "Modi ji has announced the granting of ownership rights to more than 1,700 unauthorised colonies. Previously, these colonies did not have permission for construction, buying, or selling. Now, by granting them full ownership rights and aligning with the Ministry of Housing's regulations and Delhi's by-laws, we will give them the right to construct and sell."

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## Modi, Rahul features in AAP list of corrupt leaders

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Days after former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that he would not respond to Rahul Gandhi's attack on him, the Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday released a poster putting Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's name among a list of 11 "corrupt" people and claiming that the former Delhi Chief Minister will take on them. For the first time, Congress Leaders Rahul Gandhi, Ajay Maken and Sandeep Dikshit were featured prominently in the Arvind Kejriwal-led party's campaign poster. Besides Rahul, the poster also has images of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, BJP leaders Virendra Sachdeva, Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma, Vijender Gupta and Ramesh Bidhuri and Congress Ajay Maken and Sandeep Dikshit. The poster with an image of security personnel making way for Kejriwal and his wife Sunitha has a tagline, "Kejriwal's honesty will be trouble for the corrupt."



The poster referred to Kejriwal as being "honest". "Kejriwal ki imandari sare beyimano par padegi bhari [Kejriwal's honesty will prevail over all the dishonest people]," reads the poster. However, the inclusion of Rahul Gandhi signalled that the gloves are off for AAP. The AAP and Congress

are part of opposition bloc 'INDIA', however, are not fighting the Delhi election together. While Congress leaders have attacked Kejriwal on the corruption front, Rahul has not referred to graft allegations against AAP though he had likened Kejriwal to Modi on "propaganda and false promises". Rahul had targeted Kejriwal on the issue of development over his governance track record, claiming that he cannot match the achievements of former Delhi Chief Minister and Congress leader Sheila Dikshit. Meanwhile Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba, who is contesting against Atishi from Kalkaji assembly seat hit out at Kejriwal after AAP in its poster labelled Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Sandeep Dikshit and Ajay Maken as "dishonest". "You (Arvind Kejriwal) insulted Sheila Dikshit and Manmohan Singh. Now, he says in the interview that Manmohan Singh was the most honest Prime Minister. He should apologise to Dr Singh's wife. You were begging Congress for an alliance. We made a huge mistake by allying with you on seven seats and supporting you during the Lok Sabha elections," Lamba said.

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# Republic Day: CRPF awarded highest number of gallantry medals

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The CRPF has been awarded the highest number of police gallantry medals, 21, among all central and state police forces including two defence ministry issued Shaurya Chakras on the eve of the 76th Republic Day on Saturday. A total of 95 bravery medals have been awarded to the personnel of state and central police forces, fire service, home guard and civil defence and correctional services through an order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The Ministry of

Defence also announced two Shaurya Chakras for the CoBRA commandos of the force -- Deputy Commandant Vikrant Kumar and Inspector Jeffrey Hmingchullo -- for undertaking a daring operations against Maoists in Jharkhand during 2023. As per their citation, these personnel from the 203 Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) displayed "exceptional" bravery during an anti-Naxal operation that took place on April 2, 2023 in Chhota district of the state leading to the killing of five "top" Maoists and recovery of a cache of weapons and ammunition. The Shaurya Chakra is the



third highest peacetime military gallantry medal. A senior officer of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) said that out of the 19 police medals for gallantry (GM), 11 are for operations undertaken in Jammu and Kashmir, seven for acts of bravery in anti-Maoist operations and one for courage displayed during an operation in the northeast. The awardees include second-in-command rank officer Narendar Yadav, and Assistant Commandants Amit Kumar and Vinay Kumar who have been conferred with the 1st bar to GM (gallantry medal awarded for the second time). Late Constable Sunil Kumar

Pandey has been named for the medal posthumously. The 186th battalion jawan laid down his life in September 2023 in Assam while stopping bike-borne smugglers who trafficked contraband from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh. The assailants attacked him with a knife. After the CRPF, the country's largest paramilitary force, the highest number of medals went to Uttar Pradesh (17), Jammu and Kashmir (15), Chhattisgarh (11) and Border Security Force (5). Three Border Security Force (BSF) personnel deployed under the United Nations (UN) flag in Congo have also

been honoured with the gallantry medal. Inspector Jitu Deori, Constable Ratan Kumar Yogi and Constable Awdhesh Kumar Yadav displayed "exemplary courage" in rescuing 38 unarmed UN staff members from a violent mob that attacked their camp in Butembo on July 26, 2022. The BSF is primarily tasked with guarding Indian borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh apart from rendering a variety of other security duties. The CRPF, with about 3.25 lakh personnel, is the mainstay for internal security duties in the country.

## FIITJEE founder among 12 booked for closure of centres in Delhi-NCR

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
NOIDA/NEW DELHI

The founder of FIITJEE and 11 other people were booked on a complaint by parents of the coaching institute's students after several of its centres in Delhi-NCR abruptly shut down, the Noida Police said on Saturday. FIITJEE founder DK Goyal, Chief Financial Officer Rajiv Babbar, Chief Operating Officer Manish Anand and his Greater Noida branch head Ramesh Batlesh have been named in the FIR, a Noida Police spokesperson said. In Delhi, the police launched a probe after more than 250 people accused FIITJEE's East Delhi centre of fraudulent practices and mismanagement following the coaching institute's abrupt shutdown, sources said. The institute, however, claimed the shutdown was the



result of "mismanagement and desertion" by managing partners, and announced plans to pursue legal action against its competitors for alleged poaching of its faculty. On Friday, students and parents said several FIITJEE centres had unexpectedly shut down across Delhi-NCR and many teachers resigned,

allegedly due to non-payment of salaries for months. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Noida) Rambadan Singh said, "Based on the complaint of parents, a case has been registered on charges of criminal conspiracy and breach of trust." According to FIITJEE's website, it runs 73

centres across the country, providing coaching for competitive exams to engineering aspirants. Citing the complaint of Satsang Kumar, a resident of Greater Noida, the Noida Police spokesperson said the institute's centre at Sector-62 was open till January 21 but closed an hour before

schedule. Later, it was found that the centre had been completely shut. He claimed that more than 2,000 students studied at the centre. Similar allegations have been made by Manoj Kumar, a resident of Sector Omega-2 of Greater Noida. In Delhi, people carrying reports of FIITJEE centres closing nationwide, visited the East Delhi centre at Lakshmi Nagar to seek clarity on the closures of branches, sudden faculty resignations, and alleged non-payment of staff salaries. The parents of children enrolled with FIITJEE claimed it collected substantial fees but failed to fulfil its commitment. A social media group formed by those affected has already garnered 257 members, many of whom are demanding urgent action.

## Terrorist strike thwarted on an Army camp in Kathua

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■** JAMMU



Ahead of the 76th Republic Day celebrations, an alert sentry stationed at one of the peripheral observation posts of a Temporary Operating base (TOB) thwarted a terrorist strike in the Moar area of Bhattodi village in Billawar tehsil of Kathua district on Saturday. Moving swiftly, massive search operations were launched by the Indian army in the nearby forested area to track down the footprints of a suspected group of terrorists. Before fleeing the area suspected terrorists also opened fire on the army camp. However, no loss of life/injuries were reported in the brief exchange of firing. Meanwhile, the entire area has been kept in a state of high alert in the run-up to the Republic Day celebrations. The villagers in the area have been advised to keep a close vigil on the movement of the suspected personnel. Additional security forces have been rushed to the area to ensure area domination

and random checking of vehicles at the security checkpoints. According to preliminary reports, at around 1.20 a.m late last night, an alert sentry opened fire after observing suspicious movement of a group of suspected terrorists near TOB Moar. According to these reports, the alleged group of terrorists also fired back leading to a brief exchange of fire for about 20-30 minutes. According to official sources, no injuries were reported in the area. According to official sources, three suspected terrorists are believed to have fled into a

nearby forest. Deputy Inspector General of Police, Jammu, Samba and Kathua Range, Shiv Kumar Sharma, visited the main venues of the Republic Day functions in Jammu, Samba and Kathua to take stock of the security arrangements. To ensure peaceful conduct of the Republic Day celebrations, a multi-layered security grid has been beefed up across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. According to police, elaborate security arrangements have been made in Srinagar and Jammu to ensure peaceful conduct of the celebrations at both the main venues.

## US SUPREME COURT PAVES WAY...

From page 1

In its charge-sheet, the Mumbai police officials had said that they had found several documents which indicated that Rana was not only a co-conspirator along with incarcerated Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, but that he actively participated in the conspiracy behind the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai. He had helped Headley get an Indian tourist visa based on fake documents, that allegedly provided logistical support to the Lashkar-e-Taiba for the 26/11 attacks and that there was evidence in the form of an email sent

by Headley to Rana. At the time of filing a supplementary charge-sheet against Rana, Special public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam said that he would present before the court some "incriminating material" the crime branch had gathered during its investigation against the accused, and seek a non-bailable warrant against him. He said he had a "catalogue of evidence" against Rana whose name was first revealed by the US national David Headley. Headley, who was the 26/11 conspirator in the 26/11 terror strike case, had turned an approver in the

trial of key 26/11 conspirator Zaibuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal trial in December 2015 after the Mumbai court pardoned him in the case. In May 2023, the Magistrate Judge, US District Court of California, Judge Jacqueline Chooljian had ordered the extradition of Rana in the 26/11 attacks case. However, another US court on August 18 stayed the extradition of Rana. "The extradition of Rana to India is stayed pending the conclusion of his appeal before the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit," Judge Fischer had said in the order issued on August 18, 2023.

## India-Indonesia sets new pace to bilateral ties

From page 1

An agreement signed between India and Indonesia on Saturday in the maritime security sphere will further strengthen cooperation in crime prevention, search and rescue and capacity building, Modi said. He said both sides talked on the need to diversify the trade basket and market access to boost the overall economic ties. "We decided to strengthen cooperation in areas like FinTech, artificial intelligence, internet of things and digital public infrastructure," the prime

minister noted. He also said that both sides laid stress on cooperation in maritime security, cyber security, counter-terrorism and decriminalisation. In the talks, the Indian side also welcomed Indonesia's BRICS membership. In his remarks, the Indonesian leader described the talks as "very frank" and said both sides have agreed to expand cooperation in many key sectors of common interest. "I have given directions to our officials that we need to accelerate the economic partnership with India," Subianto said.

## Government announce Padma Awards

From page 1

As many as 113 persons were awarded Padma Shri including 30 people in the unsung heroes category. A 100-year old freedom fighter from Goa, a Dhak player from West Bengal who trained 150 women in the male-dominated field and India's first woman puppeteers are among 30 unsung heroes who were awarded Padma Shri, a government statement said on

Saturday. Libia Lobo Sardesai, who played an important role in Goa's freedom movement, cofounded an underground radio station -- 'Voz da Liberdade (Voice of Freedom)' -- in a forested area in 1955 to rally people against the Portuguese rule. Also among the awardees is Gokul Chandra Dey, a 57-year old Dhak player from West Bengal who broke the gender stereotype by training 150 women in the male-

dominated field. A vocal advocate of woman empowerment, 82-year old Sally Holkar transformed once dying Maheshwari craft and founded Handloom school in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, to give training in traditional weaving techniques. Born in America and Inspired by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar's legacy, she devoted five decades of her life to revitalise 300-year-old weaving legacy.

## Clean Yamana in three years, metro rides for youth...

From page 1

He also announced that the 13,000 shops in Delhi which are sealed will be reopened. "We have worked with lawyers to find a legal path to reopen them. We will create a judicial authority and reopen these shops within six months to resume operations." Refugee colonies that have been established since 1947, such as Rajendra Nagar, Lajpat Nagar, and Kingsway Camp, currently have people on lease; they cannot sell or buy the land. We will grant ownership rights to all these refugees who have land on lease in these colonies in the first Cabinet meeting," Shah added. The Home Minister also announced the establishment of a Workers Welfare Board in Delhi, which will ensure that all workers have life insurance

coverage of up to 10 lakh and accident insurance of up to 5 lakh. Additionally, their children will receive advantages. "We will apply the same formula for textile workers. We will provide Rs 10,000 as assistance to workers, and for registered workers, we will offer loans up to 3 lakh to enhance skills and businesses," he said. The Home Minister promised to provide 50,000 government jobs to the youth of Delhi in a transparent way without any corruption in addition to creating 20 lakh self-employment opportunities. The government, if voted to power, will provide Rs 4,000 every year in National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) to needy students. The party also promised to complete the phase- IV of the

Delhi metro soon and provide buses and metro round the clock. "Through an investment of 20,000 crore, we will develop an integrated public transport network and convert 13,000 buses into electric buses, making Delhi a 100 per cent electric bus city under the BJP government," he said. He also underlined that to promote tourism, they will collaborate with the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments to create a Mahabharata corridor. "We will develop the Yamuna Riverfront, similar to the Sabarmati Riverfront. I would like to invite Kejriwal to join us after three years of our government to take a dip in the Yamuna with his family. We will end manual scavenging 100 per cent and eliminate this inhumane practice completely," he said.

Upon the 'Ayushman Bharat Scheme' which has been a flash point between the Centre and AAP ruled Delhi government, the minister added that as soon the party forms government, in the first Cabinet meeting only, they will implement the Centre's scheme. The BJP also announced Rs 10 lakh as life insurance for accredited journalists and lawyers and Rs 10 lakh to them for health and accident insurance. Shah reaffirmed that the BJP would not halt ongoing welfare initiatives for the poor in Delhi. The party has already announced several poll promises in the first and second part of the manifesto. In part 1 of its 'Sankalp Patra', the BJP promised to open an Atal Canteen for people, free cylinders for poor women on Holi and Diwali and Rs 2500

for women in the national capital. For senior citizens, the BJP announced Rs 2500 per month and Rs 3000 for widows and Divyang people. The saffron party said that an Atal canteen will be opened in Jhuggis and pregnant women will be given Rs 21,000 for their health welfare and six 'Poshan Kit' (Nutrition Kit). In part 2, the party promised Rs 15,000 to youth for exams and free education for needy students from Kindergarten (KG) to Post Graduation (PG), in Delhi if voted to power. As per the announcement, BJP will provide free education 'from KG to PG' to needy students in government education institutes only. Delhi will vote on February 5 while the counting is scheduled to take place on February 8.

## Modi, Rahul features in AAP list of corrupt leaders

From page 1

Rahul had previously alleged that Kejriwal was following PM Modi's "strategy of propaganda and false promises" while failing to address rising pollution, corruption, and inflation in the capital. On another occasion, he charged that both the Prime Minister and the AAP chief do not want marginalised groups, such as Dalits and tribals, to receive their due. Congress leader Ajay Maken, who previously labelled Kejriwal "anti-national," and Sandeep Dikshit, the son of Sheila Dikshit contesting against the AAP supremo in the New Delhi constituency, also appear on the poster.

