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TOP OF THE DAY

DELHI AIR QUALITY BACK IN 'SEVERE' CATEGORY

NEW DELHI: In response to the deteriorating air quality, the Commission for Air Quality Management on Friday decided to watch the situation for a day or more before invoking stricter curbs under Stage III of the Centre's air pollution control plan called the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in Delhi-NCR, as forecasts suggested that the situation may improve.

Delhi's 24 hourly running average Air Quality Index (AQI) steadily rose from 374 at 9AM and crossed the 400 mark clocking 409 at 4 pm, "as per a press release by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM). The air quality index from 0 to 100 is considered 'good', 100 to 200 'moderate', 200 to 300 'poor', 300 to 400 'very poor' and from 400 to 500 or above 'severe'.

Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) Sub-Committee for GRAP called on an emergency meeting today and took stock of the current air quality scenario and forecast of meteorological conditions as well as the projected air quality index by IMD/ IITM, the release stated. As per assessment of IMD/ IITM, the dispersion of air pollutants has been low because of dip in temperature, foggy conditions and local sources due to which a spurt in the average AQI of Delhi has been witnessed today, the CAQM said. The Sub-Committee, however, while comprehensively reviewing the air quality scenario and relevant aspects, noted that as per the air quality forecasts by IMD/ IITM, Delhi's average AQI is likely to improve from today itself and is expected to be in 'Very Poor' in coming days.

WOMEN POWER STEALS THE SHOW AT 75TH REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS

French Prez gets a glimpse of India's rich cultural heritage and military might.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The country ushered in its 75th Republic Day with spectacular display of its women power and military might that included elite marching contingents, missiles, warplanes, surveillance gadgets and lethal weapon systems.

French President Emmanuel Macron gracing the occasion as the chief guest.

The Republic Day Parade at the Kartavya Path in the heart of the national capital commenced with President Droupadi Murmu taking the salute shortly after she and Macron, flanked by the President's Bodyguards, arrived in a 'traditional buggy'.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, several other Union ministers, the country's top military brass, foreign diplomats and senior officials were among those who witnessed the impressive show that also included a fly-past by helicopters and other aircraft, with even a dense fog cover failing to dampen the spirits of the spectators.

Soon after, Murmu and Macron left from the Kartavya Path in the 'buggy', which made a return after 40 years. After the end of the parade, Modi, wearing a multi-coloured 'bandhani' print safa, mingled with the excited crowd as people clicked pictures and welcomed him with claps and slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai".

For the first time, an all-women tri-services contingent marched down the ceremonial boulevard reflecting the country's growing 'Nari Shakti' (women power). In

all-women tri-services contingent marched down the ceremonial boulevard reflecting the country's growing 'Nari Shakti' (women power). In



All-women Tri-service contingent march at Kartavya Path.

BEST BITS

- Traditional 'buggy' made a return after 40 years
- PM Modi, wearing a multi-coloured 'bandhani' print safa, mingled with the excited crowd
- Parade heralded by over 100 women playing Indian musical instruments

WORLD COURT ASKS ISRAEL TO PREVENT ACTS OF GENOCIDE AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The World Court ordered Israel on Friday to prevent acts of genocide against the Palestinians and do more to help civilians, according to reports.

It just stopped short of ordering a ceasefire as requested by the plaintiff South Africa, the reports added.

While the ruling denied Palestinian hopes of a binding order to halt the war in Gaza, it also represented a legal setback for Israel, which had hoped to throw out a case brought under the genocide convention established in the ashes of the Holocaust.

The court found that there was a case to be heard about whether Palestinian rights were being denied in a war it said was causing grievous humanitarian harm. It also called for Palestinian armed groups to release hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel that precipitated the conflict.



Benjamin Netanyahu

KCR TO LEAD THIRD FRONT IN 2024 POLLS: RAMA RAO

TDG NETWORK
HYDERABAD

Amid the rift within the I.N.D.I.A. bloc following West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) Chief Mamata Banerjee and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's vow to go solo in their respective states in Lok Sabha polls, Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) leader KT Rama Rao, popularly known as KTR, has hinted at the possibility of a 'third front', to be led by party chief and former Telangana CM K Chandrashekhhar Rao (KCR).

In an exclusive interview with ANI, KTR said, "If the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has to be stopped, then the people should support regional leaders like KCR, Mamata or Kejriwal (Delhi Chief



K. Chandrashekhhar Rao

Minister) because Congress cannot stop the BJP. On one side, Rahul Gandhi is doing Bharat Jodo but on the other side, the INDI alliance is developing differences. Only regional parties and strong regional leaders can stop the BJP. So, we should strengthen the regional forces. Only the Congress and Rahul

Gandhi can't defeat the BJP. KCR knew that Congress would not give any respect to any party. That is why we have been talking about a non-Congress and non-BJP coalition; a third front or federal front should be formed."

"However, we hope that discussions take place on this. We made efforts towards it around two years ago. Unfortunately, it did not succeed. However, we are focusing on Telangana now. If we get a good number of seats in Telangana in the Lok Sabha polls, maybe we can succeed in the talks with regional forces like Akhilesh (Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav), Mamata, Kejriwal and others," he added.

The BRS leader further said that the meeting of the I.N.D.I.A. bloc was merely a

Stage set for yet another switch by Nitish to NDA

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The political suspense in Bihar has heightened after speculation about JDU rejoining the BJP-led NDA picked pace. Giving more weight to the possible entry of Nitish Kumar into NDA, Bharatiya Janata Party MP and former Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, Sushil Kumar Modi on Friday said that doors are never closed "permanently" in politics.

The BJP Rajya Sabha MP arrived in the national capital on Thursday for a meeting with the party's top brass after speculation ran rife that the Bihar Chief Minister could jump ship again.

"In yesterday's meeting, strategies for (the upcoming) Lok Sabha elections were discussed. But as far as Nitish Kumar and JD(U) are concerned, doors are never closed permanently in politics. Now our central leadership will decide whether the door will open or not," Sushil Modi told reporters before returning to Patna.

Sushil Modi was Deputy Chief Minister in the NDA government in Bihar in 2022, before Janata Dal (United) supremo Nitish Kumar severed ties with the ally BJP and partnered with the RJD and the Congress again.

Earlier, Lalu's daughter Rohini Acharya took a swipe at RJD's ruling ally, JDU, on X posting that while the 'socialist party' (JDU) styles itself as progressive, its ideology shifts with the changing wind patterns, a



Nitish Kumar

BIHAR ASSEMBLY	PARTY POSITION
RJD	79 MLAs
BJP's	78
JD(U)'s	45
Congress	19
CPI (M-L)'s	12
CPI (M)	2
CPI	2
HA M	4
AIMIM	1
Independent	1

TEJASHWI GOES INTO HUDDLE WITH AIDES

A meeting between RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and his close aides is underway at the former's official residence in Patna. The meeting was called by the Bihar Deputy Chief Minister.

Tejashwi Yadav, Deputy Chief Minister and RJD leader, skipped the event while RJD leader Alok

P5

KEY TWO-DAY BJP MEET STARTS TODAY

Amid the possibility of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar making yet another switch to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the BJP has called its state executive meeting tomorrow and the day after, sources said.

The meeting is likely to be held on January 27 and 28. According to the sources,

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OVER 120 PIECES OF EVIDENCE SUPPORT EXISTENCE OF HINDU TEMPLE IN GYANVAPI, SAYS ASI SURVEY

ASHISH SINHA
NEW DELHI

Following the issuing the ASI survey report on the Gyanvapi complex from the Varanasi district court at 10 pm on Thursday, January 25th, a renewed wave in Hindus swept across India, and now this is capturing media attention. This issue is not only resonating in North India but also reached the southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. The evidence uncovered by ASI during the survey drew the focus of Hindu-Satanis from North to South in India on this issue. Professor Alok Tripathi is the key person who prepared and submitted to the court, with the help of eight individuals holding doctorate degrees, including two Muslims.

Drawing on references from various sources such as Shatapath Brahmana, Gopath Brahmana, Brahadranyaka Upanishad, Panini's Ashtadhyayi, Mahabharata's Anushasna Parva, and Buddhist texts like Mahavastu, Buddhacharita, and Jetakas, the team meticulously surveyed Gyanvapi. They also incorporated insights from the



TDG EXCLUSIVE

travel memoirs of European and Chinese travelers, including the notable Hwein Tsang.

In their comprehensive report, the team, responding to court instructions and questions, addressed the seventh point in the 'Brief Findings of Survey,' explicitly stating that a

NEED TO STUDY ASI REPORT FIRST, SAYS ISLAMIC CENTRE

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

After the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) released its survey report on the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, Islamic Centre of India chairperson Maulana Khalid Rashid Firangi Mahali said that the report needs to be studied first and only after that, anyone can comment anything on it.

"The ASI has given its 839-page report to the concerned parties and the Muslim side has to study the entire report first and give their opinion. We have full hope that whatever decision will be taken will be taken on the basis of reality. The case is going on in the court. The ASI report will be studied first and only then anything can be said," Maulana

P5

this can be said, 'A Big Hindu temple existed before the current structure was built.'

Judge vs judge: SC to hear case suo motu today

ASHISH SINHA
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court of India has taken suo motu cognizance of recent happenings the Calcutta High Court. This follows a peculiar order issued by a single judge, Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who chose to overlook a stay order from a division bench.

Justice Gangopadhyay

not only ignored the division bench's order but also launched a verbal attack on Justice Soumen Sen, the head of the division bench, accusing him of "acting for a political party in the State."

A five-judge bench, consisting of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, Surya Kant, and Aniruddha Bose, will convene to hear the suo motu case on

Saturday at 10:30 am.

The issue originated from a petition in the Calcutta High Court, alleging widespread issuance of fake caste certificates in the State. The petition claimed that individuals used these certificates to gain admission to medical courses.

On Wednesday morning, Justice Gangopadhyay issued an order instructing the West Bengal Police

to hand over case-related documents to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). However, the division bench of Justices Soumen Sen and Uday Kumar promptly stayed this order later the same day.

In an unusual move, Justice Gangopadhyay, in an order on Thursday night, accused Justice Soumen Sen of instructing Justice Amri

P5

Girl 'drugged and raped' by Instagram pal

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Showing tremendous courage and seeking justice, a 21-year-old woman has taken to social media to narrate her traumatic story of "being drugged and raped" by her Instagram friend. The Mumbai police is investigating the case.

It was her first meet with accused Heetik Shah. They had previously interacted

with him Instagram only.

"Heetik Shah and I went out for drinks and partying in town, starting at place A. After meeting a couple of his friends, we left for Bastian. After some tequila shots, I became intoxicated, feeling anxious and alone at the party," she alleged.

In her post, the victim said was forced to drink some more by the accused which led her to have a blackout episode, she said, adding



she suspected she was "roofied".

"He insisted I drink more, and I had a blackout episode, not recalling what happened

next. I suspect I may have been roofied. I woke up to him raping me, and despite my efforts to stop him, he continued and even slapped me three times with intense rage, leaving me scared and intimidated," she recounted the horrific night.

The assault happened at the residence of one of accused's friends, she said.

"The place turned out to be his friend's, and his friends intervened to protect him.