Meanwhile, Delhi Congress on Saturday approached the Election Commission of India with a complaint of a "defamatory poster" on social media uploaded by AAP against its leaders. According to the complaint, the ruling party in Delhi targeted its former president Rahul Gandhi along with other leaders. "This is to bring to your kind notice that on Saturday, AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) on its authorised X handle has posted a defamatory picture against various senior Congress Leaders - Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi, AICC treasurer Ajay Maken, and Sandip Dikshit," it read. The post was headlined "Ek akela padega sab par bhaari,"

and bore a picture of Arvind Kejriwal with the caption 'Kejriwal ki imandari,' and those of Congress leaders beneath his, captioned "sare beimano par padegi bhaar," the complaint read. "The post itself is in violation of the Model Code of Conduct as well as the provisions of Representation of Peoples Act 1951. Furthermore Kejriwal has been projected as an honest man and targeting senior Congress leaders such as Gandhi, Maken, and Dikshit are dishonest people. "It is submitted that the said post is baseless and without any authenticity thereby trying to malign the reputation of senior Congress leaders during the election time. The said post is a malicious attempt for political gains," the complaint stated.

From page 1

drinking water entitlements for citizens. Efforts to support marginalised communities, particularly those belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), were also highlighted. Murmu mentioned various initiatives, including pre-matric and post-matric scholarships, national fellowships, and dedicated schemes aimed at the socio-economic development of these communities, such as the Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan. The President's address underscored the government's commitment to fostering

inclusive growth and redefining governance standards in the country, creating a vision for a more equitable and prosperous future for all citizens. She emphasised that this occasion is a collective celebration of joy and pride for all citizens and remarked that while 75 years may seem like a brief moment in the life of a nation, it has been a significant period for India, marked by the revival of its long-dormant spirit and its journey to reclaim its rightful status among the world's civilisations. Reflecting on India's historical journey, she urged citizens to

remember the brave souls who sacrificed their lives for the nation's freedom, highlighting the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda, whose contributions to the freedom movement are now receiving due recognition. The President praised the early 20th-century freedom fighters for uniting the nation in a well-organised independence movement and credited iconic figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Babasaheb Ambedkar for helping India rediscover its democratic values. "Justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity are not just modern concepts; they have always

been integral to our civilisational heritage," she asserted, noting that skeptics of the Constitution's future were proven wrong. Murmu highlighted the inclusive nature of the Constituent Assembly, which represented diverse communities across the nation, including 15 women members who played pivotal roles in shaping the country's democratic framework. "When women's equality was a distant goal in many parts of the world, Indian women were actively engaged in the nation's destiny," she said. The Constitution, according to the President, has evolved into

a living document that serves as the foundation of India's collective identity and has guided the nation's progress over the past 75 years. Shifting focus to present-day advancements, she highlighted the government's emphasis on physical infrastructure development, which has laid the groundwork for sustained growth. She commended the innovative use of technology in finance, noting that digital payment systems and direct benefit transfers have enhanced inclusion and transparency in the economy. The health of the banking system has improved due to

reforms like the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, which significantly reduced non-performing assets in commercial banks. Looking towards the future, the President underscored the importance of education in shaping the next generation. The government has increased investments in the education sector, resulting in substantial improvements in learning quality and digital inclusion, especially in regional languages. Murmu noted that women teachers have played a crucial role in this educational transformation, with over 60 percent of new teachers being women

As India marches confidently towards the future, the President affirmed that the dreams of today's youth, particularly young women, will shape the nation by the time it celebrates a century of independence. She expressed hope that future generations will recognise the pivotal role of the Constitution in guiding their journey. Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, she reiterated the importance of morality in governance and civic life, stating, "If Swaraj was not meant to civilize us, it would be nothing worth." The President called for a renewed commitment to Gandhiji's ideals of truth, nonviolence, and compassion - not just towards fellow humans but also towards nature.

## President Murmu bats ONOE

# 22 police personnel from C'garh to be feted on R-Day

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
RAIPUR

As many as 22 police personnel, a Home Guard and a pharmacist from Chhattisgarh will be felicitated with Gallantry and Service Medals on the occasion of the Republic Day, an official statement said on Saturday.

Of the 22 police personnel, 11 will get the Medal for Gallantry, 10 for President's Meritorious Service and one for Medal for Distinguished Service.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Anju Kumari, Inspector Sanjay Potam, Sub-Inspector Chaitram Gurupanch, Head Constables



Budhram Korsa (posthumously), Hemla Nandu and Pyaras Minj and a Constable Manoj Punem, all posted in Dantewada district, will get Gallantry Medal for their exemplary courage during the anti-Naxal

operations in June 2021, December 2021 and March 2022.

DSP Kumari is the first female police officer of Chhattisgarh who will be feted with Gallantry Medal.

Inspector Potam is going to get the Gallantry Medal for the third time.

Also, Inspector Lalji Sinha and Bhuneshwar Sahu will get the Gallantry Award.

Besides this, Mahesh Ram Sahu, Inspector (Special Branch), Police Headquarters, Nava Raipur, will be feted with the President's Medal for distinguished Service.

Gyanendra Kumar Awasthi, Assistant Inspector General of Police (Security) at

PHq in Nava Raipur, Inspector Anil Kumar Kashyap and Harishankar Pratap Singh, Company Commander Naresh Kumar Paikra, Inspector Wali Mohammad Sheikh, Assistant Sub-Inspector Samaiya Chippanpalli, Head Constables Sushil Kumar Sriwas, Tularam Churendra and Harish Chandra Markam and Constable Sushil Kumar Choubey are those who will be feted with Medal for their distinguished service.

Home Guard Mahesh Kumar Mishra and Dhal Singh Kosre, pharmacist, grade-II, will also be feted meritorious and correctional services respectively.

## BJP seeks suggestions for poll manifesto

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
RAIPUR

The BJP in Chhattisgarh has sought suggestions from public to prepare their manifesto for the upcoming urban body elections.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said on his X handle on Saturday that the resolution for development will be made a reality through the suggestions of the people. He said that the expectations of the people will be prioritised.

He shared the WhatsApp number 9111014400 and e m a i l : morsujhav@bjpcg.com, for people to send their suggestions.

## Tigress found dead in Achanakmar Tiger Reserve



**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
RAIPUR

A five-year-old tigress was killed by another big cat at Achanakmar Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh's Mungeli district, a forest official said on Saturday.

The carcass of the tigress was found in a forest patch under the tiger reserve when a forest guard was patrolling the area, the official said.

Senior forest officials were informed by him and a team of

veterinarians conducted a post-mortem later on.

The official said, "Prima facie, it seems like the big cat died in a fight with another tigress."

The post-mortem revealed teeth marks on the neck, ruptured trachea, shrinkage of lungs, and scratch marks all over the body, which could have been caused in an attack by another tiger."

"However, further investigation is underway", he added.

## Polling staff felicitated to mark National Voters' Day

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
RAIPUR

Polling staff in Chhattisgarh were honoured on Saturday to mark National Voters' Day for their exemplary work in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Chief Electoral Officer Reena Babasaheb Kangale and State Election Commissioner Ajay Singh felicitated the polling personnel at the main event in Raipur. Chairperson of Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission Rita Shandilya was the chief guest.

Kangale remarked that awareness among women voters had increased.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, 1024 women voters exercised their franchise as



compared to 1000 men, she said.

Increasing the participation of women in elections is a matter of pride for all of us, she said.

Shandilya said that through voting, we shape the future of our country and decide the direction of

development. Therefore, all citizens should exercise their franchise and contribute to development.

Raigarh Collector Kartikeya Goel received the best District Election Officer award for achieving the highest voter turnout of 81.66 percent. Dantewada and Durg

Collectors Mayank Chaturvedi and Richa Prakash Chaudhary were honoured for increasing the voter turnouts by 10.39 and 2.48 percent respectively, and Raipur Collector Gaurav Kumar Singh received a special award for excellent training of polling parties.

Best National Level Master Trainer Awards went to US Agarwal, Pranav Singh, Pulak Bhattacharya, Sunil Sharma, Geeta Diwan, Dr. K.R.R. Singh, and Ujjwal Porwal. On this occasion, voters across the state were administered an oath to exercise their franchise in all elections. Oath-taking ceremonies were held in government offices and educational institutions.

**AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED**  
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**AUCTION NOTICE**

Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis. The details of the cases are as under.

Name of Borrowers/Co-Borrowers/Guarantors/Mortgagors	Dues As on	Date & Amount of 13(2) Demand Notice	Date of Possession	Description of Property	Reserve Price For Property	Earnest Money For Property	Date & Time of Auction	Place of Tender Submission, Tender Open & Auction at Aavas Financiers Ltd.
ABHISHEK BANCHHOR, HEMA V BANCHHOR GUARANTOR : TIKESH KUMAR BENCHHOR (AC NO.) LNRAI00720-210153036 & LNRAI09522-230226264	Rs. 15,19,661.00/- & Rs. 11,05,977.00/- DUES AS ON 13 JAN 2025	9 JAN 24 Rs. 1272141/- & Rs. 913066/- DUES AS ON 8 JAN 24	17 OCT 24	PROPERTY PART OF KH. NO.411/44 SITUATED AT MAJUA TEMAREI, PH.NO.115/54, R.N.M. RAIPUR-1, TAHSIL & DISTRICT RAIPUR CHHATTISGARH 492001 AREA-800 SQ.FT.(0.0280HECT.)	Rs. 1932800/-	Rs. 1932800/-	11.00 AM TO 01.00 PM 28 FEB 2025	SHOP NO. 89 & 104 to 109, 1ST FLOOR, D.M. TOWER, RAVABHATA, BILASPUR ROAD, RAIPUR-492331, CHHATTISGARH-INDIA

**Terms & Conditions:** 1) The person, taking part in the tender, will have to deposit his offer in the tender form provided by the AFL which is to be collected from the above branch offices during working hours of any working day, super scribing "Tender Offer for name of the property" on the sealed envelope along with the Cheque/DD/pay order of 10% of the Reserve Price as Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) in favour of AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED payable at Jaipur on/before time of auction during office hours at the above mentioned offices. The sealed envelopes will be opened in the presence of the available interested parties at above mentioned office of AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED The Inter-se bidding, if necessary will also take place among the available bidders. The EMD is refundable if the bid is not successful. 2) The successful bidder will deposit 25% of the bidding amount adjusting the EMD amount as initial deposit immediately or within 24hrs after the fall of the hammer towards the purchase of the asset. The successful bidder failing to deposit the said 25% towards initial payment, the entire EMD deposited will be forfeited & balance amount of the sale price will have to be deposited within 30 days after the confirmation of the sale by the secured creditor; otherwise his initial payment deposited amount will be forfeited. 3) The Authorised officer has absolute right to accept or reject any bid or adjourn/postpone the sale process without assigning any reason therefore. If the date of tender depositing or the date of tender opening is declared as holiday by Government, then the auction will be held on next working day. 4) For inspection and interested parties who want to know about the procedure of tender may contact AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED 201,202, 1Ind Floor, South End Square, Mansarovar Industrial Area, jaipur-302020 or Manoj Kumar - 8130291423 or respective branch during office hours. Note: This is also a 15/30 days notice under Rule 9(1)(8)(6) to the Borrowers/Guarantors/Mortgagor of the above said loan accounts about tender inter se bidding sale on the above mentioned date. The property will be sold, if their out standing dues are not repaid in full.

Place : Jaipur Date : 26-01-2025 Authorised Officer Aavas Financiers Limited

**76 गणतंत्र दिवस**  
26 जनवरी

की आप सभी को  
**हार्दिक बधाई एवं शुभकामनाएं...**

आईये, गणतंत्र दिवस के पावन अवसर पर सर्वव्यापी, सर्वस्पर्शी और सर्वसमावेशी भारत के निर्माण के लिए हम सब अद्भुत, आत्मनिर्भर और अतुल्य छत्तीसगढ़ के निर्माण का शुभ संकल्प लें।

**जय हिंद, जय छत्तीसगढ़**

**भावना बोहरा**  
विधायक पंडरिया विधानसभा

**विनीत : समस्त भाजपा पदाधिकारी एवं कार्यकर्ता, पंडरिया विधानसभा**

**AM/NS INDIA** ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India

**RE/MAGINEERING**  
सशक्त भारत का उज्ज्वल भविष्य,  
स्मार्टर स्टील्स के साथ।

आज हम भारत के संप्रभुता का जश्न मनाते हैं जिसे स्थापित करने में कई दूरदर्शी लोगों का योगदान रहा है। एक ऐसा देश जो आदर्शों, दूरदर्शिता, कल्पना और स्टील समान आंतरिक शक्ति से बना है। सबके उज्ज्वल भविष्य के लिए, AM/NS India अपने स्मार्टर स्टील्स से इस मजबूत नींव को और मजबूत बनाने के लिए प्रतिबद्ध है।

**76वें गणतंत्र दिवस की आपको ढेर सारी शुभकामनाएँ!**

**SMARTER STEELS BRIGHTER FUTURES**

**#CelebratingTheSteelWithin**

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# R-Day Parade: India to display military might, cultural heritage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is set to showcase its military prowess and rich cultural heritage and display a symbolic confluence of 'virasat' and 'vikas' on Kartavya Path here to mark the 76th Republic Day on January 26 when the nation will also commemorate the platinum jubilee of the enactment of the Constitution.

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will be the chief guest on the occasion. A 352-member marching and band contingent from Indonesia will be participating in the parade.

Subianto will be the fourth Indonesian president to attend India's Republic Day celebrations. Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, was the chief guest at India's first Republic Day celebrations in 1950.

While 75 years of the Constitution is the focus of celebrations this year, the theme for the tableaux is 'Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas'.

Sixteen tableaux from across states and Union Territories and 15 from central ministries, departments and organisations will roll down the ceremonial boulevard on Sunday.

The country will display its military prowess by showcasing some of the cutting-edge defence platforms including BrahMos, Pinaka and Akash, with the Army's Battle Surveillance System 'Sanjay' and DRDO's surface-to-surface tactical missile 'Pralay' set to register their presence in the ceremonial parade for the first time.

T-90 'Bhishma' tanks Sarath (infantry carrying vehicle BMP-II), Short Span Bridging System 10m, Nag Missile System, multi-barrel rocket launcher system 'Agnibaan' and 'Bajrang' (light specialist vehicle) will also be part of the parade, officials said on Thursday.

The parade will see many other firsts as well, such as the tri-services tableau that will depict the spirit of 'jointness' among the armed forces.

The tableau would display a battlefield scenario demonstrating a synchronised operation in land, water and air with the indigenous Arjun battle tank, Tejas fighter aircraft and advanced light helicopter, according to the Defence Ministry.

The theme of the tri-services tableau will be 'Shashakt aur Surakshit Bharat' (Strong and



Secure India). Besides, the DRDO will present a tableau with the theme 'Raksha Kavach' -- multi-layer protection against multi-domain threats, officials said.

President Droupadi Murmu will deliver an address to the nation on the eve of the Republic Day.

This January 26 will carry extra significance as India's Constitution, which came into effect on this historic day in 1950, completes 75 years.

The Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949.

Before the parade, Prime



Minister Narendra Modi will lead the nation in paying tribute to the country's martyrs by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial.

The parade will begin in the morning with the National Salute and will continue for 90 minutes, reflecting the journey

of India's heritage and growth. C-130J Super Hercules, C-295, C-17 Globemaster, P-8I, MiG-29 and Su-30, among other aircraft, will also take part in the celebrations.

The ceremonial parade will be heralded by 300 cultural artistes playing 'Sare Jahan Se Achha' on

musical instruments representing different parts of the country, according to the Defence Ministry.

Lt Gen Bhavnish Kumar, General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area will be the Parade Commander, while Parade Second-in-Command will be Chief of Staff (COS), Delhi Area, Maj Gen Sumit Mehta.

Maj Gen Mehta said the event will showcase India's military prowess with a number of cutting-edge platforms and a range of vibrant tableaux depicting the country's heritage.

Two Param Vir Chakra awardees -- both Kargil war heroes -- and one Ashok Chakra awardee will be part of the parade, he said.

The flypast will feature 40 Indian Air Force aircraft and three Dornier aircraft of the Indian Coast Guard.

The Indian Army will be represented by a mounted column, eight mechanised columns, and six marching contingents, officials said. The column will be represented by the 61 Cavalry. The marching columns will consist of contingents from the Brigade of the Guards contingent, Jat Regiment, Garhwal Rifles Regiment, J&K Light

Infantry (JAKLI) regiment and a contingent of the Corps of Engineers.

Capt Ritika Khareta will be the contingent commander of a marching contingent of the Army's Corps of Signals. The officer is the only woman member of her contingent and the rest are men.

There will also be a motorcycle display by daredevils of the Corps of Signals. Capt Ashish Rana will be its leader and Capt Dimple Singh Bhati, the second in line.

"I will be riding a ladder on a motorcycle and give a salute to the president during the parade," Bhati said soon after the full dress rehearsal on January 23.

Capt Rana said Capt Bhati would become the "first woman officer" from the Army to give the ladder-borne salute to the president in the history of Republic Day celebrations.

States that will display their tableaux during the 76th Republic Day Parade include Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Delhi and Chandigarh will showcase them among the Union Territories.

## CCPA imposes ₹3 Lakh penalty on Vision IAS for misleading UPSC exam advertisements

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 3 lakh on Vision IAS for deceptive advertising about its students' success in the civil services examination. The authority found that Vision IAS deliberately withheld specific course information, creating a misleading impression about its success rates in such exams, a statement by Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said.

The institute's advertisement claimed "10 in Top 10 selections in CSE 2020 from various programs of Vision IAS" and prominently displayed successful candidates and pictures. Vision IAS mentioned the course opted by AIR 1-UPSC CSE 2020 i.e. GS Foundation Batch Classroom Student but



deliberately concealed information regarding the courses chosen by the other nine successful candidates.

This concealment created misleading impression that the remaining nine candidates were also enrolled in the 'GS Foundation Batch Classroom Student' course which was not

true. Out of remaining 9 candidates- 1 took foundation courses, 6 took test series related to Pre and Mains stage and 2 took Abhyaas test. Further, CCPA examined the digital profiles and fee receipts submitted by Vision IAS and discovered that the Foundation course is the most expensive,

costing ₹1,40,000/-, whereas the Abhyaas one-time prelims mock test costs only Rs 750. As per the available information, Rank 1 enrolled in the Foundation Course 2018 (Classroom/Offline), and Rank 8 enrolled in the Online Foundation Course 2015 of the Institute. CCPA found that Rank 2, Rank 3, Rank 5, Rank 7, Rank 8, and Rank 10 of UPSC CSE 2020 enrolled in the GS Mains Test Series. This comes into play in Mains examination i.e. after clearing prelims examination which is a screening test wherein approximately only 1% students able to clear the said stage, making it the toughest stage with the most competition.

The above-mentioned students took GS Mains test series which is one of the various components of the Mains examination which implies that the afore-

mentioned candidates cleared the prelims and Interview stages on their own, without any contribution of opposite party. Additionally, Rank 4 and Rank 9 of UPSC CSE 2020 enrolled in Abhyaas test, a mock test for the Prelims exam. Rank 6 enrolled in the GS Prelims Test Series. This implies that the above-mentioned candidates cleared the Mains and Interview stages on their own, without any contribution of opposite party. By deliberately concealing about the specific course opted by each of the successful candidates, the Vision IAS made it look like all the courses offered by it had the same success rate for the consumers, which was not right. These facts are important for the potential students to decide on the courses that may be suitable for them and should not have been concealed in the advertisement. CCPA has observed

that several coaching institutes use the same successful candidate's names and photographs in their advertisements while deliberately concealing important information about specific course opted by them to create a deception that the successful candidates were regular classroom students at coaching institute or were students of several courses offered in the advertisement.

The commission imposed a penalty to protect 'young and impressionable aspirants' from potentially deceptive marketing practices, the statement said.

The CCPA has so far issued 46 notices to various coaching institutes for misleading advertisements and unfair trade practice. It has imposed a penalty of Rs 74.60 lakh on 23 coaching institutes and directed them to discontinue the misleading advertisements.

## 942 police personnel awarded gallantry and service medals



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 942 police, fire and civil defence personnel have been awarded different categories of gallantry and service medals on the eve of the Republic Day, according to a government statement issued on Saturday.

These include 95 gallantry medals.

The awardees include the personnel of police, fire, home guard and civil defence and those working in correctional services, the Union home ministry said.

Among the gallantry award winners, 28 deployed in Left Wing Extremism-affected areas, 28 in the Jammu and Kashmir region, three in the northeast and 36 posted in other regions are being awarded for their gallant action, it said.

Of the 101 President's Medals for Distinguished Service (PSM), 85 have been awarded to police personnel, five to fire services person-

nel, seven to civil defence and home guard service and four to correctional service. Among the 746 Medals for Meritorious Service (MSM), 634 have been awarded to police service, 37 to fire service, 39 to civil defence and home guard service and 36 to correctional service, the statement said.

The Medal for Gallantry (GM) is awarded for a rare conspicuous act of gallantry and a conspicuous act of gallantry respectively in saving life and property or in preventing crime or arresting criminals, the risk incurred being estimated with due regard to the obligations and duties of the officer concerned.

The President's Medal for Distinguished Service (PSM) is awarded for a special distinguished record in service and the Medal for Meritorious Service (MSM) is awarded for valuable service characterised by resource and devotion to duty.

## NHRC admits petition on mysterious deaths in J and K's Rajouri

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The NHRC has admitted a petition filed by a Jammu-based RTI activist over the mysterious deaths of 17 people from three Scheduled Tribe families in a remote village in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district during the past one-and-a-half months.

In his petition to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Raman Sharma sought the statutory body's intervention to ensure "justice, relief and proactive measures to safeguard the rights and dignity of citizens in vulnerable areas".

17 people, including 13 children, died under mysterious circumstances in Badhaal village

between December 7 and January 19. The patients complained of fever, pain, intense sweating, nausea and loss of consciousness before dying within days of their admission to hospitals.

Investigations and samples collected empirically indicated the incidents were not due to a communicable disease of bacterial or viral origin and that there was no public health angle, prompting police to set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) after certain neurotoxins were found in the samples of the deceased. A central inter-ministerial team has also joined the multi-agency probe to unravel the mystery behind the deaths.

"The families and community of Badhaal village urgently need support.

## Congress slams Election Commission on National voters' day, alleging erosion of institutional integrity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Saturday hit out at the Election Commission on Saturday, saying the "self-congratulation" on National Voters' Day would not obscure the fact that the poll panel as it has been functioning makes a "mockery" of the Constitution and is an insult to the voters themselves.

The opposition party also alleged that over the past decade, the professionalism and independence of the Election Commission has been "severely compromised" by the duo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. In a social media post, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "Even as we celebrate National Voters' Day, the cease-



less erosion of the institutional integrity of the Election Commission of India, in the last ten years, is a matter of grave national concern."

"Our Election Commission of India and our Parliamentary Democracy, despite widespread doubts, over the decades, turned out to be impartial, independent and ideal to emulate globally," he said. The realisation of universal adult suffrage, extending to

the grassroots levels of panchayat and urban local bodies embodies the vision of our founders, he said. "However, complacency in upholding democratic processes can inadvertently pave the way for authoritarianism. Therefore, safeguarding the independence of our institutions is essential to preserve our democracy and uphold the constitutional principles that underpin it," Kharge said.

The National Voters' Day has been celebrated for the past 15 years to mark the inception of the Election Commission (EC) on January 25, 1950, a day before India became a republic. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "There will be a lot of self-congratulation today but that will not obscure the fact that the Election Commission as it

has been functioning makes a mockery of the Constitution and is an insult to the voters themselves."

"Today has been celebrated as National Voters Day since 2011 to mark the day on which the Election Commission came into being 75 years ago on Jan 25th, 1950," he noted. The Election Commission is a Constitutional body and its first Chairman was the legendary Sukumar Sen whose role in establishing the foundations of our electoral democracy was crucial, Ramesh said. "He was the sole Chief Election Commissioner for eight years. His Report on the First General Elections in India 1951-52 is a classic. But the preparations of the draft electoral roll for the first elections had been completed before Sen took over," he said.

## 31 CBI officers awarded Police medals on 76th Republic Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Officers who supervised probes into the Manipur riots, online trading scams, big-ticket corruption and the post-poll violence in West Bengal are among 31 officers awarded police medals on the occasion of 76th Republic Day.

Six officers have been awarded the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service while 25 received the Police Medal for Meritorious Service, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said in a statement.

CBI Joint Director Ghanshyam Upadhyay was awarded the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service.

He supervised the probes into the post-poll violence in West Bengal, Manipur riots, Commonwealth Games corruption, land for jobs scam against Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family, 2024 NEET irregularities, important cases related to the Assam Ponzi scam, besides leading several complex special



crime cases. Joint Director (North East Region) Datla Sreenivasa Varma, who is supervising the probe into the online trading scam of Assam, and now post-poll violence cases of West Bengal and further investigation in the Manipur riots, has also been awarded the medal.

Assistant Inspector General (CBI, Policy Division) Tejpal Singh, Deputy Superintendent of Police Naresh Kumar, Sub-Inspector Bhani Singh Rathore and Assistant Sub-Inspector Aikodan Balakrishnan are also among

the awardees. The Police Medal for Meritorious Service was awarded to 25 officers, including Joint Director Rajiv Ranjan -- who supervised the illegal mining case of Jharkhand involving an alleged close aide of the chief minister and the Saradha scam, among other corruption cases. Deputy Director (Admin and Personnel) Kuldeep Dwivedi -- who supervised the probe into the Madhya Pradesh nursing scam and big-ticket corruption involving the seizure of huge cash -- also received the medal.

## CEC Rajiv Kumar urges parties to avoid disruptive campaigning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Saturday requested political parties to avoid "disruptive campaigning" and "fake narratives", saying it might cause disillusionment among youngsters regarding the electoral process. He was addressing the 15th National Voters' Day event here in the presence of President Droupadi Murmu, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and representatives of political parties.

At the same time, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kumar assured political parties that the Election Commission (EC) would respond in writing to concerns flagged by them on the electoral process and the suggestions made by them to improve the system. His remarks came on a day the

opposition Congress hit out at the EC, saying its "self-congratulation" on the occasion would not obscure the fact that the poll panel's functioning had made a "mockery" of the Constitution and insulted the voters. Kumar also flagged the "dangerous trend" all over the world of misinformation and fake narratives, calling them the single-biggest threat to democratic processes worldwide.

"I would also urge them to avoid disruptive campaigning so that our youth do not get disillusioned and move away from the electoral process," Kumar said.

"We assure them, with all respect and humility, that whenever they ask any question or give any suggestion to improve the electoral process, we will look into it with all sincerity, make improvements and also give them a written response. But we must avoid fake narratives, I would like to add," he added.

## Haryana minister reviews progress of global city project on Dwarka expressway

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Industry and Commerce, Environment, Forest and Wildlife Minister Rao Narbir Singh chaired a review meeting and visited the proposed Global City on Dwarka Expressway on Saturday.

During the visit, officers associated with the project were also accompanied and informed the minister about the progress made so far about the project.

Cabinet Minister Rao Narbir Singh said that Gurugram is a city of possibilities. On one hand, the world's largest jungle safari project is going to come to fruition, while on the other hand, the work of developing the country's first global city is also going on at a rapid pace. Taking Gurugram's global identity to new heights is the priority of the Haryana government.

"Gurugram city remains a centre of attraction for investors from all over the world. With the devel-



opment of a global city, the investment possibilities here will increase. This global city is being developed on 1003 acres of land between NPR and CPR in Gurugram. In which a detailed plan of large and small plots has been made," he said. The minister said that the work of its first phase will be completed by the end of next year.

"Fortune 500 companies of the world are already in touch with the state government with interest in investing in the global city. With the quick success of new

residential and industrial development projects in the district and the constantly improving connectivity, the possibilities of expansion of development in the entire area of the district are stronger, which will bring a change in the social status of the people," he added.

Global City would be a world-class futuristic city being planned in Gurugram on Dwarka Expressway, based on live, work, and play at its core and a transit-oriented walk-to-work based future-ready and environmentally resilient design.

The officials informed him that the city has multiple access from National Highway-48, Pataudi Road NH 352W and Dwarka Expressway and has a mixed land use of 56.08% commercial, 40.05% residential, 2.73% institutional and 1.14% utility with an average FAR of 3 (ranging from 1.5 to 12.5) with approximately 6 km long green corridor to promote healthy living with tranquil Artificial Lakes.

# First Constitution of Akhand Hindu Rashtra to be unveiled at Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The first constitution of the proposed Akhand Hindu Rashtra has been finalized and is set to be unveiled on the auspicious occasion of Vasant Panchami on February 3 during the Maha Kumbh. The 501-page document has been crafted over 12 months and 12 days by a committee of 25 scholars from North and South India. Drawing inspiration from Ram Rajya, the kingdom of Lord Krishna, Manusmriti, and Chanakya's Arthashastra, the constitution is envisioned as a blueprint for a Hindu Rashtra. Once approved by the four Shankaracharyas, it will be presented to the central government. The drafting committee includes experts from Banaras Hindu University, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, and Central Sanskrit University. According to Swami Anand Swaroop Maharaj, the head of Shambhavi Peeth and patron of the committee, the constitution aims to establish a Hindu Rashtra by 2035. He emphasized that the proposed nation would be a republic founded on the principles of Vasudhaiva



Kutumbakam (the world is one family) and Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah (may all be happy). While elections will determine the nation's leader, the constitution assures that followers of all religions will have the right to live in the country. However, strict measures will be enforced against those involved in anti-national activities.