FRENCH PREZ MACRON, PM MODI ATTEND ‘AT-HOME’ RECEPTION AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also attended 'At-Home' reception.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday hosted an at-home reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan on the occasion of the 75th Republic Day.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron, who was the chief guest at the Republic Day parade, were among the many dignitaries attending the reception.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and his wife Sudesh Dhankhar were also among the attendees at the reception.

Lok Sabha speaker OM Birla, Union Ministers Kiren Rijju, and Dharmendra Pradhan also attended the in-house reception on a decked-up and well-lit front yard of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

President Murmu was pictured introducing her French counterpart to other dignitaries at the reception.

The President also interacted with the foreign dig-



President Droupadi Murmu interacts with guests during 'At Home' reception at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi on Friday.

nities at the function.

Earlier in the day, President Murmu commenced the celebrations of the 75th Republic Day by unfurling the national flag at Kartavya Path.

On her arrival at Kartavya Path, she was received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Based on the twin themes

of 'Viksit Bharat' and 'Bharat - Loktantra ki Matruka', this year's parade witnessed the participation of around 13,000 special guests, an initiative aimed at providing an opportunity for people from all walks of life to take part in the celebrations and encourage 'Jan Bhagidari' (public involvement) at the event.

As many as 16 states and Union Territories also displayed their heritage diversity through cultural performances and tableaux.

President Droupadi Murmu and French President Emmanuel Macron arrived at the Kartavya Path in the traditional buggy, which made a comeback at the event after 40 years.

MAY MARCH TOWARDS MUMBAI TODAY: MARATHA QUOTA ACTIVIST

NAVI MUMBAI: Maratha Reservation activist Manoj Jarange Patil on Friday warned Maharashtra government to issue a Government Resolution regarding Maratha quota adding that if demands are not met by tonight then protestors will march towards Mumbai on Saturday morning. Reiterating his demands in Navi Mumbai, Jarange Patil urged the Maharashtra Government to withdraw all the cases registered by the police regarding the demand for Maratha reservation in the state. "Let us wait here till tonight. Then the government should issue an ordinance and give it to us, this is important. We are giving time to the government till 11 am tomorrow, after that we will leave for Mumbai. If we go there we will not return," Jarange Patil said.

Earlier, Maratha Reservation activist Manoj Jarange Patil said on Thursday that their rally towards Mumbai will be peaceful, but no return will be made from the state capital without reservation. "We are now left with one last stop, which is at Vashi.

Pillars of fundamental rights ensured by Constitution under attack: Kharge

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge stated on Republic Day that the pillars of fundamental rights, social justice, and political rights, ensured to every citizen by the Constitution are under attack.

Extending his greetings on the occasion of India's 75th Republic Day on Friday, Kharge posted a video address on social media platform X.

Emphasising justice, equality, fraternity, freedom, brotherhood, secularism, and socialism as India's foundational pillars, he said that the pillars of fundamental rights, social justice, and political rights, ensured to every citizen by the Constitution are under attack.

"I extend my good wishes to you on the 75th Republic Day. It is on this day 74 years back in 1950 that our Constitution came into effect, and we became a Republic breaking the chains of feudalism and colonialism," Kharge said.

"Our Constitution was based on the values of our Bharatiya civilisation, that is Nyaya (Justice), Maryada



(dignity), Samata (equality), and Samabhaav (equanimity). This is the foundation for the social, economic, and political transformation of our country. Justice, equality, fraternity, freedom, brotherhood, secularism, and socialism are India's foundational pillars. The Constitution ensured fundamental rights, social justice, and political rights to every citizen. Today, these pillars are under attack from the government itself," the Congress chief said.

He said, "The founding fathers of our Constitution Pandit Nehru, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Sardar Patel, Babu Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad and other giants of the Constituent Assembly would not have imagined that the Constitution would face such challenges."

"Today, the fundamental and basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution to every Indian, are slowly being encroached upon and being eroded. We, the people of India who gave this Constitution to ourselves included Dalits, Tribals, Women, Farmers, and Labourers. Today they are facing assault by the government which is using emotional issues to divert attention and hide the 'Truth from citizens," Kharge added.

He said that the Congress party has resolved to fight for the protection of the Constitution, democracy and Nyaya.

"The five pillars of Nyaya, Yuva Nyaya, Bhagidari Nyaya, Nari Nyaya, Kisan Nyaya, and Shram Nyaya will empower everyone and protect their rights.

Today on Republic Day, let us all come together and make a pledge and join this mission of NYAY. Only then will we be able to secure the future of our youth. This will be the victory of our Constitution. This will be the victory of India. Once again, many good wishes on Republic Day. Jai Hind!" he said in the nearly five-and-a-half-minute video.

NYAY YATRA FACING PROBLEMS IN GETTING PERMISSION FOR RALLIES IN WEST BENGAL: CONGRESS

TDG NETWORK
SILIGURI (WB)

West Bengal Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Friday said the party encountered difficulties in obtaining permission to organise certain public meetings during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the state, prompting a strong retort from the ruling TMC, which accused him of echoing BJP's rhetoric.

Speaking to reporters in Siliguri, Chowdhury said the schedule of the yatra was submitted to the state administration long ago.

"In some places, we are not getting permission to organise public meetings, citing exams. The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra has faced problems in the Northeast, including Assam, and now it is facing problems in TMC-ruled West Bengal as well," he said.

"We were denied permission to hold a public meeting in Siliguri. We expected better cooperation from the state government. The route and the itinerary of the yatra remain the same except for a few changes," he added.

Asserting that the Rahul Gandhi-led yatra was a movement to safe-



guard the Constitution, Chowdhury claimed that it had nothing to do with the Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking on the issue on Thursday night, Chowdhury had said they thought they would get "relaxations" in some places in West Bengal for public meetings but the administration "is saying that they can't give it".

The yatra, which began in Manipur on January 14, entered West Bengal from Assam on Thursday, and took a two-day break. It will resume on January 28.

The ruling Trinamool Congress, however, claimed that the administration in West Bengal is free of political influences.

"Adhir Chowdhury is responsible for the INDIA alliance falling apart

in West Bengal. Second, all opposition parties conduct programmes in the state, nobody faces any problems. The administration must have taken the decision as there are board examinations in schools," TMC MP Santanu Sen said.

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh accused Chowdhury of speaking the language of the BJP.

"Adhir Chowdhury is an agent of the BJP. He speaks their language. Today also he is making those allegations on the instructions of the saffron camp. The TMC has nothing to do with the permission of the yatra," he said.

Taking a dig, the BJP said Congress was getting a taste of "authoritarianism" from its ally.

'DISCUSSIONS' ON SAFRAN-INDIA ENGINE DEAL FOCUSED ON ADVANCED TECH TRANSFER: MEA

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Shedding light on the "ongoing discussions" between India and Safran regarding the Shakti jet engine deal, Ambassador of India to France Jawed Ashraf said that the focus of the deliberations is on achieving a set of specifications that align with India's future fighter jet requirements. "This is a subject of ongoing discussions," Ambassador Ashraf said, highlighting the intricate nature of the negotiations. "Now, the issue is really about arriving at a set of specifications that comply with our future fighter jet requirements," he said, explaining that the current discourse involves more than just the transfer of manufacturing technology.

According to the Indian envoy to France, the deal aims to delve into the actual design phase, metallurgical aspects, and other critical elements that contribute to the development of advanced jet engines. "So this (deal) always fea-

tures in the conversation between the President and the Prime Minister," Ashraf said, addressing a special briefing on Friday by the Ministry of External Affairs on the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India. The Ambassador emphasised the need for a comprehensive approach, stating, "What we are looking for is not just a manufacturing transfer of technology, which essentially keeps you going with the same crutches that you have been going on for the last six decades but to work in the actual design phase, metallurgical aspects, et cetera." Safran, a key player in the aerospace industry, has expressed its willingness to engage in a 100 per cent transfer of technology across various phases of the project.

This includes design development, certification, production, and more. However, Ambassador Ashraf acknowledged that navigating such complexities requires aligning the discussions with India's

overall future defence requirements. "So Safran is fully willing to do it with 100% transfer of technology, 100% transfer of technology in design development, certification, production and so on and so forth." "It's obviously a very complex subject, and it has to fit in with the overall future requirements.

So these discussions will continue to take place, and that's also part of the defense industry roadmap," he added. In July 2023, in a significant decision, India and France decided to extend their ground-breaking defence cooperation in advanced aeronautical technologies by supporting the joint development of a combat aircraft engine.

They also decided to support industrial cooperation for motorisation of heavy-lift helicopters under the Indian Multi Role Helicopter [IMRH] programme with Safran Helicopter Engine. The announcement was made after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's talks with Macron in Paris.

Lord Ram has deep connection with Tamil Nadu: Governor RN Ravi

LATHA SRINIVASAN
CHENNAI

Governor Ravi Friday said that Lord Ram has deep connection with Tamil Nadu. On 75th Republic Day, Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi spoke about various aspects including the recently inaugurated Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and Lord Ram's connection to the south state. Chief Minister MK Stalin and Speaker Appavu were present on the occasion.

Speaking about Lord Ram, Governor Ravi said, "Sri Ram has been our national icon and inspiration. He is the common thread that unites Bharat and lives in the hearts of every Bhartiya. He is an inspiration and his rule Rajya is an ultimate example of good governance, the ideals of which are enshrined in our Constitution. "His story has inspired and enriched Tamil literature since the Sangam period, constitutes the soul of Carnatic music, and has enriched our classical dance. It is in Tamil Nadu that the most ardent among the devotees of Sri Ram and great poet Kambar wrote in Tamil, the 'Ramavataram'-long before the story of Sri Rama was told in other Bharatiya languages after the first one in Sanskrit."

The Governor also spoke about the welfare projects initiated by the Centre and paid tribute to the martyrs, freedom fighters, and members of the armed forces who take care of India's security and freedom. He also expressed his sincere gratitude to the armed forces, security agencies, and police for their relentless vigil, valour, and sacrifices in defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. He spoke about the important role that volunteers and voluntary organizations played during the natural disasters, especially cyclonic storm Michaung, and how they provided rescue and relief. TN CM MK Stalin did not attend the Republic Day High-Tea party organised at Raj Bhavan though DMK has not boycotted the event.

GYANVAPI MOSQUE SECURITY HEIGHTENED POST ASI REPORT RELEASE

TDG NETWORK
VARANASI

Security measures have been beefed up outside the Gyanvapi mosque, a day after the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex revealed there "existed a large Hindu temple prior to the construction of the existing structure".

Following the release of a survey report by the Archeological Survey of India, confirming evidence of Hindu temples, today's Jumma (prayers held by muslims on every friday) at the disputed Gyanvapi mosque holds a special importance. Consequently, stringent security measures were put in place to prevent any untoward incidents.

The media was intentionally kept at a distance from Gyanvapi, ensuring that the situation remained calm for the peaceful execution of the Friday prayer. The authorities were keen on avoiding any misinformation or unnecessary panic.

However, there was a conscious effort to manage any potential conflicts in the area.

Notably, The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex revealed that a pre-existing structure appeared to have been destroyed in the 17th century, and "part of it was modified and reused," adding that based on scientific studies, it can be said that there "existed a large Hindu temple prior to the construction of the existing structure."

"The Arabic-Persian inscription found inside a room mentions that the mosque was built in the 20th regnal year of Aurangzeb (1676-77 CE). Hence, the pre-existing struc-



Paramilitary personnel keep vigil as devotees offer Friday prayers at Gyanvapi Mosque on Friday.

ture appears to have been destroyed in the 17th century, during the reign of Aurangzeb, and part of it was modified and reused in the existing structure. Based on scientific studies/ survey carried out, study of architectural remains, exposed features and artefacts, inscriptions, art and sculptures, it can be said that there existed a Hindu temple prior to the construction of the existing structure," the ASI said in its report.

"Based on the scientific studies and observations on central chamber and main entrance of the pre-existing structure in existing structure, western chamber and western wall, reuse of pillars and pilasters of pre-existing structure in the existing structure, inscriptions on the existing structure, Arabic and Persian inscription on the loose stone, sculptural remains in cellars, etc., it can be said that there existed a large Hindu temple, prior to the construction of the existing structure," the report further said.

The ASI survey was ordered by the district court after the Hindu petitioners claimed the 17th-century Gyanvapi mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple.

Himachal Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla unfurls the tricolour at Ridge in Shimla

TDG NETWORK
SHIMLA

Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla unfurled the National Flag on the 75th Republic Day state level celebration at the historic Ridge, Shimla today.

The governor took salute from an impressive march past led by Parade Commander Lt. Karan Gogna from 22, Jammu & Kashmir Rifles. Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu was also present on the occasion.

The contingents of Army, Indo-Tibet Border Police, Himachal Pradesh Armed Police, Haryana Police, State Police, Home Guards, Fire Services and Himachal Pradesh Postal Services, Disaster Management, ex-servicemen, National Cadet Corps (NCC), National Service Scheme Cadets, Bharat Scout and Guide etc. performed the march past.



Tableaux showcasing various development activities of different departments were the main attraction wherein the tableaux of the Horticulture Department bagged the first prize of Rs. 10,000.

The culture troupes from Bal Ashram Tuti Kandi, and troupes from Shimla, Sirmaur and Government Senior Secondary School, Rohru gave scintillating cultural performance. The troupes of North Zone Cultural Center from Haryana also performed on the occasion. The police band was the main attraction.

Apart from this, the Gov-

ernor also presented prizes to the winners of HP Digital-Ignition contest organised by the Department of Digital Technologies and Governance.

The Governor presented appreciation certificates to top performing hospitals under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana on the occasion in the presence of the Chief Minister. State level awards were given to Indira Gandhi Medical College, Shimla, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College, Tanda in Kangra, and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Chamba.

TWEET OF THE DAY

President of India
@rasbtrapatibbn



The 75th Republic Day Parade showcased the nation's extraordinary Nari Shakti as impressive march-pasts by women received standing ovation by the invitees. President Droupadi Murmu and the French President Emmanuel Macron arrived at the Kartavya Path in the traditional buggy which made a comeback after 40 years.

Narendra Modi
@narendramodi



Paid tributes at the Rashtriya Samar Smarak. We remember and honour those who selflessly defended our nation. Their courage and sacrifice will never be forgotten. We bow to them in solemn respect and gratitude, vowing to uphold the ideals they stood for.

Amit Shah
@AmitShah



I participated in a recent conversation with the regular newspaper. Let us discuss the points of how the new laws will give justice to the people of the country within three years, how they will give special protection to women and children.

Mallikarjun Kharge
@kbbarge



Best wishes and many congratulations to everyone on the 75th Republic Day. The Constitution of India is based on the social, economic and political values inherent in the ancient Indian civilization. Our values of justice, dignity, equality and equanimity are its strong pillars, and these also became the standards of our social, economic and political transformation after independence. Our Constitution gave fundamental rights, social justice and political rights equally to all citizens. But, today these rights are being attacked by the government itself. The year 2024 is a very important year for India.

Arvind Kejriwal
@ArvindKejriwal



Best wishes to all the countrymen on the 75th Republic Day. Let us all together take an oath to protect our Constitution and strengthen our great democracy.

LG PRAISES DELHI'S PROGRESS IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT DURING R-DAY SPEECH

Proud to inform you that by 2025, 85 per cent of the public transport buses will be electric in Delhi

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Lt Governor VK Saxena, in his Republic Day speech, on Friday said the central and the local governments are making sustained efforts to develop Delhi into a global and inclusive city.

Saxena highlighted various achievements of Delhi, including in the fields of public transport, health, and power sector and ration supply, in his speech.



In the last few years, Delhi has made significant progress in the power sector, he said. "The demand

for power is being met without any load shedding." The LG also lauded

various agencies including DDA, PWD, NDMC, MCD, Delhi Police among others, workers and employees and people of Delhi-NCR for readying Delhi to successfully host the G-20 Summit.

The government is committed to giving top priority to health services and making them available to the people, Saxena said.

"Delhi has modernised its public transport system. I am proud to inform you that by 2025, 85 per cent of the public

transport buses will be electric in Delhi. That is a big achievement on the global level," he said.

The Centre has extended special financial assistance under the FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) scheme, he said.

Efforts are being made for all the sections of society aiming for inclusive development and 72 lakh beneficiaries have received subsidised foodgrains from fair-price shops, the LG said.

"The number of 'One Nation, One Ration Card' beneficiaries is the highest (in the country)," he said.

The government is also committed to tackling air and water pollution and conservation of the Yamuna river, Saxena said.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is also trying for effective and timely implementation of various public welfare schemes and development works, he stated.

In the last one year, several projects have been

completed to transform Delhi. Two world-class auditoriums -- Bharat Mandapam and Yashobhumi -- have been inaugurated and the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) between Meerut and Delhi has begun and work is in progress on Delhi-Alwar and Delhi-Panipat corridors, he said. The LG also lauded various agencies including DDA, PWD, NDMC, MCD Delhi has modernised its public transport system.

DELHI DMs TO SPEND NIGHT IN SELECTED VILLAGES HOLD TALKS WITH RESIDENTS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The district magistrates of all 11 districts will stay overnight in selected villages on January 27 and January 28 to draw up specific plans for the restoration and development plan for the villages, Raj Niwas officials said.

This is the second time the district magistrates will be staying overnight at selected villages.

"On Lt Governor V K Saxena's directions and following encouraging results from the exercise earlier this month, all district magistrates of 11 districts will visit and stay overnight in selected villages over the coming weekend on January 27 and 28," an official said.

During the stay, district magistrates will hold 'Samvaad' (talks) with the residents of the village and its neighbourhood villages



All DMs will visit and stay in selected villages over the coming weekend on January 27 and 28. - (Official)

and prepare the plan under "Dilli Gramodaya Abhiyan" to be implemented by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

The exercise aims at chalking out the restoration and development plan for Delhi's villages, in consultation with the villagers,

under the ambitious "Dilli Gramodaya Abhiyan", being executed by DDA at a cost of more than Rs 800 crore.

Continuing with the exercise of staying the night over in villages to get a first-hand experience through "samvaad" with the villagers, senior nodal officers, district magistrates and senior officers from all stakeholder departments like DDA, MCD, DJB and PWD, etc., will stay overnight, in identified villages across all 11 districts of

Delhi.

Following Saxena's announcement on January 2, after a 'Samvaad@Raj Niwas' with representatives from 180 villages, all 11 district magistrates reached selected villages on January 7 in the morning and stayed the night over.

The selected villages in the 11 districts are -- Neelwal in west district, Madanpur Dabas in north-west district, Chhawla in southwest, Bhati in south, Aali in southeast, Dalupura in east, Saboli in Shahdara, Badarpur Khadar in northeast, Burari in central, Rangpuri in New Delhi and Mugheshpur in north district respectively.

On day one of their visit, the DMs will hold 'Samvaad' with residents of the villages where they are staying as well as those in the neighbourhood over the first three hours, starting at 11 am.

DENSE FOG IN DELHI ON R-DAY, MINIMUM TEMPERATURE 4.7 DEG C

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Dense fog engulfed Delhi on Republic Day and the minimum temperature in the city settled at 4.7 degrees Celsius, officials said on Friday. The conditions are expected to

improve by the time the 75th Republic Day parade commences on Kartavya Path. According to the weather office, the Indira Gandhi Airport and the Safdarjung airport reported dense fog with visibility of 100 metres and 300 metres respectively

at 8.30 am. The morning was cold, with the minimum temperature recorded four notches below the season's average. The weatherman predicted partly cloudy skies for the day and said the maximum temperature is expected to

settle at 20 degrees Celsius. The IMD had issued an orange alert for Friday. Delhi on Thursday recorded a minimum temperature of 4.8 degrees Celsius, three notches below the season's, and a maximum temperature of 20.5 degrees Celsius.

Delhi CM unfurls national flag on Republic Day

RAHUL GAHLAWAT
NEW DELHI

On the occasion of the 75th Republic Day, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal unfurled the national flag at his residence on Friday.

Taking to social media handle X, the Chief Minister said, "Best wishes to all the countrymen on the 75th Republic Day. Let us all together take an oath to protect our Constitution and strengthen our great democracy."

Several Chief Ministers of various states unfurled the tricolour on the occasion of Republic Day today.

Like every year in the national capital

The 75th Republic Day focuses on the themes of 'Nari Shakti' and 'Viksit Bharat'.

Delhi, this year too, a grand Republic Day parade was held at Kartavya Path. The 75th Republic Day focuses on the themes of 'Nari Shakti' and 'Viksit Bharat'.

Earlier, President Droupadi Murmu commenced the celebrations of the 75th Republic Day on Friday by unfurling the national flag at Kartavya Path.

FIRE ERUPTS IN DELHI'S SHAHDARA

New Delhi: A fire broke out at a house in north-east Delhi's Shahdara area on Friday, officials of the fire department said.

Five people are feared trapped inside the building and a rescue operation is underway, they said.

A total of five fire engines were pressed into service to douse the flames.

"We got a call at 5.22 pm regarding a fire at a house in Ram Nagar area. Immediately, five fire engines were pressed into service. We got to know that five people are feared trapped in the building. We are conducting the rescue operation," a fire official said.

Maliwal upset by absence of Delhi, Punjab tableaux in R-Day Parade

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Swati Maliwal, the former Chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Women and AAP Rajya Sabha candidate, expressed disappointment on Friday over the exclusion of the tableaux of Punjab and Delhi from the Republic Day parade.

In a post on X, Maliwal underscored the significant themes these tableaux could



have portrayed, stating, "It is sad that there are no tableaux of Punjab and Delhi in

the Republic Day parade." She elaborated on the symbolic messages conveyed by these tableaux, mentioning, "While the tableau of Delhi gives the message of the importance of education, the tableau of Punjab, the land of brave martyrs, pays respect to the immortal revolutionaries."

Expressing hope for future inclusion, Maliwal stated, "Hopefully next time the tableaux of both the states

will be seen on Republic Day." A total of 25 tableaux were featured in the Republic Day parade, with 16 representing various States and Union territories and 9 from central government departments.

According to a Ministry of Defence statement, the exclusion of Punjab and West Bengal's tableaux was attributed to a misalignment with the "broader themes" of this year's tableau.

Delhi assembly eyes health, education, roads in budget session

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Kejriwal government will present its tenth budget in the budget session of Delhi Assembly to be held from February 15-20, with a focus on health, education, roads and infrastructure, officials said on Friday.

Delhi Finance Minister Atishi is expected to table the 2024-25 budget of the city government on February 17, they said.

It will be the first budget presentation by Atishi, who was given the finance portfolio last year.

A file of the budget session has been sent to Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena for his approval, said a statement from Delhi government.