The draft proposes a unicameral legislature called the Hindu Dharma Parliament, comprising 543 members elected as Dharma MPs. Only followers of Sanatan Dharma and Indian-origin faiths such as Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism will be eligible to vote or contest elections. The voting age is set at 16 years, while candidates must be at least 25 years old and graduates of Vedic Gurukuls. Dharma MPs will receive only basic allowances, such as constituency funding, transportation, and security. They will also be required to submit regular progress reports. Dissatisfied constituents can recall their representatives by filing a no-confidence motion with a minimum of 50,000 signatures. The president of the Hindu Rashtra will be selected by a two-thirds majority of the Dharma Parliament. To qualify, candidates must have expertise in Dharmashastra and Rajashastra, along with five years of practical governance experience. They must also demonstrate leadership skills, knowledge of statecraft, and proficiency in the use of arms. During times of war, the president will lead the armed forces.

# Baba Artatrana claims to heal the incurable with divine touch



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The ongoing Mahakumbh event is a mesmerizing spectacle of faith, devotion, and spirituality, drawing millions of pilgrims and seekers from across the globe. Amid this sea of humanity, the presence of extraordinary spiritual figures adds an almost otherworldly dimension to the event. Among them, Baba Artatrana stands out, cloaked in mystique and reverence, claiming to possess the divine power to cure even the gravest ailments with the touch of his feet. In an atmosphere thick with awe and wonder, long queues of hopeful devotees stretch endlessly, each awaiting the miraculous touch they believe can dispel their suffering. "I have been performing this divine treatment since 2007," Baba Artatrana told ANI, his voice calm yet brimming with conviction. "No food, no drink, no medicines are needed. Just my touch, my voice over the phone, or listening to my mantra on YouTube can cure even the most complex diseases." Baba Artatrana's claims, though extraordinary, have a magnetic pull that captivates thousands. He asserts that his divine touch has a success rate of 99%, a gift he attributes to the blessings of Lord Shiva. "This is Shiva's blessing. With his grace, I can cure even the greatest illnesses in an instant. I don't know why God chose me for such immense power, but I use it as He teaches-to heal," he said, his words sparking wonder and devotion in the hearts of his listeners. The aura around Baba Artatrana deepens when he speaks of his role during the COVID-19 pandemic. With a tone of serene confidence, he claimed, "During the pandemic, I challenged the Odisha government and cured millions of people with a simple touch." His influence extends beyond India's borders, as he shares tales of traveling to foreign lands to spread the benefits of his divine powers.

# Seeking freedom from abuse, two UP women defy norms and marry each other

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ GORAKHPUR

In a courageous act of defiance, two women from Gorakhpur, tired of enduring years of domestic violence from their alcoholic husbands, left their abusive homes behind to marry each other. Kavita and Gunja, also known as Bablu, tied the knot at the Shiva Temple, commonly referred to as Choti Kashi, in Deoria on Thursday evening. The duo, who bonded over shared experiences of physical and emotional abuse, connected via social media and grew close as they offered each other solace. Over time, their relationship blossomed into a source of strength, culminating in their decision to embark on a life together, free from violence. During the simple yet symbolic ceremony, Gunja assumed the role of the groom, performing the traditional Hindu rituals of applying sindoor (vermillion), exchanging garlands, and taking the seven pheras. Kavita, standing resolutely by her side, embraced this new beginning as they vowed to build a peaceful life together. "Our husbands' drinking and abusive behavior left us with no choice but to take control of our lives," Gunja shared after the ceremony. "We decided to leave behind the pain and focus on a future built on love and mutual respect. We plan to settle in Gorakhpur and work to sustain ourselves." The temple priest, Uma Shankar Pandey, who facilitated the ceremony,

described the event as quiet yet significant. "They came, performed their rituals with garlands and sindoor, and left. It was a poignant moment that reflects their determination to escape their pasts," he remarked. Their story has drawn attention to the pervasive issue of domestic violence, which often remains hidden due to fear, stigma, and societal pressures. Lenin Raghuvanshi, a leading human rights activist, lauded their courage. "This act is not just a rejection of abuse; it's a powerful statement against the systemic oppression women face. It underscores the urgent need to address domestic violence and ensure women's safety at home," he said. Experts point out that domestic violence, often fueled by alcoholism, remains a widespread issue in India. Many victims endure years of abuse due to financial dependency and lack of support. Social worker Shabnam Mishra highlighted the broader implications of Kavita and Gunja's decision: "Their story is a testament to how women can reclaim their agency and inspire others to break free from abusive cycles." As Kavita and Gunja embark on this bold new journey, their act of resistance serves as a beacon of hope for countless others trapped in similar circumstances. Their story is not just about personal liberation but a reminder of the need for systemic change to address the scourge of domestic violence.

# Demand for public holidays during Maha Kumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Vishisht BTC Shikshak Welfare Association has requested the Uttar Pradesh government to declare public holidays on the dates of the Shahi Snan during the ongoing Maha Kumbh. In a letter to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the association has sought three days of public holidays for all state employees and teachers to allow them to participate in the holy bath and religious rituals with their families. Santosh Tiwari, the provincial president of the association, and Dilip Chauhan, state secretary of the joint forum, emphasized



the rarity of this Maha Kumbh, which occurs after 144 years. They stated that it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many, as future generations might not witness such an event. The association has urged the state government to consider their demand positively, allowing people to partake in this historic event. Provincial media in-charge Vineet Singh specifically

requested public holidays on significant bathing dates such as Mauni Amavasya, Basant Panchami, and Maghi Purnima so that everyone can take a holy dip at the Maha Kumbh. Demand to Merge DA with Salaries Raised to PM The Indian Public Service Employees Federation (IPSEF) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to announce the merging of 50% dearness allowance (DA) with salaries, as was practiced earlier. IPSEF's national president, VP Mishra, highlighted that when DA exceeds 50% of the salary, it is traditionally merged with the base salary, a practice upheld by all past pay commissions.

# Not only devotees, Maha Kumbh witnesses surge in beggars, many feigning wounds for sympathy

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj is not just a spiritual event for millions of pilgrims but also a magnet for thousands of beggars, many employing creative or deceitful tactics to evoke sympathy and collect alms. At Sangam Ghat, a woman sat near the water's edge, writhing in apparent pain while displaying a deep wound on her hand. With a plate placed before her, she repeatedly raised her injured hand, attracting a steady stream of coins, notes, and even grains from pilgrims. By evening, she packed her grains into a sack with the help of a man and quietly disappeared, her tactics carefully crafted to draw the maximum charity from those moved by the spirit of giving. Pilgrims, however, seem unfazed by the questionable authenticity of such wounds. "When you come to the Kumbh, giving alms is part of the faith," said Shyam Sundar Yadav, a farmer from Hardoi. "Whether the wounds are fake or real is not my concern. My dharma is to give." A Surge in Beggars from Across India

Before the event began, authorities estimated around 7,000 beggars in Prayagraj. Now, their numbers have ballooned to over 50,000 as pilgrims from districts like Pratapgarh, Mirzapur, Chitrakoot, Varanasi, and Kaushambi, as well as states like Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh, flock to the Kumbh. For many, the event represents a rare opportunity to collect alms on a scale impossible elsewhere. "Beggars are a natural part of religious events like this," said Meera Devi, a teacher from Kanpur. "For us, donating to them is a way to earn good karma. If they are lying or deceiving, it is on them, not us." The Mela's prime begging spots include Sangam Ghat, Akshay Vat, Akharas, and the Reclining Hanuman Temple. In these areas, beggars position themselves strategically, occupying fixed spots that they return to daily. At Sangam Nose, where devotees gather for holy dips, over 100 beggars line up to solicit alms. Many display gruesome injuries-often fake. According to locals, these injuries are often crafted using animal fat and other materials to maintain the appearance of



fresh wounds while keeping flies at bay. Pain-relief balms are sometimes applied to create an impression of genuine suffering. These "wounds" are refreshed daily, and the illusion is enough to convince most devotees. Adding to the spectacle are children dressed as deities, drawing particular attention from pilgrims. Eight-year-old Arti (name changed), dressed as Radha near the Hanuman Temple, shared her story. "It takes me an hour to get ready," she said, smiling. "Mummy also dresses like me and does the same work. Yesterday, I earned ₹500." Sushma and her family arrived from Koraon in Prayagraj a week ago, capitalizing on the massive influx of pilgrims. Such stories are common in areas like Sector 20, where thousands of beggars, including children, line the streets. A boy from Jamalpur in Jaunpur revealed that nearly 500 people from his village alone had come to beg at the Kumbh. For some pilgrims, these children are difficult to ignore. "When a child dressed as Radha or Krishna asks for alms, how can you say no?" asked Sunita Verma, a homemaker from Agra. "It feels like giving to God directly." Police Struggles to Control the

Situation The administration has been trying to tackle the surge in beggars. Vehicles frequently patrol key areas, picking up beggars and transporting them to shelters or hospitals. "Every night, the police come and take many of us away," said Sandeep, a disabled beggar near the Hanuman Temple. "But we always return the next day." Vinay Kumar, a senior official overseeing operations, said, "We try to document every beggar we pick up and encourage them to return home, but they keep coming back. The tradition of charity during Kumbh is too strong, and they know they will get alms here." Despite these efforts, beggars persist. Many see the Mela as their best chance to make a living, even if it means enduring repeated evictions. The practice of giving alms during religious events like the Kumbh is deeply ingrained in Indian culture. "Charity during such occasions is an age-old tradition," explained Dr. Dhyananjay Chopra, a professor at Allahabad University and an expert on the Maha Kumbh. "Bathing, meditation, and donation form the triad of

spiritual practices at the Kumbh. This attracts not only genuine beggars but also those who exploit the generosity of devotees." For pilgrims like Ram Narayan Singh, a retired school principal from Ghazipur, the authenticity of beggars is irrelevant. "This is my way of connecting with God," he said. "I don't care if the person is genuinely needy or pretending. My act of giving is what matters." Faith, Generosity, and Deception The Maha Kumbh, a grand spectacle of faith, charity, and devotion, also reveals the complex interplay between spirituality and exploitation. While some beggars genuinely struggle to survive, the prevalence of deceitful tactics raises questions about the morality of exploiting faith. Yet for most devotees, the act of giving remains sacred, a way to fulfill their spiritual duties and earn divine blessings. As the Kumbh continues, the presence of beggars-both genuine and feigned-serves as a stark reminder of the enduring power of faith and the many ways it can be interpreted, celebrated, and, at times, manipulated.

# Jammu and Kashmir police officers honoured for foiling Amarnath yatra terror attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Seven of the 15 Jammu and Kashmir Police officers, including former Kashmir Zone inspector general of police Vijay Kumar, awarded gallantry medals on the eve of Republic Day, played a key role in averting a possible terror attack on the Amarnath Yatra three years ago. The Medal for Gallantry recipients also included Humayun Bhat, a deputy superintendent of police who was one of four officers to lay down their lives



during an encounter with terrorists in south Kashmir's

Kokernag in September 2023. Bhat had been honoured with the Kirti Chakra for extraordinary bravery on the eve of last year's Independence Day. In addition to the 15 gallantry medals, Anand Jain and Nitish Kumar -- two additional directors general of police-rank officers -- received the President's Medal for Distinguished Service while 10 other officers were awarded the Medal for Meritorious Service. During his tenure in

Kashmir as inspector general of police, Kumar generated an input that a group of terrorists were planning to carry out an attack on the annual Amarnath Yatra in June 2022, the officials said on Saturday. On June 14, a small police party headed by Rakesh Balwal, the-then Srinagar senior superintendent of police, under Kumar's supervision, stopped a vehicle at Bemina on the outskirts of the city, leading to an encounter. The officials said two hardcore

terrorists, including a Pakistani, were eliminated during the operation that was conducted without the assistance of the Army, the Central Reserve Police Force, and intelligence agencies. Kumar, who was later promoted to additional director general of police and recently transferred to the AGMUT (Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory) cadre's Delhi segment, Balwal and five other police personnel, received the gallantry medal for their bravery.

Kumar, a standout officer whose service record includes a unique combination of expertise in anti-terrorist, anti-Maoist and law-and-order operations within and outside Jammu and Kashmir, has played a significant role in the fight to counter terror threats and maintain peace post the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha congratulated the officers on their achievement.

"Congratulations to police personnel and officers who have been conferred with the Medal for Gallantry, President's Medal for Distinguished Service and Medal for Meritorious Service on the occasion of Republic Day 2025," Sinha said in a post on X. He also paid tribute to selection-grade fireman Satish Kumar Raina, who was posthumously conferred with the Medal for Gallantry for sacrificing his life while performing his duties during a fire incident in Jammu's Prem Nagar area.

# YSRCP leader V Vijayasai Reddy resigns as RS member

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

YSRCP leader V Vijayasai Reddy on Saturday resigned as a member of Rajya Sabha and announced he was quitting politics due to "personal reasons", the fourth party MP to short-terminate their terms in the Upper House since its rout in the 2024 Assembly elections. He met Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar at his residence and submitted his resignation.

Reddy, a chartered accountant by profession who represented Andhra Pradesh in the House, later told reporters he still had three-and-half-years left in his second six-year term, but he was resigning due to personal reasons. He said he would be focussing on agriculture and delivering guest lectures at universities henceforth. "I have submitted my resignation to the vice president and the chairman of the Rajya Sabha, and he has accepted it,"

Reddy told reporters after meeting Dhankhar. "I, hereby, voluntarily resign from my seat in the Rajya Sabha with immediate effect as a member representing Andhra Pradesh from the Yuvajana SRMika Rythu Congress party (YSRCP). Requesting you to kindly accept my resignation," his short resignation letter to the VP stated. In a post on X, Reddy also shared pictures of his meeting with the vice president "Today, I

submitted my resignation to the Hon'ble Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar Ji. Hon'ble Chairman of Rajya Sabha is pleased to accept the resignation with immediate effect duly recording the proceedings," he posted. Reddy said that before accepting his resignation, the vice president asked him specifically what are the reasons he was submitting his papers, and if it was voluntary or is there any coercion or undue influence.