In the forthcoming budget, the Kejriwal government is set to address several significant issues, placing particular emphasis on education, health, electricity, water, roads, and infrastructure and various developmental projects, the statement said.

The government is considering to start the 'Business Blasters' programme for



final-year and pre-final-year students in colleges, aiming to enable them to start their businesses after leaving college. Funds for entrepreneurship programmes may be allocated in the budget, it said. The Delhi LG will address the House on the first day of the budget session and the Outcome budget (report card of government) will be tabled in the House on the next day.

During the preparation of the budget, the government sought suggestions from all stakeholders in Delhi and the noteworthy recommendations from them have been included in the budget,

the statement said.

In the financial year 2023-24, the Kejriwal government had a whopping Rs 78,800-crore budget outlay, with focus on a 'Clean, Beautiful, and Modern Delhi'.

An allocation of Rs 21,000 crore was made for Delhi's infrastructure.

In 2014-15, Delhi's budget was only Rs 37,450 crore, which more than doubled in the last fiscal year.

The budget preparations of the government in the last 20 days included the first high-level meeting regarding the budget chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on January 6.

DELHI AQI SEVERE AGAIN, CENTRE DELAYS STRICTER CURBS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday decided to delay implementation of stricter measures to curb pollution in Delhi-NCR despite the 24-hour average AQI in Delhi breaching the 400-mark for the second time in three days.

Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 409 at 4 pm, a level requiring authorities to invoke stricter curbs under Stage III of the Centre's Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to control air pollution.

The CAQM sub-committee for operationalisation of GRAP convened an emergency meeting and took stock of the air quality situation, projected AQI and meteorological forecasts, a statement said.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), a dip in temperature



and foggy weather allowed accumulation of pollutants in Delhi on Friday.

Forecasts by the IMD and the IITM suggest an improvement in Delhi's air quality from Friday itself. It is expected to be in the 'very poor' category in the coming days, the statement said.

"Therefore, the committee decided to monitor the situation before considering invocation of stringent actions under Stage III of GRAP," it said.

The ongoing preventive or restrictive actions implemented under Stage I and

Stage II of GRAP will continue.

Stage III curbs include a ban on non-essential construction work and the plying of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers in Delhi-NCR.

Construction work related to national security or defence, projects of national importance, health care, railways, metro rail, airports, interstate bus terminals, highways, roads, flyovers, overbridges, power transmission, pipelines, sanitation and water supply are exempt from the ban.

DELHI TOP COP'S SON MISSING, CASE FILED IN HARYANA

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has initiated a case of abduction following the disappearance of the son of an Assistant Commissioner of Police from the Samaypur Badli area, officials reported on Thursday.

Lakshya Chauhan (24) and two friends attended a marriage function in Haryana on Monday, after which

Mr. Chauhan failed to return home the next day. A missing complaint was filed by his father, ACP Yashpal Singh, on Tuesday.

Upon investigation, it was revealed that Lakshya Chauhan was last seen at the Karnal bypass, prompting the registration of a case under Sections 365 (kidnapping or abducting with intent secretly and wrongfully to confine

a person) and 368 (wrongfully concealing or keeping in confinement a kidnapped or abducted person) due to suspicions of foul play.

Three suspects have been detained and are currently undergoing interrogation. Special teams have been assembled to locate Mr. Chauhan and his friends who were with him during the incident.

TOP OF THE DAY

ONE DEAD IN FIRE AT MUMBAI'S RESTAURANT

MUMBAI: One person was reported to be dead as a massive fire broke out at a restaurant in Mumbai's Kamathipura on the intervening nights of Thursday and Friday, officials said. According to fire officials, the charred body of an unknown man was found in the bathroom at the premises and was moved to JJ Hospital in an ambulance. Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) officials have launched an inquiry into any other injured or missing person in the incident. Due to the flames, a nearby mall and a high-rise building have been evacuated, BMC officials said, adding that no injuries have been reported so far. BMC officials said that a level-4 fire broke out at a restaurant in Kamathipura at Mumbai's Grant Road. The Mumbai Fire Brigade (MFB) declared Level II fire at 2:22 am, Level III fire at 2:28 am and Level IV fire at 3:03 am on Friday.

JHARKHAND CM MAY REPLY TO ED'S SUMMONS

RANCHI: Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren has responded to summons issued to him by the Directorate of Enforcement in a money-laundering case linked to an alleged land scam, sources said. As per sources, Jharkhand Chief Minister has said that he has received the agency's letter and will reply to this in due course. The ED on January 22 issued a fresh summons to Soren, asking him to be available in the case for questioning between January 27 and 31. Earlier on January 20, the ED arrived in Ranchi to question the Jharkhand Chief Minister in the land scam case. The state Chief Minister was questioned for 7 hours at his official residence.

UTTARAKHAND ASSEMBLY SESSION FROM FEB 5

DEHRADUN: The session of the Uttarakhand Assembly will be convened from February 5 in Dehradun. A note issued on Friday from the Uttarakhand Assembly Secretariat stated that Uttarakhand had summoned the Fifth Vidhan Sabha of Uttarakhand to meet for the second session. "Whereas Governor, Uttarakhand had summoned the Fifth Vidhan Sabha of Uttarakhand to meet for the second session of the year 2023 at 11 am on Tuesday, September 5, 2023, in the Sabha Mandap, Vidhan Sabha Bhawan, Dehradun and which as adjourned sine die on September 8, 2023, in continuation there of the Speaker of Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly again summoned the House from Monday, February 5, 2024, at 11 am in the Sabha Mandap, Vidhan Sabha, Dehradun," the notice stated.

HP CHIEF MINISTER CONGRATULATES SOM DATT FOR PADMA SHRI

SHIMLA: Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu congratulated Som Datt Battu for being selected for the Padma Shri award as approved by the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, for rendering distinguished services in the field of promoting Art.

‘BREACH OF TRUST’: CONGRESS HITS OUT AT SHETTAR FOR REJOINING BJP

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah said Congress treated him with respect after he had joined the party ahead of last year’s assembly polls.

TDG NETWORK
BENGALURU

Karnataka Congress hit out at former Chief Minister Jagdish Shettar for rejoining the BJP, terming his move as a “breach of trust” and questioning his conscience. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and state Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said the Congress treated Shettar with respect, after he joined the party ahead of last year’s Assembly polls, while the BJP had humiliated him by denying him the ticket to contest the elections in May. Shettar, who rejoined his old party on Thursday, cited his long association with the BJP, and said many of his well-wishers wanted him to back in the outfit. “Jagadish Shettar had told me that he was being requested (by BJP) and workers were being sent to meet him. Yesterday morning too I spoke to him. He had told me that he would not

do such a thing and will not go (to BJP), as the Congress party has given him another life in politics. Keeping his words in mind, I spoke about it Mysuru, but now I got information that he is in BJP office,” Shivakumar said. Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, he said the Congress party, considering Shettar as a senior leader, treated him with respect. “He (Shettar) had said that BJP is not good, he had made several statements against the BJP...Congress had trusted the senior leader, but now you (media) are showing that that trust is being breached. I have got information that he has sent his resignation (as MLC) to the Chairman of the Legislative Council. I don’t know whether he has gone or has been taken (by BJP) under any pressure...,” he said. Responding to Shettar’s statement that he has rejoined the BJP in the national interest, Shivakumar asked, “did he not know about national interest, when he was



Jagadish Shettar

not given the ticket (by BJP)? Did he not know about Congress and national interest, when Congress made him MLC for five years?” Asked whether Shettar has fallen prey to any allurements, he said, “he (Shettar) has to say what allurements were given to him. I can only say that Congress treated him respectfully....all of us have conscience, he too will have conscience.” On whether Laxman Savadi (Congress MLC, who too had joined party from BJP ahead of Assembly polls)

will also go back to BJP, Shivakumar said, “no one will go, quitting the party, Shatter has gone, it’s a different matter, despite people rejecting him by a margin of 35,000 votes (in May Assembly polls), Congress treated him respectfully, rest conscience and people will decide.” Speaking to reporters at Virajpet in Kodagu district, Siddaramaiah said he was not aware of the development, but repeatedly maintained that Congress treated Shettar respectfully and that he had assured that he

NO COMPLAINT AGAINST CONGRESS: JAGADISH SHETTAR

BENGALURU: Former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagdish Shettar, who switched back to the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) after a short stint in Congress, said that he does not have any complaints against his former party colleagues. “After 9 months, I rejoined the BJP. It is my home, and I am happy about it. I joined the Congress during the 2023 Assembly elections. They gave me respect and honour, and I expressed my gratitude to the CM and Deputy CM yesterday for their good treatment. There is no complaint against the Congress party,” Shettar said on Friday. Speaking about the recently held Pran Pratishtha ceremony in Ayodhya, he said, “Ram Mandir was the dream of everybody. That has come to fruition.” On Mamata Banerjee deciding not to share any seat with the I.N.D.I.A. bloc in

West Bengal, Shettar said that alliances do not work out wherever there are contradictory interests. “Wherever contradictory interests are present, it does not work out,” he said. Earlier on Thursday, Jagdish Shettar said that it seemed that he had come back to his “home” after he joined the party. “Bharatiya Janata Party is my home. I came back to my home,” Shettar said speaking to reporters on Thursday. Shettar said he had a meeting with the party’s national leadership Amit Shah and JP Nadda on Thursday as well as state leaders BY Vijayendra, BS Yediyurappa and joined the BJP following their guidance. Responding to a question asked by a reporter on contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the former Chief Minister said, “Whatever the high command directs, I will do.”

would not go back to BJP.

“Jagadish Shettar came to Congress stating that BJP humiliated him and did not give a ticket, we gave him a ticket as he is an ex-Chief Minister. He lost in the Assembly election from his own constituency. We then made him MLC. So no in-

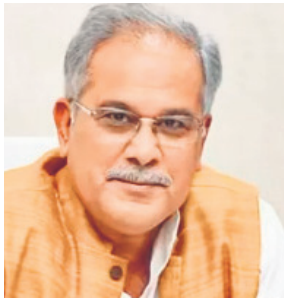
justice or humiliation happened to him from the Congress party, we treated him respectfully,” Siddaramaiah said. Shettar joined the Congress on April 17 last year, dealing a blow to the then ruling BJP ahead of Assembly elections.

The decision to part ways with the BJP came after the 68-year-old six time MLA, a former Leader of Opposition in the Assembly and ex-Speaker, was denied ticket to contest in the Hubli-Dharwad (Central) segment, which he represented in the outgoing Lower House.

Ex-Chhattisgarh CM Baghel targets BJP Govt after ACB files FIR in ‘coal, liquor scams’

TDG NETWORK
RAIPUR

Taking a swipe at the ruling BJP over the state Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) registering an FIR in the alleged coal and liquor scam cases against the previous Congress regime, former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Friday said the government directed the ACB to file an offence in a case that the ED and Income Tax sleuths had been probing over the last three years. Speaking to reporters on



Friday, the former CM and senior Congress leader said, “The ED (Directorate of Enforcement) and the I-T were probing the matter over the last three years and now it turns out that the government

has directed the ACB to register an offence. Earlier, during the probe carried out by ED and IT, none of our leaders were named. However, the ACB has now registered an offence naming several of our leaders. It seems that a case has been registered with an eye on the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.” He claimed that Congress leader UD Minj has been named in the case as he contested against the current Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, adding that the

move only goes to show the narrow and vindictive mindset of the BJP leader. Claiming that the move was aimed clearly at extracting political mileage ahead of the next general elections, the former CM added, “During our rule, revenue from liquor sales increased significantly as compared to the Raman Singh-led government. However, there’s not a shred of evidence to support allegations of a liquor scam worth Rs 2200 crores and a coal scam worth Rs 500 crores.