# AP CM Chandrababu Naidu defends Davos Visit to WEF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Saturday a visit to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, is not just about inking agreements but networking with influential people to gain insights into the direction the world is headed. Addressing a press conference on his recent

visit to Davos, the Chief Minister brushed aside criticism from some quarters, including YSRCP, that the high-level delegation led by him returned empty-handed and focused solely on Naidu's self-promotion, while other states managed to forge deals. "Davos is a place for networking. The whole world goes there for four days. Country heads and

ministers attend. Not only governments, but all corporations will be there," said the CM, adding that there is a myth about Davos, where people only consider the number of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed and the amount of money flowing in the form of investments. According to Naidu, the WEF in the Swiss resort town of Davos brings

together the best minds for knowledge enhancement and learning the latest trends. The TDP supremo asserted that he spoke to several key people during the summit, including Microsoft founder Bill Gates, and observed that meeting all of them in their home countries would be a herculean task, involving visas, appointments, and several other challenges.





# Family Drama on Stage

Shailesh Lodha's theatre debut delivers humour, emotion and family chaos, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



When I first heard that Shailesh Lodha was making his debut on the theatre stage in *Dad's Girlfriend*, I was intrigued. Known for his wit and charming presence on television, particularly for his role in *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah*, Lodha's transition to theatre seemed like an exciting challenge. His comedic timing and subtle humour have made him a household name, but how would that translate to the stage, where the dynamics are different and every performance is live? The play *Dad's Girlfriend* turned out to be a delightful mix of humour, family dynamics and emotional complexity. Lodha plays Animesh, a successful author and professor who returns to his estranged daughter Diya and her husband Kanav after years of emotional distance. From the outset, it becomes evident that the story is not only about comedy but also about reconnecting, understanding, and navigating personal challenges within a family. Lodha brings a grounded yet comedic presence to Animesh, capturing his complexity with both humour and a hint of vulnerability. He's not just the larger-than-life character you might expect; there's a human side to him that makes his emotional journey relatable. Kanav, played by Aman Bajpai, adds a refreshing comic energy to the stage. His character starts out trying to navigate the awkwardness of having his father-in-law around, and his reactions provide much of the laughter throughout the play. But

what stands out is how the character develops, revealing deeper layers of insecurity and emotional turmoil as the story progresses. Then there's Avni, a fan of Animesh played by Megha Mathur. She brings a surprising element to the play, stirring emotions and creating a sense of jealousy and tension, especially between her and Diya, played by Anumeha Jain. Their interactions bring a mix of comedy and conflict, creating a dynamic that keeps the audience engaged. Under the direction of Atul Satya Koushik, *Dad's*

*Girlfriend* strikes a balance between humour and emotional depth. The play effectively captures the complexities of family relationships, the generational gaps that often create misunderstandings, and the awkward yet beautiful ways love can play out in the midst of it all. It's not a light-hearted farce; instead, it offers a deeper reflection on how we navigate family bonds, often balancing humour and pain. What I found most striking about the performance was how humour blended with

moments of genuine emotional depth. The comedy is sharp, but it's the emotional weight of the story that stays with you. It's a reminder that, despite the challenges and complexities of relationships, the desire to reconnect and understand each other remains at the heart of family dynamics. The actors, especially Lodha, deliver performances that are both engaging and thought-provoking, making *Dad's Girlfriend* a memorable experience for anyone who's ever tried to bridge the gap between love, laughter, and the misunderstandings that come with it. As the curtain fell and the audience slowly made their way out, there was one thing on everyone's mind, *Dad's Girlfriend* is a reminder that life, like theatre, is full of unexpected twists, laughs and those cringe-worthy moments that we can't help but love. After all, if you can survive family drama, flirtations and a father-in-law with a slightly over-the-top personality, you can survive anything! Just like the play, sometimes the best moments come when you least expect them and in this case, it was a delightful mix of humour, heart and a little bit of chaos. It left me thinking, maybe we should all take a page from Animesh's book and learn to laugh at the absurdity of life.

Play: *Dad's Girlfriend*  
 Director: Atul Satya Koushik  
 Lead Actor: Shailesh Lodha  
 Cast Members: Anumeha Jain, Megha Mathur and Aman Bajpai



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

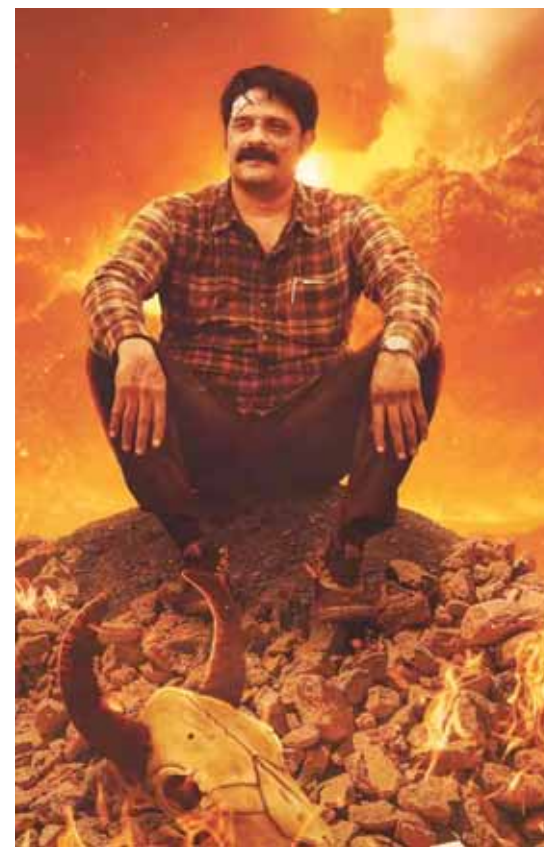
# QUIETER BUT IMPACTFUL SEASON

Jaideep Ahlawat returns to the world of *Paatal Lok* in a more sombre way, yet the season remains compelling, says **ABHI SINGHAL**



Taking away all the popularity even in the pandemic era, *Paatal Lok* has shined with its first season making the audience giving a reaction of great, awesome and what not. The second season of Sudip Sharma's *Paatal Lok*, a multi-layered crime drama that builds upon its predecessor is back. This season takes a more subdued and contemplative approach making its shape deeply into the human condition, the nature of violence, and the brittle links that bind individuals and communities together. All this is showcased in contrast to the first season's plot on caste, class, and corruption. Jonathan Thom, a well-known Nagaland leader, was shockingly assassinated in Delhi at the start of the story. His ruthless murder starts a series of events that jeopardise peace negotiations in Nagaland. Inspector Hathi Ram Chaudhary, played expertly by Jaideep Ahlawat, is drawn into a web of political plots and personal grudges as a result of the crime. In order to track down a strange woman named Rose Lizo (Merenla Imsong), whose existence connects several story threads, Hathi Ram and his former coworker Ansari (Ishwak Singh) work to catch her. *Paatal Lok Season 2* chooses a slow-burning plot that puts character development and emotional resonance first, in contrast to the previous season's relentless pacing and incisive societal satire. In addition to examining issues of

trauma, sorrow, and the cyclical nature of violence, Sharma's writing digs deeply into the emotional lives of its protagonists. Hathi Ram Chaudhary remains the emotional core of the series. Jaideep Ahlawat delivers a powerhouse performance, portraying the world-weary inspector with the same grit and vulnerability that made him a standout in the first season. This time, Hathi Ram is not just chasing criminals but grappling with his own insecurities as a father and a man. His interactions with Ansari, now a successful IPS officer, form one of the show's most poignant arcs with themes of fellowship, professional jealousy, and unspoken respect. Additionally, Sharma defies the standard police procedural rules. The genre gives depth and dignity to side characters, who are sometimes reduced to mere story gadgets. Every subplot enhances the overall story, from Rose's heartbreaking search for comfort to Meghna Barua's played by Tillotama Shome, battle to be accepted as an Assamese woman in a system that is controlled by men. Director Avinash Arun's cinematography captures the duality of *Paatal Lok*: the grimy chaos of Delhi and the landscapes of Nagaland. The visuals serve as more than just backdrops; they echo the themes of division and alienation that permeate the story. The action sequences are tightly choreographed serving only justice to the



story rather than overshadowing it. The writing, too, deserves special mention for its ability to balance the personal and the political. While the first season was a hammer blow to societal structures, this season is more of a scalpel, dissecting issues like the migrant crisis, unemployment, and the fragile peace in conflict-ridden regions. Abhishek Banerjee, who played Hathoda Tyagi in a killer Season 1, has also written two episodes in the series. The cast shines across the board. Ahlawat is, as expected, a tour de force, but it's the supporting cast that truly elevates this season. Tillotama Shome delivers a nuanced performance as Meghna, a character who challenges both societal and viewer biases. Merenla Imsong's Rose is hauntingly tragic, while Nagesh Kukunoor's turn as a shadowy bureaucrat adds a layer of intrigue. *Paatal Lok Season 2* is a long-form narrative accomplishment. It may not have the same initial effect as the first season, but it makes up for it with a deeper, more complex examination of its subjects. Every character, no matter how small, feels real in Sudip Sharma's world, and every violent act has significance and repercussions. The series offers a moving reflection on the human cost of cruelty and the fading prospect of forgiveness, and it requires patient but rewards it abundantly.

RATING: 4/5

## SUGGESTED BINGES



**HISAAB BARABAR**  
 IMDB Rating: 6.2/10  
 OTT: ZEE5  
 Director: Ashwini Dhir  
 Cast: R Madhavan, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Kirti Kulhari



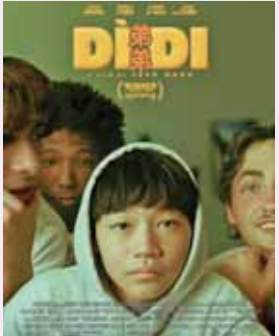
**THE NIGHT AGENT SEASON 2**  
 IMDB Rating: 7.5/10  
 OTT: Netflix  
 Cast: Gabriel Basso, Luciane Buchanan, Fola Evans-Akingbola



**PRIME TARGET**  
 IMDB Rating: 6.7/10  
 OTT: Apple TV  
 Director: Brady Hood  
 Cast: Leo Woodall, Quintessa Swindell, Sidse Babbett Knudsen



**SWEET DREAMS**  
 OTT: Disney+ Hotstar  
 Director: Victor Mukherjee  
 Cast: Anil Parashar, Mithila Palkar



**DIDI**  
 IMDB Rating: 7.4/10  
 OTT: JioCinema  
 Director: Sean Wang

"Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear"

— GEORGE ADDAIR



Tihar is more than just a correctional facility, it is a microcosm of society, brimming with stories of resilience, redemption and raw humanity. Following the excerpt from the book *355 Days: Pursuit of Freedom*.

With *Black Warrant* topping Netflix charts as the No. 1 show, the enigmatic world of Tihar Jail has captured the public's attention once again.

As one of Asia's largest and most complex prison systems, Tihar holds within its walls stories of resilience, despair, redemption and raw humanity. This newfound interest highlights society's fascination with the lives hidden behind prison walls, narratives that often remain untold but carry immense significance.

*Tihar Jail* is more than just a prison – it is a world within a world, housing individuals from all walks of life. From petty criminals to high-profile offenders, from activists to political prisoners, it is a microcosm of society where identities collide and stories unfold. Beneath the label of "convict" or "undertrial" lies a human being, grappling with remorse, survival, and perhaps even hope. Both *Black Warrant* and *355 Days* aim to shed light on this humanity, challenging the stereotypes often associated with prison life.

While *Black Warrant* provides chilling insights into executions and the inner workings of the prison system as a first-hand account by the former *Tihar Superintendent* and *ex-Legal*



## The Changing Perception of Prison Life

Advisor of Delhi Jails, Sunil Gupta, the novel *355 Days*, inspired by true events, delves into the emotional and psychological journeys of inmates. Together, these narratives as well as other stories inspired by true events compel us to confront questions about justice, survival, and the power of redemption.

*355 Days*, an Amazon bestseller, delves into the complexities of life within *Tihar Jail*. The novel, which features a quote from *Sunil Gupta* on the cover stating it offers "A writing about a sensitive subject. An emotional journey with in-depth research of Tihar life," reinforces its commitment to authenticity. The endorsement highlights the novel's connection to the realities of life within *Tihar Jail*, appealing to readers interested in stories inspired by true events. *355 Days* transcends the typical crime story, weaving together legal drama with profound exploration of the protagonist's inner journey. This unique blend positions the novel within the sphere of philosophical prison drama. *Tihar Jail*, in many ways, serves as a mirror to

larger socio-economic and judicial systems. It reveals the inequities that plague our society, the struggles and resilience of the marginalised. While the prison itself is often viewed as a place of punishment, it also serves as a crucible of transformation. *Sunil Gupta's* tenure as Superintendent of *Tihar Jail* was instrumental in bringing significant reforms, including the establishment of legal aid cells, the streamlining of jail procedures with the *Delhi Jail Manual*, and the introduction of yoga and meditation programs for inmates. The rehabilitation initiatives and the skill-building workshops offer inmates a chance to rediscover themselves and have been instrumental in improving the lives of those incarcerated. When asked about the recent success of *Black Warrant* on Netflix, he said, "I believe in the power of selfless acts! I firmly hold that when you work towards the betterment of others, the universe rewards you in abundance. God's blessings and gratitude from those you've helped are the greatest rewards. Keep spreading



I BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF SELFLESS ACTS! I FIRMLY HOLD THAT WHEN YOU WORK TOWARDS THE BETTERMENT OF OTHERS, THE UNIVERSE REWARDS YOU IN ABUNDANCE. GOD'S BLESSINGS AND GRATITUDE FROM THOSE YOU'VE HELPED ARE THE GREATEST REWARDS. KEEP SPREADING KINDNESS, AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE!



kindness, and making a difference!" Literature and media have the unique ability to humanise even the most vilified. By presenting detailed, empathetic narratives, they remind us that every prisoner has a story, a past and, perhaps, a chance at a better future. Stories like *Black Warrant* and *355 Days* do not shy away from the darkness but instead bring to light the glimmers of hope and humanity that exist even in the bleakest environments.

Recent years have seen several films inspired by real-life incidents. Notably, *Shahid* (2012), a critically acclaimed biographical drama based on the life of human rights lawyer *Shahid Azmi*, garnered numerous awards for its portrayal of his fight for justice for the wrongfully accused. *Lucknow Central* (2017), exploring the realities of life within Indian prisons, received positive reviews and praise for *Farhan Akhtar's* performance. However, it was the 2018 biopic *Sanju* – depicting the life of *Sanjay Dutt*, that achieved blockbuster status, breaking several box office records. Through literature and media, we can begin to bridge the gap between perception and reality, inching closer to a more nuanced understanding of the world behind bars.

Title: 355 Days: Pursuit of Freedom  
Author: Deeba Salim Irfan  
Publisher: LIFI Publications Pvt. Ltd.  
Language: English  
Paperback: 239 pages





**MISSION BAY HAS SOME AMAZING DISHES:**

**KIMCHI BRUSSELS SPROUTS:** *Kimchi Brussels Sprouts* is a fusion dish that combines the earthy flavour of Brussels sprouts with the bold, spicy, and tangy notes of traditional Korean kimchi. The Brussels sprouts are usually roasted or sautéed, then tossed with kimchi, adding a satisfying crunch and depth to the dish.