ULFA pro-talk faction meets Assam CM, discusses rehabilitation of cadres

TDG NETWORK
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma chaired a meeting with a 13-member delegation of the pro-talks faction of ULFA, which is now disbanded, and discussed the issues of rehabilitation of its ex-cadres here in Guwahati. The meeting held on Thursday discussed the demands of the delegation, which according to the members would help them to lead a respectable life.

The Chief Minister upon receiving the demands said that a mechanism of rehabilitation would be formulated for expeditiously meeting their demands. He said that the government will proactively address all the issues to ensure that the ex-cadres and their family members can lead a decent life.

Chief Minister Sarma also said that he will work with all for the expeditious implementation of Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) that was signed in a tripartite agreement between Central government, State government and the pro-talks faction



of ULFA on 29 December in the national capital. The delegation was led by its president Rajib Rajkhowar and general secretary Golap Barua. DGP GP Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Home and Political Avinash Puroshattam DasJoshi, ADGP Hiren Nath and other senior officers of Home department were present at the meeting.

The pact signed in December was significant as the banned ULFA-Independent is the only major insurgent outfit in the state after the ULFA pro-talks faction signed the agreement with the Centre and Assam government.

The separatist ULFA was formed in April 1979 in the aftermath of an agitation

against undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan). It split into two groups in February 2011 with the Arabinda Rajkhowa-led faction giving up violence and agreeing to unconditional talks with the government. Paresch Baruah, who leads the other rebranded ULFA-Independent faction, is against the talks.

A series of talks with officials concerned in the Central government has taken place since the delegation arrived in Delhi for signing the settlement pact.

The Union government has signed peace deals with rebel Bodo, Dimasa, Karbi, and Adivasi outfits in Assam over the last three years, bringing an end to the decades-long instability.

Tenure of UCC draft committee extended by another 15 days: Uttarakhand CM Dhami

TDG NETWORK
DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Friday said that the tenure of the expert committee preparing the draft of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for the state has been extended by 15 days. The Uttarakhand Chief Minister was addressing the media during the 75th Republic Day function at his residence in Dehradun, where he also unfurled the national flag.

“UCC committee has almost completed its task. A little more time is needed to compile it and complete some other formalities, so the time-period has been extended by 15 days. We are going to get the draft soon. As soon as we get it, we will take further steps and convene an Assem-



bly session,” the Uttarakhand Chief Minister said. The tenure of the committee headed by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai has already been extended three times earlier, with the latest being an extension of four months in September last year.

A statement by the Chief Minister’s office on September 23 last year said, “The Uttarakhand government has extended the tenure of the expert committee for the Uniform

Civil Code by four months.” The panel was constituted on May 27, 2022, and it is the fourth time an extension has been given to the committee. After receiving public suggestions, the committee has done the work of preparing a draft but the report has not been submitted to the government yet, the statement added.

The UCC was promised to the people of the state in the run-up to the 2022 assembly polls in Uttarakhand. Article 44 of the Constitution of India says that the State shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) throughout the territory of India.

The UCC proposes a common set of laws dealing with marriage, inheritance, adoption, and other matters.

NITISH NOT ALLOWED TO BECOME OPPOSITION FACE, CONGRESS MOVE BREAKS I.N.D.I.A ALLIANCE IN BIHAR

AJIT MAINDOLA
NEW DELHI

Congress has once again put the alliance government in crisis in Bihar. It seems that the alliance government in Bihar is on the verge of breaking, and under the leadership of Nitish Kumar, the government in the state is about to be formed again. Everything will be decided on Saturday, it is learnt.

This is not happening for the first time, it happened in 2017 as well. Now the question arises, who is responsible for this? The answer is Congress. Congress did not agree to Nitish’s terms in 2017, and they reportedly betrayed him again in 2023.

Actually Nitish wanted to become the face of the Prime Minister from the opposition in 2017 and 2019, but Congress was not ready to make him the face of the Prime Minister.

In 2023, Nitish Kumar united the anti-BJP parties in some way. However, even after creating an alliance, the parties did not gain the desired momentum.

In the meantime, the Congress spokespersons also made statements



like suggestions. The first impact of this was that the rally of the I.N.D.I.A alliance scheduled in Bhopal in October had to be postponed.

Congress was hoping that after winning the elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh in November, they would lead the I.N.D.I.A alliance according to their terms, but the election results turned the tables. After the results, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge called a meeting but by then, it was too late.

Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar started calculating in their own way. Until Nitish found a way, the danger of a split in his party loomed. This is where the game began. Sources say that the BJP

informed about the split in the party. Lalu Yadav is making efforts to make his son Tejashwi Chief Minister. When Nitish could not become the coordinator of I.N.D.I.A alliance in Delhi, he tried to influence the JDU. As soon as Nitish was seen in trouble, the BJP helped him, and I.N.D.I.A alliance leaned towards breaking.

The whole story of breaking and forming a government has been written by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. After everything was clear, Amit Shah clarified last week about Nitish’s return to the government.

As far as the day was concerned, it was supposed to happen after Republic Day. It is happening. The indication is that Nitish may resign, thereafter the Governor will administer him the oath by January 30.

In this way, Congress’s crucial move has brought a change again in Bihar. In 2017, if Congress had accepted Nitish’s words and made him the face of the PM, perhaps the country’s politics would have been different today.

Now, when Nitish tried for the second time, he was shown a twist again, and then Congress put itself in trouble.

TEJASHWI YADAV GOES INTO HUDDLE WITH CLOSE AIDES

CONTINUED FROM P1
Mehta, a cabinet minister was present at the event. When asked why Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav did not come for the official event at Raj Bhavan, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, “Ask those who did not come.” Earlier today, LJP leader Chirag Paswan said that the NDA is keenly watching the political scenario in the state, and is conducting meetings to discuss the situation and act upon it. “LJP (Ram Vilas) is monitoring every second of the po-



Tejashwi Yadav

litical scenario in the state. We even held a meeting yesterday to discuss the prevailing situation. The party has bestowed upon me, the responsibility to make decisions as far as the NDA alliance is concerned. We are cancelling plans for the next 2-3 days and going to Delhi. Whatever the decision will be, LJP and BJP will take it together,” he said. Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi said that the ruling Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) government will not last for long.

KCR to lead third front in 2024 polls: Rama Rao

CONTINUED FROM P1
‘Chai-biscuit’ meeting. “No one can form any alliance with the Congress by tolerating their arrogance. We earlier also said that the INDI Alliance meeting is just a chai-biscuit meeting. It has turned out to be true. The TMC and the AAP have proved this. Others will also not be with them (Congress). The party is ‘Ghamandi’ (arrogant) and they don’t be-

lieve in taking anyone along,” he said. The I.N.D.I.A. bloc is currently attempting to combat the inner differences emerging within the alliance. Earlier, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann and his West Bengal counterpart, Mamata Banerjee, announced they would go solo in their respective states in the Lok Sabha polls. However, a day after the

duo made the announcement, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi adopted a conciliatory tone, saying that the I.N.D.I.A. bloc will fight ‘Anyay’ together. “BJP and RSS are spreading hatred, violence and injustice. So, I.N.D.I.A. formation is going to fight ‘Anyay’ together,” he said while addressing a public gathering during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

‘Over 120 pieces of evidence support existence of Hindu temple in Gyanvapi’

CONTINUED FROM P1
Additionally, the report highlighted that the Arabic-Persian inscription inside a room indicated the mosque’s construction in the 20th regnal year of Aurangzeb (1676-77 CE). Consequently, it was inferred that the pre-existing structure had been destroyed during Aurangzeb’s reign in the 17th century, with some parts modified and reused in the current structure.

The Lawyers representing the Hindu side, Har-

HIGHLIGHTS OF ASI SURVEY

- The ASI survey report spans 839 pages, presenting a thorough examination.
- Over 124 pieces of evidence supporting the existence of a Hindu temple are documented in the survey report.
- Rigorous scientific scrutiny was applied to analyze all the evidence.
- Inscriptions discovered in the survey are in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Granthik, and Nagari scripts.
- The survey uncovered idols of Dikpal, Dwarpal, Makar, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha, and other deities.
- The pre-mosque temple featured a spacious central chamber and a smaller chamber on the north side.

ishankar Jain and Vishnu Jain, asserted that Hindus

should now be permitted to worship at the site.

NEED TO STUDY ASI REPORT FIRST, SAYS ISLAMIC CENTRE

CONTINUED FROM P1
Khalid Rashid said speaking to ANI. The ASI survey was ordered by the Varanasi district court after the Hindu petitioners claimed the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple. The ASI report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex revealed that a pre-existing structure appeared to have been destroyed in the 17th century, and “part of it was modified and reused,” adding that based on scientific studies, it can be said that there “existed a large Hindu temple prior to the construction of the existing structure.” The ASI also said the “west-

ern wall of the existing structure is the remaining part of a pre-existing Hindu temple”. “The Arabic-Persian inscription found inside a room mentions that the mosque was built in the 20th regnal year of Aurangzeb (1676-77 CE). Hence, the pre-existing structure appears to have been destroyed in the 17th century, during the reign of Aurangzeb, and part of it was modified and reused in the existing structure. Based on scientific studies/survey carried out, study of architectural remains, exposed features and artefacts, inscriptions, art and sculptures, it can be said that there existed a Hindu

temple prior to the construction of the existing structure,” the ASI said in its report. “Based on the scientific studies and observations on central chamber and main entrance of the pre-existing structure in existing structure, western chamber and western wall, reuse of pillars and pilasters of pre-existing structure in the existing structure, inscriptions on the loose stone, sculptural remains in cellars, etc., it can be said that there existed a large Hindu temple, prior to the construction of the existing structure,” the report further said.

JUDGE VS JUDGE: SC TO HEAR CASE SUO MOTU TODAY

CONTINUED FROM P1
ta Sinha not to pass adverse orders against Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee. The order claimed that Justice Sen had allegedly dictated specific actions, including discontinuing live-streaming in Justice Amrita Sinha’s court and dismissing two writ petitions involving Mr. Avishhek Banerjee. Justice Gangopadhyay asserted that Justice Sinha reported this to the Chief Justice of the High Court, who purportedly conveyed it to

the Chief Justice of India. Justice Sinha, presiding over petitions related to the ‘School Jobs for Cash Scam,’ in which Banerjee is implicated, has made significant observations during the proceedings. Justice Gangopadhyay accused Justice Sen of working in favor of the ruling TMC, questioning the judge’s continued tenure at Calcutta High Court despite a 2021 recommendation for transfer to the Orissa High Court by the Supreme Court Collegium. The order concludes with

a request to the Chief Justice of India to investigate the matter, highlighting potential interference with the course of justice and the division bench’s issuance of an order without a memorandum of appeal and impugned order. In the past two days, Justice Gangopadhyay has been in conflict with the division bench led by Justice Sen, which first stayed and then set aside his order directing a CBI probe into an alleged fake caste certificate scam in the State.

KEY TWO-DAY BIHAR BJP MEET STARTS TODAY

CONTINUED FROM P1
the party’s Bihar in-charge Vinod Tawde will go to Patna tomorrow. If reports are to be believed, the stage seems to be set for Janata Dal (United) supremo Nitish Kumar to return to the BJP-led NDA again. If Nitish switches sides, this will mark the fourth time in just over a decade that he would do it. Nitish’s shift would deal a severe blow to the ruling Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) in Bihar as well as the Opposition INDIA bloc at the national level that was formed to take on the BJP-led

Centre in 2024 Lok Sabha Polls. Notably, Nitish Kumar, after parting ways with the BJP in 2022, took on the initiative of coralling all opposition forces to jointly take on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling party in the national election. He hosted the first meeting of opposition parties in Patna, and it was widely believed that he would eventually be the coalition’s Convenor. However, in a curt response to media queries, RJD MP Manoj Jha said the Bihar chief minister must “clear the confusion” by evening.

Stage set for yet another switch by Nitish to NDA

CONTINUED FROM P1
statement which triggered cracks within the ruling alliance. However, a few hours later, all three posts by Lalu’s daughter were deleted. Earlier on Wednesday, on the occasion of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur’s birth centenary celebrations, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar launched a scathing attack on dynastic politics saying, “Karpoori Thakur never promoted his family. Taking inspiration from him, I too have never promoted any member of my family. But

today, people are promoting dynastic politics.” However, Janata Dal (United) leader KC Tyagi on Thursday affirmed that the party was still with the Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) in the state and the opposition bloc-I.N.D.I.A. Meanwhile, Rashtriya Lok Janata Dal (RLJD) president Upendra Kushwaha on Friday took a jibe at Chief Minister Nitish Kumar saying that even if the latter leaves the ruling Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance), what is the guarantee that he would stay with the Bharatiya

Janata Party after the Lok Sabha elections. The former ally of Bihar Chief Minister told ANI that it is true Kumar is considering leaving his current alliance. “There is talk that he may join the NDA alliance. It is true that CM Nitish Kumar is considering leaving the (I.N.D.I.A. alliance). If he joins the NDA, the big question is whether he will stay with the NDA after the elections or not... What is the guarantee that he will not leave the NDA alliance after the Lok Sabha elections,” Kushwaha said.

‘Long live India-France friendship’: Macron

**TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI**

In a reaffirmation of the long-standing friendship between India and France, President Emmanuel Macron on Friday said: “Long live the friendship between France and India.” At the outset of his address during a banquet hosted by President Droupadi Murmu, Macron expressed heartfelt gratitude for the warm welcome extended to his delegation. Macron shared his appreciation for the unique bond that transcends time and shared values.

The French President acknowledged the exceptional welcome and recalled the five years since his last state visit, expressing his pleasure at returning to India after the resounding success of India’s G20. Macron expressed deep honour in having French soldiers participate alongside their Indian counterparts, deeming it an unforgettable memory for the entire delegation. “It is with the most pleasure that we are here and to come back five years after our former state visit and five months after the success of your G20. We were extremely honoured to be part of such an important and unique day and to have our soldiers being alongside with you and being part of this exceptional moment. I think this is for everybody here in this delegation, in our memories forever,” he said. Highlighting the warmth of their meetings, Macron



reflected on the special relationship between India and France, citing the recent joint celebration of Bastille Day and the reciprocal visit during the 75th Republic Day. “Clearly, we don’t seem to be able to stay apart...This is probably due to the very special relation we have together. And the fact that between India and France there is something very special because we do share a lot of similarities,” the French President said. The President emphasised the shared taste for history, culture, creativity, and gastronomy, underlining the special connection that goes beyond diplomatic ties. Macron’s recounted his visit to Jaipur, with Prime Minister Modi showcasing the symbolic moments that

resonated with historical significance. “Yesterday, I was delighted, Prime Minister, to discover Jaipur with you. We had a wonderful stay from Amber Fort to the Palace of Winds. Through the city it was extremely moving and definitely referred to poems of Tagore translated into French by Andre Gide, another poet and novelist, which is part of our common culture of India and France because it was translated one century ago. And I will not forget the Chai we shared together close to the palace because it was a chai paid with UPI. And this is the perfect synthesis of why it is so special. Friendship and the warmth of such a celebration tradition and innovation,” Macron said. The visit to Jantar Mantar,

where French Jesuit astronomers collaborated with India in the 18th century, was portrayed as a precursor to contemporary space cooperation. “We went to the Jantar Mantar that we visited together. And I don’t forget that it allowed two French Jesuit astronomers in 1734 to determine with precision the latitude and longitude of Jaipur. It was undoubtedly as well the first space cooperation in history and we did it together between India and France,” he said. The French President underscored the comprehensive partnership between the two nations, spanning scientific collaboration, culture, education, defence industry, nuclear energy, and more. Macron highlighted the signing of the 2047 roadmap, envisioning a future of mutual cooperation in various fields. “This ceremony was for me a sort of metaphor the whole relation we want to have and we will have. And from scientific links to culture, to education, to defence industry, nuclear energy, and all the different sectors being present here, I have to say that the intensity is due to the fact that, indeed, we do share this willingness to have a warm and friendly common approach, to respect our tradition, especially our culture on both sides, but to build together the future. This is exactly what is called for the ambition of our own friendship,” he added. Emphasizing the shared vision for the Indo-Pacific region, Macron advocated

for a free and open environment while rejecting any hegemony. “We do share the same vision of Indo-Pacific region as well. A region which should not be spoiled and trapped by the hegemony of some powers, but a region that we want to see free and open. And this free and open Indo-Pacific, it’s, I think, one of the anchor of the bilateral relation we have because we do share the same values and the same principle for the whole region,” the French President added. He pointed to joint efforts in global forums, including COP28 and the upcoming United Nations conference for oceans in 2025, as manifestations of their shared values and principles. “This is exactly what we conveyed together from the COP28 this is what we will convey together what we conveyed together during your G20 and thanks again for your leadership and this is what we will do together from the United Nations Conference for oceans that France will host in 2025 and definitely in the meanwhile this is what we will do share as well for our Olympic Games that we will organize this year,” he also said. Also bullish on strengthening cooperation in sports, Macron pledged support for India’s intention to organize future Olympic Games. “And we will be delighted to build a stronger cooperation on sports and this type of event as well with you, as we will definitely support your intention to organize Olympic Games in India for the future,” he added.

WOMEN POWER STEALS THE SHOW AT 75TH REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS

CONTINUED FROM P1
another first, the parade was heralded by over 100 women artistes playing Indian musical instruments such as ‘shankh’ and ‘nagada’ instead of traditional military bands. The first Army contingent leading the mechanised column was the 61 Cavalry, which was raised in 1953. It was followed by 11 mechanised columns, 12 marching contingents and a fly-past by advanced light helicopters of the Army Aviation Corps. The T-90 Bhishma tanks, NAG missile systems, infantry combat vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, weapon locating radar system ‘Swathi’, drone jammer system and medium-range surface-to-air missiles were among the key displays by the mechanised columns. The all-women tri-services contingent, led by Captain Sandhya of the Army Military Police, with three supernumerary officers Captain Sharanya Rao, Sub Lieutenant Anshu Yadav and Flight Lieutenant Shrishti Rao, drew huge applause. Another all-women Armed Forces Medical Services contingent,

headed by Major Srishti Khullar with Captain Amba Samant of the Army Dental Corps, Surgeon Lieutenant Kanchana of the Indian Navy and Flight Lieutenant Dhivya Priya of the Indian Air Force also marching down the majestic avenue. The Army’s marching contingents included the Madras Regiment, the Grenadiers, the Rajputana Rifles, the Sikh Regiment and the Kumaon Regiment. The Indian Navy’s contingent consisted of 144 men and women Agniveers, led by Lt Prajwal M as commander and Lt Mudita Goyal, Lt Sharvani Supreya and Lt Devika H as platoon commanders. It was followed by a naval tableau, depicting the themes ‘Nari Shakti’ and ‘Sea Power Across the Oceans Through Indigenisation’. The themes of the celebrations were -- ‘Viksit Bharat’; and ‘Bharat -- Loktantra Ki Matraka’ (India -- Mother of Democracy). A 95-member marching contingent and a 30-member band contingent from France also took part in the parade.



Two Rafale fighter gets and an Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport aircraft of the French air force also featured in ceremony that culminated with a jaw-dropping fly-past by 46 aircraft of the Indian Air Force. The IAF fleet included 29 fighter jets, seven transport aircraft, nine helicopters and a heritage plane. These aircraft operated from six different bases. Fifteen women pilots, including six from the fighter streams, operated the IAF platforms during the fly-past. For the first time, indigenously-built Tejas aircraft flew in a formation of four aircraft. The ceremony started with the prime minister’s visit to the

National War Memorial, where he led the nation in paying solemn tributes to the fallen heroes by laying a wreath. Minutes later, President Murmu and her French counterpart Macron arrived in the ‘traditional buggy’ as the crowd sought to capture the moment on their mobile phones. The national flag was then unfurled, followed by the national anthem with a 21-gun salute using the indigenous 105-mm Indian Field Guns. “The 75th Republic Day Parade showcased the nation’s extraordinary Nari Shakti as impressive march-pasts by women received standing ovation by the invitees. President Droupadi Murmu and the French

President Emmanuel Macron arrived at the Kartavya Path in the traditional buggy which made a comeback after 40 years,” the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X. Four Mi-17 IV helicopters of the 105 Helicopter Unit showered flower petals on the audience present at the Kartavya Path. The Kartavya Path also witnessed a march past by a combined band and marching contingent of the French armed forces. Gallantry award winners, and winners of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar riding jeeps decked up with flowers, also took part in the parade. Officials said about 77,000 guests are estimated to have attended the event, which included 13,000 “special invitees”. A senior official of ISRO said, “about 200 women from ISRO” also attended the event, some of them accompanied by their spouses. A total of 16 tableaux from states, Union territories and nine from central ministries and departments rolled down the Kartavya Path during the parade.

TOP 5 BILLIONAIRES' RICHES SOAR 114% SINCE 2020: STUDY

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The amassed fortunes of the globe's five wealthiest individuals have experienced a staggering surge, more than doubling to an astronomical \$869 billion since the tumultuous year of 2020, as reported by the renowned anti-poverty organization Oxfam.

This revelation, disclosed in Oxfam's comprehensive report titled "Inequality Inc.," coincides with the annual congregation of business elites during the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos, spanning from January 15 to 19.

The report sheds light on a concerning trend where billionaires are increasingly taking the reins, with either direct management or primary shareholder roles in seven out of the world's ten largest companies.

Despite the world grappling with various crises, notably the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, billionaires globally have seen their collective wealth soar by an astonishing \$3.3 trillion since 2020.

A specific focus of the report centres on the exponential rise in fortunes of the five wealthiest men on the planet: Elon Musk of Tesla, Bernard Arnault and his family associated with the luxury conglomerate LVMH, Jeff Bezos, the visionary founder of Amazon, Larry Ellison, the trailblazing founder of Oracle, and the venerable investment guru Warren Buffett. The combined wealth of these magnates has surged by an impressive 114% in real terms since the pandemic-ridden year of 2020.