**BUTTERNUT SQUASH:** *Butternut Squash* is a rich and creamy dish that highlights the natural sweetness and smooth texture of roasted butternut squash. It is served as a soup, puree, or roasted, offering a comforting and nutritious side or main.

**THAI STYLE CORN SOUP:** *Thai Style Corn Soup* is a vibrant, flavourful dish that blends sweet corn with the fragrant spices of Thai cuisine. It typically includes ingredients like coconut milk, lemongrass, ginger, and chili, creating a savoury-sweet soup with a perfect balance of heat and creaminess.

**SHIMEJI MUSHROOMS FLATBREAD:** *Shimeji Mushrooms Flatbread* is a savoury appetizer or main dish that features the delicate, nutty flavour of shimeji mushrooms. The mushrooms are sautéed and served on a crisp flatbread base, often garnished with herbs, cheese, and a drizzle of sauce for added flavour.

**RICOTTA RAVIOLI:** *Ricotta Ravioli* is a classic Italian dish featuring soft, pillowy pasta filled with creamy ricotta cheese. The ravioli can be served with a variety of sauces, from simple butter and sage to rich tomato-based sauces, highlighting the delicate filling.

**APPLE BERRY CRUMBLE:** *Apple Berry Crumble* is a comforting dessert that combines the sweetness of apples with the tartness of berries, all topped with a buttery, crumbly topping. Baked until golden and bubbling, it's often served warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.

**TOFFEE DATE CAKE:** Yet another sinful delight, *Toffee Date Cake* is a rich, moist dessert made with dates and a toffee-flavored sauce, creating a dense, caramel-like sweetness. Often served warm with a drizzle of toffee sauce and a side of cream, it offers a decadent treat perfect for dessert lovers.

unpretentious yet sophisticated, making it a great place for both casual dining and special occasions. *Mission Bay* has rapidly become a sought-after destination for food lovers in Delhi, offering not just a meal but an experience. With its innovative concept, stylish design, and impeccable service, it offers a little taste of San Francisco without leaving the city. For anyone seeking a unique dining experience in Malviya Nagar, *Mission Bay* is a must-visit.

Whether you're a local or just passing through, *Mission Bay* Restaurant is a gem that promises a truly memorable American dining experience with a touch of West Coast flair, all while providing the warmth and comfort that makes you feel right at home.

# A TASTE OF SAN FRANCISCO

The *Mission Bay* Restaurant recently opened in Malviya Nagar Delhi. It has some great cuisine and authentic American wining and dining experience for the connoisseurs, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**



Ever imagined to have American experience in Delhi, authentic and cosy ambiance with a service with smile. A tall order really but that is exactly what *Mission Bay* is offering in South Delhi. *Mission Bay* Restaurant stands as a delightful oasis of flavour, design, and American hospitality. Inspired by the vibrant and eclectic spirit of San Francisco, this restaurant offers an immersive experience that takes you straight to the Bay Area, all while keeping you grounded in the comfort of cozy, inviting interiors.

As you step into *Mission Bay*, you are immediately greeted by the distinctive atmosphere reminiscent of the Californian city. The restaurant's interior is thoughtfully designed to capture the essence of San Francisco, featuring chic industrial elements, vibrant murals, and elegant wooden accents. The open, airy spaces and warm lighting evoke the feeling of walking through a trendy Bay Area neighbourhood. With high ceilings, large windows, and a touch of vintage charm, *Mission Bay* provides an inviting environment that feels both contemporary and comfortable. The

design masterfully blends rustic and modern elements, allowing guests to feel like they are dining in the heart of San Francisco. *Mission Bay* is not just about the ambiance, it's about bringing a slice of American dining to the capital. The restaurant offers a curated menu inspired by the best of American cuisine, with everything from hearty burgers and fried chicken to succulent steaks and fresh seafood. Each dish is crafted with care, using the finest ingredients to bring out authentic American flavors. The American-inspired cuisine is rich in diversity, just like San Francisco itself, with touches of California's innovative food scene and classic diner favorites. What stands out at *Mission Bay* is its commitment to quality and innovation. From comfort food to indulgent desserts, the menu offers a variety of options that cater to every palate. Whether you're craving the comfort of a juicy burger or the richness of a gourmet salad, *Mission Bay* delivers with an authenticity that transports you straight to the West Coast. One of the restaurant's most commendable aspects is its exceptional



service. The staff at *Mission Bay* are attentive, friendly and dedicated to creating a welcoming atmosphere. Their knowledge of the menu is impeccable, and they take the time to ensure that every guest feels special. Whether it's a

casual lunch, an intimate dinner, or a celebratory meal, the team at *Mission Bay* ensures a personalised dining experience. Their commitment to excellence in service sets *Mission Bay* apart from other restaurants in the area.

Despite the bustling energy of Delhi, *Mission Bay* manages to create a cosy environment that feels intimate and relaxed. The restaurant is the perfect spot for a romantic date, a family gathering, or a meal with friends. The ambiance is



# A CULINARY REVIVAL

By **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

**XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere Opens its Doors:** In the vibrant heart of Delhi, *Le Meridien New Delhi* recently opened legendary *Le Belvedere* as *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere*. This exciting culinary destination blends the iconic restaurant's storied past with an innovative, modern twist, promising to captivate diners with a unique fusion of tradition and creativity. For decades, *Le Belvedere* has been a symbol of sophistication and elegance, a cherished venue for diplomats and dignitaries who delighted in its signature *Szechuan Chinese cuisine* and refined ambiance. With the unveiling of *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere*, the space embarks on a new chapter, fusing cherished memories with a fresh, dynamic vision for the future.



**Tradition Meets Innovation:** At *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere*, the restaurant elevates Asia's rich street food culture, combining traditional flavours with contemporary flair. Far more than just a dining experience, it celebrates the artistry of cuisine, blending innovation with timeless tradition. With inspiration drawn from the bustling street markets of Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Singapore and China, the menu offers a harmonious balance of authenticity and modern creativity that will delight discerning food lovers.



The culinary philosophy at *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere* is rooted in honoring the bold flavours and techniques of Southeast Asia, while also adapting to the evolving tastes of today's global palate. Each dish tells its own story, inviting guests to explore the vibrant world of Asian cuisine through a lens of imaginative reinterpretation and impeccable craftsmanship.

**A Journey Through Flavour:** The menu at *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere* is a sensory journey that promises to captivate from the first bite. Guests can indulge in an array of dishes, from playful twists on classic favorites to bold new creations, each thoughtfully crafted to engage the senses and spark curiosity.

With a focus on diverse textures and punchy flavours, the restaurant invites diners to savor the spirit of discovery with every course. Whether you're enjoying an intimate dinner or hosting a celebratory gathering, *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere* offers a culinary adventure that is both exciting and accessible. The restaurant's ambiance, where tradition and modernity intertwine, enhances the experience, making each meal a memorable occasion.

**An Invitation to Explore:** *XO & Mi @ Le Belvedere* is now open, ready to welcome guests to explore a world where history, culture and gastronomy come together. From its reimagined take on Southeast Asian street food to its dynamic blend of traditional flavors and contemporary techniques, this new dining destination at *Le Meridien New Delhi* promises to be a must-visit spot for food enthusiasts in the city.

To take you to the mouth watering taste of Kashmir, *Shangri-la Eros New Delhi* hosted a culinary journey with the *Chef pin pop-up* at Tamra. The pop up showcased the spicy flavours of Kashmir, expertly handpicked by *Chef Archana Dhawan*. Apart from the Kashmiri flavours, desserts took the show with the pastry *Chef Dakshata Agarwal*. Guests were treated to a symphony of Kashmiri delicacies, beginning with a selection of signature appetisers. *Chef Dhawan's* creations included the crispy *Nadur Monji*, a delightful fried snack made from lotus stems and gram flour. The delicate *Chaman Kanti* and aromatic *Nadur Aloo Adrek Mond* further tantalised the palate. For non-vegetarians, succulent *Chicken and Mutton Kanti* alongside the traditional *Talite Gaad* offered a taste of local specialties. The live theatrical kitchens added a touch of drama, where skilled chefs artfully prepared *Kabar Gah* and the classic *Kaladi Kulcha*, each dish carrying a unique story of Kashmir's rich culinary heritage.

The main course was a grand celebration of flavours, where traditional Kashmiri recipes were brought to life with timeless cooking techniques. Vegetarian delights included the famed *Dum Aloo*, aromatic *Chaman Tamatar*, and the distinctive *Chaman Roganjosh*, all complemented by the hearty *Haak and Kashmiri Bhaderwah Rajma*.

Non-vegetarians were equally indulged with the legendary *Mutton Roganjosh*,



## FROM ROGAN JOSH TO KASHMIRI KAHWA

Tamra was brought alive with the aroma of Kashmir and the soul satisfying taste of the desserts, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

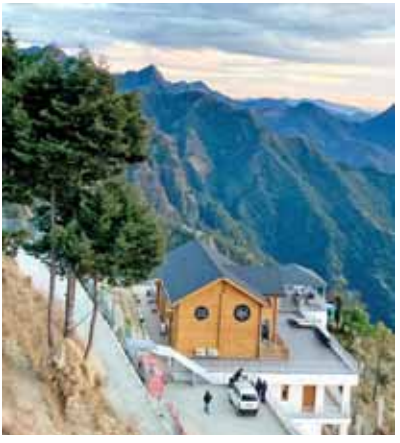
delicate *Yakhni*, and unique *Masch Aloo Bukhara*. Fish enthusiasts savored both *Tamatar* and *Nadur* preparations. Each dish was served with a selection of breads, including *Kashmiri Phulka*, accompanied by authentic *chutneys* – from the nutty Walnut to the tangy *Muli* and *Anardana Pudina* variations.

To complete the dining experience, guests were invited to savour the royal *Saffron Kheer* and enjoy a warming cup of *Kahwa*, Kashmir's beloved spiced tea. While *Chef Dhawan* delighted palates with her authentic Kashmiri creations, Pastry *Chef Dakshata Agarwal* added a touch of sweetness with her signature dessert collection. The sweet finale featured delicate *Chiffon Cakes* in two variations - a fresh Strawberry Kiss topped with Chocolate Strawberry Panna Cotta and the rich Chocolate Kiss adorned with Dark Chocolate Cookie Soil.

The indulgence continued with a velvety *Chocolate Mousse Caramel* embellished with dark chocolate elements, and the standout *Bailey's Chocolate Egg*, which guests could enjoy at their table or take home as a memorable treat. Each dessert showcased a perfect blend of classic techniques and contemporary presentation, offering a delightful conclusion to the culinary journey. The *Chef Pin* pop-up at *Shangri-la Eros New Delhi* provided a unique opportunity for guests to experience the essence of Kashmir through its flavourful cuisine and taste.



# FINDING SOUL CONNECTIONS AT SOUL STORIES



Whether you're an avid bird watcher or someone looking to escape the chaos of urban life, Soul Stories promises an unparalleled blend of adventure and soulful experience, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**



**S**oul Stories - Luxury Villas and Resort, Mussoorie, the bird-watching resort and retreat offers a haven for nature lovers and peace seekers alike. Surrounded by dense oak, deodar and rhododendron forests, this retreat is not just a destination but an experience that reconnects you with nature, tranquillity, and yourself. Whether you're an avid bird watcher or someone looking to escape the chaos of urban life, Soul Stories promises an unparalleled blend of adventure and solace. Located near Dhanaulti, in Tehri Garhwal district, Uttarakhand, India. Dhanaulti is located on the popular tourist circuit of Landour, Mussoorie, Kanatal, Chamba and New Tehri. Soul Stories is easily accessible from Delhi and other parts of the country via *Dehradun*, followed by a scenic two-hour drive.

## THE ALLURE OF SOUL STORIES' BIRD-WATCHING RETREAT

One of the retreat's standout features is its rich biodiversity. Dhanaulti, perched at an altitude of around 2,250 meters in the vicinity of Mussoorie, is home to an astonishing variety of avian species. From the vibrant Himalayan monal, the state bird of Uttarakhand, to colourful flycatchers, woodpeckers and thrushes, the retreat is a paradise for ornithologists and casual bird watchers alike. Guided bird-watching trails led by local experts ensure you don't miss out on spotting rare and exquisite birds. The retreat is carefully designed to



for personal rejuvenation. Unlike traditional retreats, it combines the joy of bird watching with holistic wellness practices such as yoga, meditation and mindfulness walking on the pathways around. For those seeking deeper connections, there are bonfire evenings where guests can share their experiences and bond with like-minded individuals. The idea is to create a community where stories and nature blend to form lasting memories.

## ESCAPE FROM THE MADDENING CROWD

In an increasingly chaotic world, finding peace can feel like an elusive goal. Dhanaulti's remoteness makes it an ideal destination for those looking to unplug. With limited connectivity and a deliberate emphasis on slow living, Soul Stories encourages guests to step away from their screens and immerse themselves in the present moment. The serene environment fosters introspection, creativity and a sense of calm that lingers long after you leave.

## SUSTAINABILITY AT ITS CORE

Soul Stories is committed to sustainable tourism. The retreat employs eco-friendly practices such as rainwater harvesting, solar energy, and organic farming to minimise its ecological footprint. Additionally, they actively engage with the local community by employing local guides and sourcing ingredients for their delicious, wholesome meals from nearby farms.

## WHY SOUL STORIES SHOULD BE YOUR NEXT GETAWAY

Whether you're a seasoned birder, a wellness enthusiast or simply someone yearning for a break from the daily grind, Soul Stories offers something for everyone. Its combination of natural beauty, thoughtful amenities, and enriching experiences makes it a sanctuary where you can find peace, inspiration, and joy. In the words of a recent visitor, "Soul Stories is not just about luxury and finding solace amidst nature; it is about discovering your own self. A place where you can hear silence and listen to your inner voices." So pack your bags, leave your worries behind, and let the hills of Dhanaulti and the birds of Soul Stories guide you to a state of blissful serenity.



harmonise with its natural surroundings. Rustic cottages with large windows offer panoramic views of the forested hills, creating the perfect backdrop for morning coffee or an evening of stargazing. The soft chirping of birds replaces the noise of traffic, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the calming sounds of nature. Madhavi Madan, the visionary behind this resort, is a dynamic individual who has personally curated every detail visitors experience here. From the paintings and artifacts to the designer furniture, each element reflects her passion and impeccable taste, seamlessly harmonising with the natural surroundings.

## A PLACE TO RECONNECT AND RECHARGE

Soul Stories stands out for more than its natural beauty; it offers an opportunity



## ROVING THROUGH DUBAI'S ARTFUL HEART

As I arrived at *Rove City Walk Dubai*, anticipation coursed through me. Touted as a modern gem in this cultural capital, I was eager to see if it would live up to the remarkable reviews, says **AKANKSHA DEAN**



**A**s I stepped into the vibrant realm of *Rove City Walk*, the first thing that struck me was the energy of the lobby. It wasn't just a reception area; it was a hub of creativity and warmth. I was immediately enveloped by a design philosophy that blended harmoniously with its lush surroundings. Channelling the spirit of the local environment, the hotel intertwines the tales of Dubai's rich culture with modern touches, creating captivating backdrops that demand to be photographed. This isn't just a hotel; it's a canvas where every corner tells a story waiting to be shared on Instagram. This artistic flair was a delightful prelude to the stylish experience awaiting me. **STYLISH COMFORT IN DOWNTOWN DUBAI:** The check-in was seamless, thanks to the friendly and engaging staff who made me feel at home from the moment I arrived. Located in the heart of the city, I felt the pulse of Dubai within my reach. Just a 15-minute journey from Dubai International Airport, the hotel's strategic location makes it ideal for both business travellers and holidaymakers alike. My home for the stay was one of the 560 spacious rooms, each designed with the modern traveller in mind. My room, with its innovative décor and local

artworks, was a cosy retreat. Looking out the window, the view of the majestic Burj Khalifa was awe-inspiring, creating a perfect backdrop for my stay. I loved that 30 percent of these rooms are interconnecting, a thoughtful feature for families or groups. With complimentary Wi-Fi, plush designer mattresses, and sofa beds perfect for unwinding after a day of exploration, it felt like the ideal sanctuary. The modern bathrooms, complete with power rain showers, were the cherry on top, offering a refreshing escape. The sense of ease continued beyond the room. The 24-hour gym kept me motivated, while the inviting pool and sun deck offered a tranquil refuge for relaxation. A self-service laundromat and a boutique convenience store added to the sense of independent living, making it feel like I could call this place my own. The hotel also features co-working spaces that are both functional and inspiring for creativity, making it an excellent choice for business gatherings and social celebrations. The Daily, an all-day neighbourhood hangout, was the perfect spot to unwind. Whether dining in or grabbing something for later, I was never disappointed. Quality coffee paired with globally-



inspired, nutritious dishes kept me fuelled for my adventures, and the vibe was just right for casual conversations with fellow travellers. **DOWNTOWN'S VIBRANT CHARM:** One of the best aspects of staying at *Rove City Walk* is its prime location, coupled with the convenience of a complimentary shuttle service to various attractions. A leisurely stroll led me to the iconic Coca-Cola Arena at City Walk, and it was just as easy to dip my toes in the sparkling waters of Jumeirah Beach. I hopped on the hotel bus, which whisked me away to the sprawling Dubai Mall. As I arrived at one of the world's largest shopping destinations, the sheer

scale and opulence of the mall took my breath away. I strolled past luxury boutiques, indulged in some retail therapy, and marvelled at the massive aquarium teeming with vibrant marine life. While at the Dubai Mall, I also experienced the mesmerising Dubai Fountain show. The synchrony of water, light and music created an unforgettable spectacle, an enchanting performance that lingered in my mind long after the final splash. Another day, I visited City Walk, brimming with chic boutiques and eye-catching street art. I lost myself in the colours of the art installations and enjoyed a leisurely meal at one of the trendy cafés. Nearby, the Green Planet, an extraordinary indoor rainforest, invited exploration among its lush greenery and exotic wildlife. It was a refreshing change of pace, showcasing the diversity of ecosystems right in the heart of the city. When evening approached, I made my way to the Dubai Opera House for an enriching cultural experience. The performances held there were world-class, each one a captivating expression of artistry and creativity. **LAST MOMENTS OF BLISS:** After several exhilarating days of exploration, it was time to wrap up my Dubai adventure. Late check-out at 2 PM

was a blessing, allowing me to linger longer in this oasis before heading out. However, I extended my experience with a last-minute visit to the Plaza Premium Lounge at the airport, a tranquil haven before my departure. As I settled into the lounge's plush seating, the welcoming ambience provided the perfect setting to reflect on my unforgettable trip. I treated myself to gourmet snacks and beverages, relishing the peaceful environment. The lounge's modern décor and views of the airport buzz were a gentle reminder of the journeys that lay ahead. As I bid farewell to Dubai, I took one last glance at the cityscape. In my time at *Rove City Walk*, I discovered more than just a temporary home; I found a vibrant community hub that embodies the essence of Dubai while delivering comfort and convenience. Every moment spent here was a reminder of why I love exploring the world, one hotel at a time. — Akanksha Dean is an independent food &amp;amp;amp;amp; travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category

"I TRY TO LIVE WITH THE IDEA THAT KARMA IS A VERY REAL THING. SO I PUT OUT WHAT I WANT TO GET BACK"  
— MEGAN FOX



**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week presents promising prospects for financial advancement. Prepare for travel, primarily for business or professional reasons. Despite potential disruptions to your plans, such as booking delays or temporary banking issues, your focus and determination will help you navigate through. The challenges may cause some frustration, but your ability to manage and control the situation will see you through. Opportunities will arise that could significantly boost your career. Additionally, romantic gestures, possibly even a significant proposal, may be on the horizon. Those feeling disheartened will find new energy, and married couples will experience a renewed sense of care and connection, enjoying a harmonious bond. However, be mindful of your expenditures towards the week's end, especially if considering special purchases or planning a scenic getaway.

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



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week promises an abundant experience for you, highlighted by prosperity not just in material terms but also in innovative ideas. You'll find yourself deeply engaged in family matters, playing a pivotal role in discussions that could shape future paths. Your efforts to spread joy won't go unnoticed, as familial support, particularly from close female relatives, will bolster your spirits and add to your emotional fulfillment. Your aspirations and desires are likely to manifest, making this a period to revel in your achievements and blessings. Financial gains might inspire plans for major projects, such as building a home or expanding entrepreneurial ventures. Opportunities for educational or professional advancement may also present themselves to younger family members, possibly including international prospects or significant job interviews.

**Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Purple**  
**Lucky day Wednesday**



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

Even when circumstances don't align with your preferences, remember, there's always a glimmer of hope. This week may bring feelings of rejection, sadness, or even betrayal. Though these experiences are tough, they serve as essential challenges. Without such tests, life would lack depth and opportunities for growth. These difficulties are chances to learn from errors and become resilient. By mid-week, you might find yourself reflecting deeply, striving to transcend your immediate desires and emotions, recognizing that they no longer serve your path forward. This period of solitude is a crucial step toward inner peace, distancing yourself from external chaos. Embrace your innate strength to overcome adversity. You may find that emerging from such trials, your capacity to love is not just restored but enhanced, ready to welcome brighter days hidden just beyond the current cloud cover.

**Lucky number 28 | Lucky colour Brown**  
**Lucky day Thursday**



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, you may find yourself enveloped in a whirlwind of social engagements as you play host to guests, drawing you into a flurry of activities centered around hospitality. Your family and friends will seek your company, filling your days with interaction and liveliness. Embrace the surge of creative energy that accompanies these encounters, finding joy in the moments spent reconnecting with those close to your heart, including a possible reunion with a cherished acquaintance from your past. You'll receive ample support and affection from elder family members, enhancing your sense of satisfaction and well-being mid-week. At home, tranquility reigns; your family thrives, your health remains robust, and your financial situation shows improvement. However, as the week draws to a close, stay vigilant. Tensions could surface, potentially straining a close relationship and impacting your well-being.

**Lucky number 18 | Lucky colour Maroon**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, you are primed to harness your innate resilience. With a clear vision of your objectives, your determination is set to guide you to success. Known for adept communication, this skill will particularly shine, aiding you in leveraging contacts and creativity to ascend to notable positions. This reinforced strength fosters a sense of security and vigor, contributing to significant financial gains, especially for those in business. Timely financial returns are anticipated, enhancing stability. Relationships, be it business alliances or personal bonds, will experience harmony, with supportive gestures from family enhancing your journey. While destiny smiles upon you, patience remains a virtue, especially in romantic engagements. Self-reflection is beneficial; however, embrace openness to new experiences, adopting a mature approach to evolving circumstances.

**Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Gray**  
**Lucky day Monday**



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

It's essential for you to embrace a phase of rest and rejuvenation. Revel in the serenity and vitality you discover during this period. Some may also find themselves recovering from physical or emotional strains. Be prepared for moments that illuminate answers and reveal deeper truths. Stay observant of your environment, as resolving these situations might not be straightforward and could initially lead to confusion or a standstill. Nonetheless, as the week progresses, expect a shift towards positivity. You'll be poised to embark on a new endeavor that demands swift action and daring. This is your moment to pursue success with the talents and enthusiasm you possess. Signs of new beginnings, possibly marking a personal expansion or a joyful addition to your family, are on the horizon. Embrace this vibrant energy, capitalizing on every opportunity it brings.

**Lucky number 20 | Lucky colour Sky Blue**  
**Lucky day Saturday**



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

The coming period marks a significant shift for those born under the sign of the twins, heralding a phase of professional advancement and personal accolades. Your objectives are well-defined, propelling you towards your goals with remarkable clarity and determination. This is a time when your efforts are likely to bear fruit, offering tangible rewards for your dedication. Midweek brings a surge of vitality and creativity, enhancing your generosity and compassion. You'll find great joy in altruistic endeavors, even as you enjoy an increase in material comfort. Despite this, you'll find yourself drawn to deeper spiritual exploration. Family support, particularly from siblings and mentors, will bolster your journey. For entrepreneurs, improved rapport with business partners is anticipated, while those in organizational roles can expect opportunities for promotion or desirable relocations.

**Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour White**  
**Lucky day Tuesday**



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week marks a significant phase in your life where overcoming challenges could lead to positive changes. A potential rupture in close bonds may cause emotional distress, yet facing these adversities head-on will only fortify your resilience. Embrace the opportunities that arise; let go of doubts and take bold steps toward your aspirations. Remember, true bravery stems from confronting and leveraging your fears. If you find yourself questioning your achievements or feeling unfulfilled by the outcomes, consider reevaluating your strategies and exploring new avenues. This could set you on a more promising path, possibly culminating in advantageous financial prospects as the week concludes. Seize this time to advance confidently towards your goals, ensuring no obstacle remains insurmountable.

**Lucky number 21 | Lucky colour Orange**  
**Lucky day Tuesday**



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

Embrace the inner light that you've previously overlooked. Trust in your abilities and the existence of a higher power. When you believe something is possible, you're already halfway there. You are discovering an internal strength and inspiration. This sensitivity makes you open to the world, yet it is in this openness that you find resilience. You're now free to explore spiritual depths in new ways. Let go of past perceptions and welcome a fresh perspective. This time marks a powerful presence of your inner guidance, allowing your deepest aspirations a chance to surface and flourish. New connections are forming, brimming with possibilities that could lead to genuine affection and joy. Open your heart to let love emanate freely. Relish in this period of emotional depth and spiritual contentment.

**Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Emerald**  
**Lucky day Wednesday**



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week, you may find yourself wrestling with internal conflicts that disrupt your sleep and peace of mind. Concerns about family, especially the well-being and future of your children, might weigh heavily on you, causing stress about their education and long-term prospects. You might also face delays in getting the results or answers you seek. Health concerns within your family, particularly involving a close female relative, could demand your attention and care, adding to your emotional load. For those experiencing heightened emotional sensitivity, this period could bring challenges related to emotional well-being, including hormonal shifts. Engaging in yoga or meditation could prove beneficial, helping to stabilize your mood and strengthen your mental resilience. As the week closes, you'll likely find yourself transitioning into a new chapter, ready to make significant.

**Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Ocean Blue**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week centers on aligning your intentions with your actions, ensuring a strong foundation rooted in self-awareness. As you engage with your innermost aspirations and fears, you discover a unique way to embrace and transform them, which strengthens your resolve. This inner clarity boosts your confidence in your abilities, enhancing your capability to achieve the outcomes you desire. You effectively merge theory with practice, and logic with emotion, showcasing a harmonious balance between thought and action. Your objectives are distinct, reminding you that mere wishing changes nothing; decisive action reshapes everything. The urge to create is hollow without the skill to execute. Therefore, embrace your ambitions wholeheartedly, set your intentions, and observe as your efforts orchestrate a symphony of success. You have the power to sculpt your life exactly as you envision it.

**Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Mint**  
**Lucky day Saturday**



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

Often, in the pursuit of our desires, we may overlook the abundant blessings already present in our lives. It's easy to miss the profound love surrounding us when we're caught up in the chase for more. Yet, this oversight can lead to missed opportunities and the potential slipping away of what we cherish most. Disappointment often arises not from a lack of possessions or achievements, but from failing to appreciate and be grateful for what we have. Taking time to acknowledge and give thanks for these blessings can be profoundly transformative. This week, anticipate significant shifts that may disrupt established routines or expectations. The nature of these changes will largely depend on your understanding of destiny and your readiness for transition. Embrace the possibility of new connections that may emerge, whether in the form of friendships, relationships, or partnerships.

**Lucky number 25 | Lucky colour Yellow**  
**Lucky day Friday**

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# Soul Connections — Karmic Ties

THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

*Karmic ties tend to mirror unresolved issues, such as fear of abandonment or low self-worth*

Some relationships feel like a gentle breeze, soothing and effortless, while others ignite storms that shake us to our core. In life, we encounter people who awaken our deepest joys and others who surface unresolved pain. These connections, seemingly fated, carry a sense of purpose beyond the mundane. They bring lessons, healing, and sometimes chaos. The line between love and challenge blurs, leaving us to wonder why some bonds feel like a sanctuary, while others seem destined to test our limits. Understanding these relationships requires a closer look at the intricate dance of souls and the threads that bind them. At the heart of this mystery lies the concept of soul connections and karmic ties. While both feel deeply significant, their essence is starkly different. Soul connections are a meeting of kindred spirits, an undeniable resonance that feels like coming home. These relationships, romantic or platonic, carry a sense of ease and mutual growth. There is a quiet knowing, a recognition transcending time and space. It's as though the souls involved are dancing to the same rhythm, supporting one another in becoming their best selves. The

love shared in such relationships is often unconditional, fostering harmony and uplifting both individuals. Karmic ties, on the other hand, are far from serene. Rooted in the spiritual concept of karma, these relationships arise from unresolved energies or past-life debts. They feel magnetic, intense, and at times suffocating. Unlike soul connections, which nurture peace, karmic ties are turbulent, marked by repetitive patterns and emotional upheavals. They challenge us, forcing confrontation with our deepest wounds and shadows. It is as if the universe orchestrates these encounters to ensure we address the unfinished business of our souls. Psychologically, these two types of relationships function differently. Soul connections align with what Carl Rogers referred to as unconditional positive regard, a state of mutual understanding and acceptance. These bonds thrive on vulnerability and trust, creating a safe space for authenticity. Dr. Arthur Aron's research on intimacy underscores this, showing that genuine closeness arises when individuals feel seen and valued without judgment. Soul connections provide this sanctuary,



allowing both individuals to grow together without the strain of unhealed trauma. In contrast, karmic ties often reflect unresolved attachment wounds. Studies on attachment theory by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby show how early experiences shape relational patterns. Karmic ties tend to mirror unresolved issues, such as fear of abandonment or low self-worth. These intense relationships can feel overwhelming but serve a purpose. Acting as mirrors, they reflect insecurities, inviting healing. Their emotional chaos is not punishment but guidance toward self-awareness and transformation. Energy dynamics further differentiate these relationships. Soul connections are energising,

akin to basking in sunlight that is warm and nurturing. Karmic ties, however, often feel draining, like an unrelenting storm. This imbalance arises because karmic relationships are designed to break us open, forcing us to confront lessons we've avoided. Once these lessons are learned, the tie often dissolves, leaving us wiser and stronger. Healing from both types of relationships requires nuanced approaches. In soul connections, nurturing the bond is key. Gratitude journaling and mindfulness meditation strengthen harmony and foster growth. Positive psychology research shows expressing gratitude enhances relationship satisfaction and resilience, preserving the sanctity of such connections.