Traditionally released just ahead of the Davos forum in the Swiss Alpine resort, Oxfam's annual report on global inequality serves as

a poignant reminder of the pressing need for economic reforms. Behar's assertion underscores the imperative for a paradigm shift, questioning the prevailing narrative that seems to prioritize the super-rich within the capitalist structure.

In essence, the Oxfam report paints a vivid picture of a world grappling with an exacerbated wealth gap, where the fortunes of a privileged few skyrocket while a significant portion of the global population faces economic hardship. This narrative aligns with Oxfam's overarching mission to champion socio-economic justice, urging policymakers and leaders to address the root causes of this profound inequality.

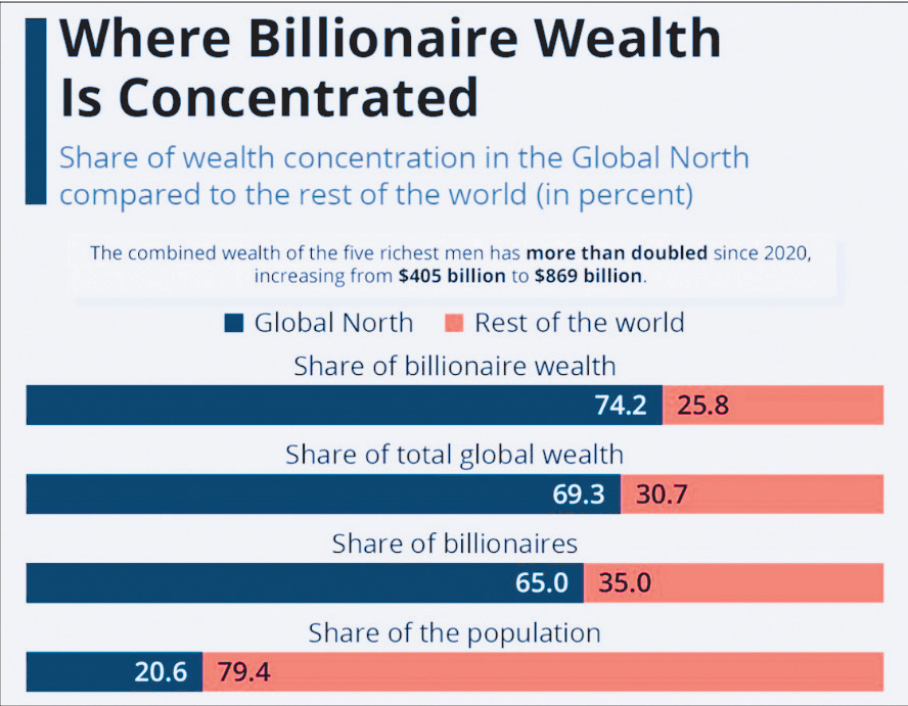
Cost-of-living crisis

The rallying cry against inequality echoes loudly as Oxfam, on January 15, issued a fervent call for governments worldwide to rein in corporate power, asserting that the chasm between the haves and have-nots is not a mere coincidence.

The organization advocates for decisive action, proposing measures such as breaking up monopolies, levying taxes on excess profit and wealth, and endorsing alternative models of corporate governance, such as employee ownership.

Oxfam's clarion call comes at a time when 148 top corporations are reported to have reaped staggering profits totalling \$1.8 trillion, marking a significant 52% increase over a three-year average. This financial windfall, however, has not trickled down to the millions of workers grappling with a cost-of-living crisis, exacerbated by inflation-induced wage cuts in real terms.

A poignant assertion from Amitabh Behar, the interim Executive Director of Oxfam International, sheds light on the deliberate nature of this growing wealth gap. "This



inequality is no accident; the billionaire class is ensuring corporations deliver more wealth to them at the expense of everyone else," he remarked.

The report substantiates this claim by underscoring a disconcerting projection: the possibility of witnessing the world's first trillionaire within a decade, a stark juxtaposition against the estimations that ending poverty would take a staggering 230 years.

The report draws attention to the rarity of such a financial milestone, noting that the individual who achieves the trillion-dollar mark, possibly not even featured on the current roster of the richest individuals, would essentially hold a comparable economic value to oil-rich Saudi Arabia.

The historical context is interwoven, referencing John D. Rockefeller, widely recognized as the world's inaugural billionaire in 1916. Presently, Elon Musk, the visionary CEO of Tesla, commands the title of the richest individual globally, boasting a personal fortune just shy of \$250 billion, according to Oxfam's



estimations.

The report takes a critical stance on the actions of the private sector globally, alleging an unrelenting pursuit of reduced tax rates, increased loopholes, diminished transparency, and other measures aimed at enabling companies to contribute as minimally as possible to public coffers.

The consequence of this intensive lobbying over tax policymaking, according to Oxfam, has been a significant reduction in corporate taxes. In Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, corporate tax rates have plummeted from 48% in 1980 to a mere 23.1% in 2022, depriving governments of essential funds that could otherwise be



channelled to support the most economically vulnerable segments of society.

In essence, Oxfam's compelling narrative underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms, imploring governments and policymakers to address the root causes of burgeoning inequality and reshape economic landscapes to foster a more equitable future.

What is stakeholder capitalism?

The genesis of the Davos events was grounded in the advocacy of "stakeholder capitalism," a principle championed by the World Economic Forum (WEF). According to the WEF, this ideology redefines corporations, emphasizing a purpose beyond profit maximization and a commitment to fulfilling "human and societal aspirations as part of the broader social system."

However, Oxfam's recent report, drawing from diverse data sources such as the International Labour Organization, World Bank, and Forbes annual Rich List, starkly contradicts the assertion that such aspirations are being realized.

Oxfam's comprehensive analysis further reveals a grim reality for the global workforce. Over the past two years, nearly 800 million workers have witnessed their wages fail to keep pace with inflation. This stagnation translates, on average, to the equivalent of 25 days of lost annual income per worker, underscoring the economic challenges faced by millions of individuals.

In a disheartening revelation, the study highlights that a mere 0.4% of the world's 1,600 largest corporations have publicly committed to paying workers a living wage and supporting such remuneration in their value chains. This statistic underscores a pervasive gap between corporate rhetoric and tangible actions in addressing the plight of workers worldwide.

Oxfam's assessment extends to the global distribution of wealth, revealing a

stark contrast. Despite representing only 21% of the global population, affluent countries in the Global North command a staggering 69% of the world's total wealth and are home to a significant 74% of the world's billionaire wealth. This data emphasizes the skewed distribution of economic resources, further exacerbating global inequality.

The report also draws attention to the impact of geopolitical events on economic disparities. Oxfam notes that Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, leading to soaring energy and food costs, disproportionately affected the poorest nations. This geopolitical event acted as a catalyst for exacerbating the existing economic challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations.

This poignant observation encapsulates the stark realities outlined in the report, prompting a critical examination of the socio-economic landscape and the imperative for transformative change.

The juxtaposition of the World Economic Forum's advocacy for "stakeholder capitalism" and Oxfam's findings underscores the dissonance between rhetoric and action within corporate circles. Despite the purported commitment to societal

aspirations, the reality on the ground, as revealed by Oxfam's analysis, highlights a glaring disparity between stated ideals and tangible outcomes.

The report's scrutiny extends to the global distribution of wealth, emphasizing the disproportionate concentration of economic resources in affluent countries, particularly in the Global North. Moreover, the impact of geopolitical events, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by the most economically disadvantaged nations.

As we navigate the beginnings of what Oxfam terms a "decade of division," marked by economic shockwaves from the pandemic, inflation, and conflict, the imperative for transformative change becomes more apparent than ever. The call for governments and policymakers to address the root causes of inequality resonates, urging a paradigm shift away from shareholder capitalism towards a more equitable and sustainable future.

Oxfam's compelling narrative serves as a powerful catalyst for dialogue, advocacy, and collective efforts to reshape economic landscapes and champion socio-economic justice on a global scale.

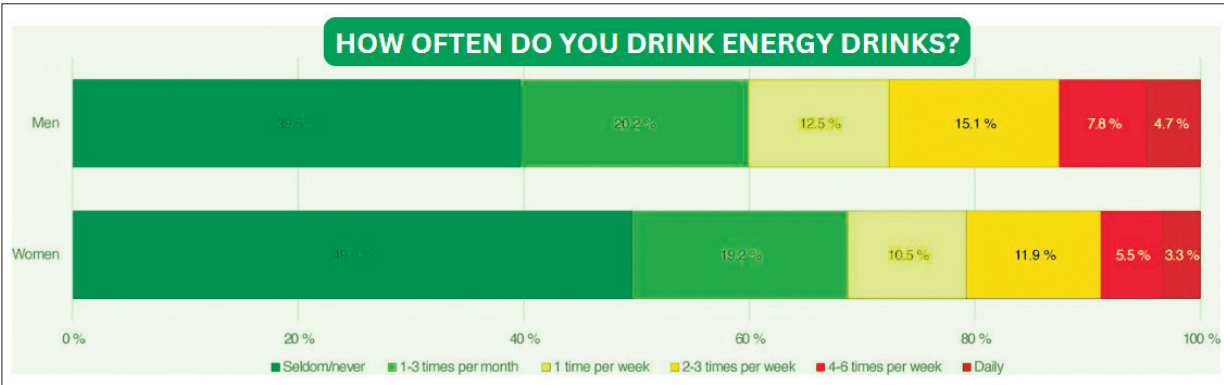
ENERGY DRINKS: A JOLT TO AWARENESS, A BLOW TO SLEEP QUALITY

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Awareness regarding energy drinks did not align well with knowledge among young adults. Surprisingly, positive awareness among students appeared to encourage increased consumption. This trend could be attributed to the marketing strategies employed by companies, targeting their audience with messages highlighting positive health and social benefits. A study involving UAE university students revealed that around 63% were aware of energy drink ingredients but were uncertain about the safest consumption levels.

Another study indicated that while most students knew about one or more components of energy drinks, a significant number lacked awareness that caffeine is an ingredient (37.14% vs. 44.77%, male vs. female). Similarly, research in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, found a lack of knowledge among more than half of the students regarding caffeine as an energy drink ingredient (57.7% of males, 51.1% of females). Furthermore, females demonstrated higher awareness of the side effects of energy drinks on health compared to males.

In contrast to studies from Saudi Arabia, the current study showed high awareness among females regarding caffeine as an energy drink ingredient (55.4%). However, a majority of energy drink consumers (75.2%) were unaware of any other

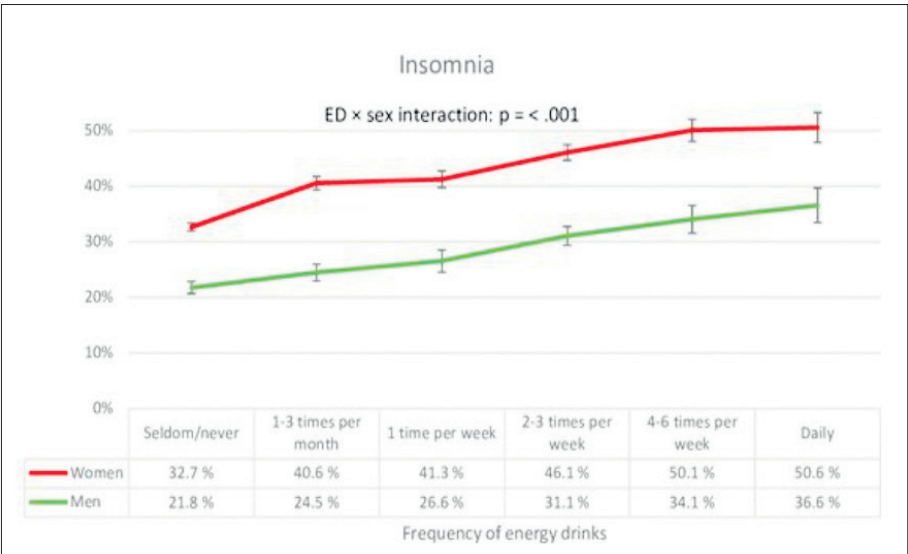


ingredients in energy drinks. Additionally, 85.3% of energy drink consumers lacked knowledge about the caffeine content in their drinks. Furthermore, 45.6% of participants were unaware of the volume of energy drinks they were consuming.