Healing karmic ties is more arduous. The first step is recognising patterns and understanding embedded lessons. This requires introspection and self-awareness. Energy healing techniques like chakra balancing and Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) can release stuck emotions. Studies by Dr. Dawson Church highlight EFT's effectiveness in reducing stress and fostering clarity. Karmic ties often involve sacred and heart chakra imbalances, which meditations and affirmations can address. Boundary-setting is crucial in healing karmic ties. Many struggle with over-giving or seeking validation. Prioritising self-worth and asserting needs can break cycles of dependency. Though challenging, this process is liberating, transforming relationships into growth opportunities rather than sources of pain. Spiritual and psychological dimensions of these relationships intertwine deeply. Spiritual teachings describe relationships as mirrors, reflecting unhealed wounds or highest potential. Carl Jung's concept of the shadow self explains how unresolved aspects of our psyche manifest externally

until integrated. Soul connections reveal our potential, while karmic ties confront the shadows we avoid. Scientific studies support relationships' transformative power. Research on neuroplasticity shows challenging relationships can rewire our brains, fostering growth and resilience. Whether harmonious soul connections or turbulent karmic ties, both serve purposes in spiritual evolution. The distinction between these relationships is more than theoretical. It's a guide for navigating love's complexities. Soul connections reveal unconditional love's beauty and growth potential, while karmic ties demand healing and transformation. Both offer unique lessons for self-discovery. Ultimately, these relationships guide us toward self-realisation. Whether soothing the soul or testing its limits, each bond deepens our understanding of ourselves. As Rumi said, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you." Through the intricate dance of soul connections and karmic ties, every wound and moment of love brings us closer to the light within. — She is a Life Coach and Founder of Soulful Wellness

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# Australian Open: Keys upsets Sabalenka in women's final for first Grand Slam title

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Madison Keys of the United States upset two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 in the Australian Open final on Saturday night to collect her first Grand Slam title at age 29. By adding this win over the No. 1-ranked Sabalenka to an elimination of No. 2 Iga Swiatek in the semifinals on Thursday — saving a match point along the way — Keys is the first woman since Serena Williams in 2005 to defeat both of the WTA's top two players at Melbourne Park. Keys, ranked 14th and seeded 19th, was playing in her second major final after being the runner-up at the 2017 U.S. Open. She prevented Sabalenka from earning what would have been her third women's trophy in a row at the Australian Open — something last accomplished by Martina Hingis from 1997-99 — and her fourth major title overall. When it ended, Keys covered her face with her hands, then raised

her arms. Soon, she was hugging her husband, Bjorn Fratangelo — who has been her coach since 2023 — and other members of her team, before sitting on her sideline bench and laughing. Sabalenka chucked her racket afterward, then covered her head with a white towel. The men's final is Sunday, with defending champion Jannik Sinner against Alexander Zverev. Sinner is seeded No. 1, Zverev No. 2. Sinner eliminated American Ben Shelton in the semifinals, while Zverev advanced when 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic stopped playing because of an injury. Keys is the oldest woman to become a first-time major champion since Flavia Pennetta was 33 at the 2015 U.S. Open. This was the 46th Slam appearance for Keys, which ranks as the third-most major tournaments before winning a trophy in the Open era, behind only Pennetta's 49 and Marion Bartoli's 47 when she won Wimbledon in 2013.



It was the more accomplished Sabalenka who was shakier at the outset. Keys broke three times in the first set, helped in part by

Sabalenka's four double-faults and 13 total unforced errors. Don't for a moment think this was merely an instance of Sabalenka

being her own undoing. Keys certainly had a lot to do with the way things were going, too. She compiled an 11-4 edge in

winners in that first set, managing to out-hit the big-hitting Sabalenka repeatedly from the baseline. For a stretch, it seemed as though every shot off the strings of Keys' racket — the one she switched to ahead of this season to protect her off-injured right shoulder and to make it easier to control her considerable power — was landing precisely where she wanted. Near a corner. On a line. Out of Sabalenka's reach. Also important was the way Keys, whose left thigh was taped for the match, covered every part of the court, racing to get to balls and send them back over the net with intent. On one terrific defensive sequence, she sprinted for a forehand that drew a forehand into the net from Sabalenka, capping a break for a 4-1 lead. Never one to hide her emotions during a match, Sabalenka frequently displayed frustration while trailing on the scoreboard, kicking a ball after netting a volley, dropping her racket after

missing an overhead, slapping her leg after an errant forehand. Sabalenka took a trip to the locker room before the second set, and whether that helped clear her head or slowed Keys' momentum — or both — the final's complexion soon changed. Keys' first-serve percentage dipped from 86% in the first set to 59% in the second. Sabalenka raised her winner total to 13 in the second set and began accumulating, and converting, break points. When she sent a backhand down the line to force an error by Keys for a break and a 2-1 lead in the second, Sabalenka shook her left fist and gritted her teeth as she walked to the sideline. When she broke again to go up 4-1, Sabalenka marked the occasion with a long and loud scream while looking in the direction of her team. By the time the last set arrived, the action was tight and tense, without so much as a single break point until its final game, when Keys came through with one last forehand winner.



## Rohit named captain of ICC's T20 International Team of the Year 2024

PTI ■ DUBAI

Rohit Sharma was on Saturday named captain of the ICC's T20 International Team of the Year 2024, which was predominantly Indian in its composition thanks to the side's memorable World Cup triumph in the format. The other Indian members of the all-star XI were pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who also featured in the ICC's Test Team of the Year, all-rounder Hardik Pandya and left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh. The standout performers from other nations to make the line-up were Australian marauder Travis Head, England's Phil Salt, Pakistan's Babar Azam, West Indies' Nicholas Pooran, Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza, Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, and Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga. Rohit the Test captain and Test batter has been under considerable pressure in the past few months owing to a series of debacles for the team as well as him personally. But the 37-year-old's credentials in the shorter formats remain strong. In T20 Internationals, Rohit had an unforgettable 2024, both as a leader and a batter. The seasoned opener amassed 378 runs in 11 matches at an impressive average of 42.00 and a strike rate of over 160. Rohit played a pivotal role in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign in the USA and West Indies, with three half-centuries, including a sensational 92 against Australia in the Super Eight stage. "His astute leadership was instrumental in guiding a young Indian side through high-pressure situations, cementing his legacy as one of

India's greatest T20I captains," the ICC stated in a tribute to the 37-year-old, who was recently forced to show up in domestic red-ball games to reignite his Test career. Likewise, Pandya reaffirmed his stature as one of the world's finest all-rounders, playing a crucial role in India's successful campaign. In 17 matches, he scored 352 runs and claimed 16 wickets, finishing as the top-ranked ICC men's T20I all-rounder. His standout performance came in the T20 World Cup final against South Africa, where he defended 16 runs in the last over, securing India's title victory. His best bowling figures of 3/20 in the final underlined his ability to deliver under pressure. Bumrah has exemplified perfection in Indian cricket this past season across formats and T20 was no different. He led India's bowling attack and claimed 15 wickets in eight matches at an astonishing average of 8.26, making him a nightmare for opposition batters. His lethal yorkers and impeccable control at the death overs played a pivotal role in India's success, and his performances earned him a nomination for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy as ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year. The winner of that honour will be unveiled in the next three days. Young left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh emerged as India's most prolific wicket-taker in 2024, scalping 36 wickets in 18 matches at an average of 13.50. Arshdeep's ability to swing the ball early and deliver pinpoint yorkers in the death overs made him indispensable to the Indian squad.



## Gukesh holds Abdusattorov; Praggnanandhaa stays in lead

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

World champion D Gukesh played out a draw with overnight joint leader Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, while R Praggnanandhaa signed peace with defending champion Wei Yi of China in the sixth round of the Tata Steel chess tournament here. With only decisive game in the 14-players round-robin tournament at the De Morian on Friday, Abdusattorov and Praggnanandhaa continued to share the lead on 4.5 points out of a possible six and Gukesh is right on the toes of the leaders with four points. Seven rounds are still left in the first major tournament of the year. P Harikrishna, Alexey Sarana of Serbia and Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia share the fourth spot on 3.5 points each and are within the striking distance of the leaders. Gukesh held his ground in a challenging endgame against Abdusattorov, escaping with a draw after 64 moves. The game began with the Italian Opening, leading to an equal middlegame. However, as complications arose, Abdusattorov seized a persistent advantage and handled the position skillfully. In the endgame, Gukesh was forced to concede a pawn, and the situation worsened when Abdusattorov sacrificed his knight for three pawns, putting the Indian under significant pressure. Despite being in a difficult position, Gukesh once again showcased his defensive resilience, capitalising on an inaccuracy by his opponent to salvage a hard-fought draw. Praggnanandhaa tried to make a foray with white pieces against Wei Yi out of a Ruy Lopez opening. The Chinese always had the game was drawn after 58 moves. P Harikrishna raised vision

with his two extra pawns against Jordan van Foreest of Holland but the latter used his bishop pair well to draw level. Arjun Erigaisi who has been under pressure right from the first round, decided to play it very safe with white and drew quickly with top rated Fabiano Caruana of the United States in a Berlin defence game. Arjun just followed the routine theory and exchanged pieces to reach a dead-drawn minor piece endgame. Leon Luke Mendonca also drew with Max Warmerdam of Holland out of a Queen's pawn opening game to reach 1.5 points like Arjun. In the challengers section, R Vaishali could not get much against tailender Irina Bulmaga of Romania and the draw was agreed to vide repetition in a rook and pawns endgame while 11-year-old Faustino Oro of Argentina defeated Divya Deshmukh. **Results (Round 6)** **Masters:** Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 4.5) drew with D Gukesh (Ind, 4); Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 1.5) drew with Max Warmerdam (Ned, 2.5); Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 1.5) drew with Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 3); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 4.5) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 3); P Harikrishna (Ind, 3.5) drew with Jordan van Foreest (Ned, 2); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 2.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 3.5) beat Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 3.5). **Challengers:** Nodirbek Yakubov (Uzb, 3) drew with Frederik Svane (Ger, 2.5); Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1) drew with R Vaishali (Ind, 3.5); Benjamin Bok (Ned, 4) drew with Nogerbek Kazymbek (Kaz, 3.5); Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 2) drew with Miaoyi Lu (Chn, 3.5); Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1.5) lost to Faustino Oro (Arg, 2.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 4) drew with Erwin L'Ami (Ned, 4.5); Aydin Suleymanli (Aze, 2.5) vs Ediz Gurel (Tur, 2.5).

## Arshdeep named ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year

PTI ■ DUBAI

Indian left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh was on Saturday crowned the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2024 for his influential role in the team's World Cup title triumph, which cemented his reputation as one of the leading short format bowlers. The 25-year-old took 36 wickets in 18 matches last year. He was also named in the ICC T20I Team of the Year 2024 earlier in the day alongside Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya. In the T20 World Cup in the Americas, Arshdeep showcased his mastery in both powerplay and death bowling and ended the tournament as the joint highest wicket-taker alongside Afghanistan's Fazalhaq Farooqi with 17 scalps at an average of 12.64 across eight matches. His standout performance was one of the major factors behind India's campaign



culminating in a dramatic seven-run victory over South Africa in the final in Barbados. In the final, he claimed 2/20, dismissing South African captain Aiden Markram early and breaking a threatening partnership by removing Quinton de Kock during the middle overs. Tasked with bowling the penultimate over, Arshdeep conceded just four runs, setting the stage for Hardik Pandya to seal the win. **A Stellar Year**

Arshdeep's T20I record in 2024 further underscores his dominance — 36 wickets in 18 matches at an average of 15.31 and an economy rate of 7.49. His strike rate of 10.80 was a testament to his wicket-taking prowess, especially given his challenging role in the powerplay and at the death. Only four players in the world took more T20I wickets than Arshdeep in a calendar year — Saudi Arabia's Usman Najeed (38), Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga (38), UAE's Junaid Siddique (40) and Hong Kong's Ehsan Khan (46) — with all four playing more matches. Of those bowlers, only Hasaranga featured for a full-member nation. His best figures of the year, 4/9, came against the USA during the World Cup group stage, a performance emblematic of his brilliance on varied surfaces. With 97 scalps, Arshdeep is now the highest wicket-taker in the format for India.

## PCB to test CT venues in Karachi

PTI ■ KARACHI


Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will test its newly renovated stadiums in Karachi and Lahore for the upcoming Champions Trophy by holding a tri-nation ODI series involving South Africa and New Zealand from February 8. The PCB issued the official schedule of the tri-series on Saturday with the final slated at the National Stadium in Karachi on February 14. The Champions Trophy will be held from February 19 to March 9. The Board, which has spent around 1.2 billion rupees on the upgrade and construction of new buildings at its two Test venues, is under scrutiny




on whether the stadiums would be ready on time for the eight-team Champions Trophy. Pakistan face New Zealand in the opening match of the Champions Trophy here. The PCB said that the tri-nation series will be played in a single-league format from February 8 to 14 with the first

two matches at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium. The final league match and tournament final would be held in Karachi. In preparation for the tri-series, Pakistan and New Zealand will train under the lights at Gaddafi Stadium on February 6. South Africa's first practice session at the

venue will take place on the morning of February 9. At the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, the seating capacity has been increased with the addition of new chairs. Additionally, 480 modern LED lights have been installed to improve broadcast quality. Two large digital replay screens have been added for better fan engagement. A state-of-the-art hospitality enclosure for players and officials is also nearing completion. Similarly, the National Stadium in Karachi has been upgraded, with the addition of 350 LED lights for better broadcast visibility, two replay screens, and the installation of 5,000 new chairs.



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