A similar trend was observed in the United States, where despite adolescents having negative attitudes toward caffeine, they continued to consume energy drinks. Overall, the results highlight that, despite awareness of caffeine as an energy drink ingredient, a majority of participants persist in consuming it in high amounts.

Consuming energy drinks is associated with poor quality sleep and insomnia among college students, according to a major Norwegian study published in the open-access journal BMJ Open.

And the higher the frequency of consumption, the fewer hours of nightly shut-eye the students clocked up. But even just the occasional can-1-3 times a month-is linked to a heightened risk of disturbed sleep, the findings indicate.



Energy drinks contain an average caffeine content of 150 mg per litre as well as sugar, vitamins, minerals and amino acids in varying quantities, note the researchers. Marketed as mental and physical pick-me-ups, they are popular with college students and young people in general.

While there is some evidence to suggest that they reduce sleep quality, it's not clear exactly which aspects of sleep might be more or less affected, or whether there are any sex-specific differences in these effects.

To explore these issues further, the researchers drew on 53,266 eighteen to 35-year-old participants of the Students' Health and Well-being Study (SHOT22 study)---the most recent wave of a large national survey of college and university students in Norway.

The students were asked how often they drank energy drinks, with the response options of daily, weekly (once; 2-3 times; 4-6 times), monthly (1-3 times), and seldom/never.

They were also asked detailed questions about their usual sleep patterns: when they went to bed and got up; how long it took them to fall asleep (sleep latency); wakefulness after going to sleep. Sleep efficiency was then calculated from the total nightly hours of sleep vs time spent in bed.

Insomnia was defined as experiencing difficulties falling and staying asleep and waking early on at least 3 nights of the week, plus daytime sleepiness and tiredness for at least 3 days of the

week, for at least 3 months.

The survey responses indicated clear sex differences in patterns of energy drink consumption. For example, women were more likely than men to report never or seldom consuming energy drinks: 50% vs 40%.

Of those who said they did drink these beverages, 5.5% of women said they drank them 4-6 times a week and just over 3% reported daily consumption. The comparable figures for men were 8% and 5%, respectively.

However, there was a clear dose-response association for both sexes between energy drink consumption and fewer hours of sleep.

Both men and women who reported daily consumption slept around half an hour less than those reporting only occasional or no consumption. Similar associations were also observed for waking after falling asleep and taking longer to fall asleep.

Increasing consumption was associated with a corresponding increase in both nocturnal wake time and time taken to fall asleep---poorer sleep efficiency.

Insomnia was also more common among both women and men reporting daily consumption than among those reporting occasional or no consumption: 51% vs 33% (women) and 37% vs 22% (men).

Overall, higher energy drink consumption was associated with an increasing risk of sleep problems across all the aspects studied, with the strongest associations for

short sleep duration.

Compared with those reporting no or only an occasional energy drink, men who reported daily consumption were more than twice as likely to say they slept fewer than 6 hours/night, while women were 87% more likely to do so.

But even those reporting having an energy drink just 1-3 times a month were still at heightened risk of sleep problems.

This is an observational study, and as such, no firm conclusions can be drawn about the cause. The researchers acknowledge that reverse causality---whereby energy drink consumption might be a consequence of poor sleep rather than the other way round---might explain the associations found.

There was no information either on the timing of consumption or the exact quantities drunk, and the study relied on self-assessment rather than objective measures of consumption and sleep patterns.

Nevertheless, the researchers conclude: "The results from the current study show that there is a robust association between the frequency of [energy drink] consumption and the different sleep parameters.

"Identifying modifiable risk factors for sleep problems among college and university students is vital and our results suggest that the frequency of...consumption could be a possible target for interventions."

In conclusion, the presented studies highlight a

concerning trend among young adults, particularly students, regarding awareness and consumption of energy drinks. Despite varying levels of awareness about energy drink ingredients, notably caffeine, the majority of participants continue to consume these beverages, often in high amounts. The positive awareness generated by marketing strategies seems to contribute to increased consumption, even when individuals are aware of potential health risks.

Moreover, the findings from a major Norwegian study add a significant dimension to the discussion by linking energy drink consumption to poor sleep quality and insomnia among college students. The study reveals a dose-response association, indicating that a higher frequency of energy drink consumption correlates with fewer hours of sleep, longer wakefulness after falling asleep, and increased sleep latency.

While the observational nature of the study calls for caution in drawing firm conclusions about causality, the consistent associations found between energy drink consumption and various sleep parameters suggest a potential target for interventions. The need to identify modifiable risk factors for sleep problems among college and university students is emphasized, with the frequency of energy drink consumption emerging as a significant factor worthy of consideration in public health initiatives and educational campaigns.

FROM FIRST TWIN SEATER TEJAS TO RECORD INCREASE IN DEFENCE CAPITAL BUDGET

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

As the world's largest democracy celebrate its 75th Republic Day on Friday, here are the things that showcase India's 'Atmanirbharta in Defence' sector. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced the allocation of record 75 per cent (approximately Rs one lakh crore) of the defence capital procurement budget for domestic industry in FY 2023-24, a sizeable jump from 68 per cent in 2022-23. The Defence Minister also released the Fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) of Department of Military Affairs (DMA) comprising 98 items, during the plenary session of 'Swavlamban 2.0'. The list includes highly complex



systems, sensors, weapons and ammunition to be procured from indigenous sources as per the provisions given in Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 in a staggered timeline. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) handed over the first twin-seater Light Combat Aircraft 'Tejas' to the Indian Air Force (IAF) in October 2023, in the presence of Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt realising the vision of 'Atmanirbhara Bharat'. It is a Twin-Seater Light Combat Fighter aircraft designed, developed and

manufactured by HAL in Bengaluru. Herein, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Tejas Sortie in November was a major milestone as it was the first time an Indian Prime Minister flew a fighter aircraft sortie. During the 30-minute sortie, capabilities of Tejas were demonstrated to the PM. Notably, to enhance the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces, Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Rajnath Singh, approved in its meetings proposals worth a total of over Rs 3.50 lakh crore. In a meeting held in November, DAC accorded approval in respect of Acceptance of Necessity (AoNs) for various Capital Acquisition Proposals amounting to its 2.23 lakh crore, of which the acquisition worth 2.20 lakh crore (98% of total AoN amount) will

be sourced from domestic industries. Numerous projects for modernisation and increasing the lethality of the Armed Forces to include procurements of 26 Rafale marine Aircrafts, 16 Sky Guardians, 15 Sea Guardians, HALE, RPAS, HELINA ATGMS, Dhruvastra, Su-30 MKIs, HTT40 basic trainer aircrafts, Cadet Training Ships, improved Akash weapon System, offshore Patrol and Missile Vessels, Fleet Support Ships, IN Shankush medium rafts, Upgraded Dornier Aircrafts for Indian Coast Guard and contracts with BEL such as Project Akashteer and Sarang are being undertaken to name a few. Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) Tableau and Equipment will be showcased during the parade on Friday.

Women contingent at R-Day parade to inspire next gen to join force: Air Force Chief

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The participation of women Indian Air Force personnel in the Republic Day parade and the flypast will inspire the next generation of women to join the force, purely as a career option, Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari said. "Our capabilities are growing, our stature remains very high and when you talk about women, you are aware that Indian Air Force is a completely gender-agnostic service. We have women officers serving in every branch. We have them undergoing every possible course and tenantry every possible appointment that can be given to them," the Air Chief Marshal said. In this year's Republic Day parade, the Indian Air Force



Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari

Viksit Bharat's rich cultural diversity, the 'Atmanirbhara' military prowess and the growing Nari Shakti are the dominating themes of the 90-minute parade that will be graced by French President Emmanuel Macron as Chief Guest. For the first time, an all-women Tri-Service contingent will march down the

"Our capabilities are growing, our stature remains very high and when you talk about women, you are aware that Indian Air Force is a completely gender-agnostic service."

is strongly showcasing its capabilities in multiple areas, including 16 women pilots taking part in the fly-past over Kartavya Path.

Kartavya Path. Women pilots will also enthral the audience during the Indian Air Force's fly-past, representing Nari Shakti (women power).

It belongs to my whole team: Dr Yazdi Italia on Padma Shri Award

TDG NETWORK
VALSAD

Dr Yazdi Maneksha Italia, who has been conferred the Padma Shri Award for his work on sickle cell disease, said on Friday that the country's highest civilian honour belongs to his team. Maneksha Italia from Gujarat, is a doctor who dedicated his life to fighting sickle cell anaemia among the Tribals of Gujarat. Speaking with ANI, Italia said, "It is a good thing. I believe that this award is only in my name but it belongs to the whole of my team. Whatever I have done, it is with the help of the Valsad blood donation team..." "Shri Yazdi Maneksha Italia from Gujarat is a doctor who dedicated his life to fighting sickle cell anaemia among the Tribals of Gujarat. He has

been awarded Padma Shri for his contributions to the field of Medicine," MyGovIndia, a Citizen engagement platform of Government of India, posted on X 24 hours ago. There are 132 names on the list of Padma Awardees this year, including two duo cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one), as per the list below. The list comprises five Padma Vibhushan, 17 Padma Bhushan, and 110 Padma Shri Awards. Thirty of the awardees are women, and the list also includes eight persons from categories of foreign non-resident Indian (NRI), person of Indian origin (PIO), overseas citizenship of India (OCI), and nine posthumous awardees. The Padma Awards, which were instituted in 1954, are one of the highest civilian honours of India and

are announced annually on the eve of Republic Day. The awards are given in three categories: Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service), Padma Bhushan (distinguished service of higher order), and Padma Shri (distinguished service). The award seeks to recognise achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved. The Padma Awards are conferred on the recommendations by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year. The Awards Committee is headed by Cabinet Secretary and includes the Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and four to six eminent persons as members.

INDIA, FRANCE AGREE TO ADOPT DEFENCE PRODUCTION ROADMAP: FOREIGN SECY KWATRA

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

India and France agreed to adopt the Defence Industrial Roadmap and explore opportunities for partnership in the defence industrial sector and prioritise co-designing, co-development and co-production, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday. In a press briefing regarding French President Emmanuel Macron's ongoing state visit to India, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said that both countries agreed upon the production and manufacturing to harness the compatibilities and competencies to further strengthen defence cooperation. "The two countries have agreed to adopt a defence production roadmap. Now, the name itself is very clear that the focus and the priority of defence cooperation



Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra

through this roadmap is to actually identify opportunities for partnership in the defence industrial sector that prioritize co-designing, co-development, coproduction with the whole, and also building the defence supply chains between the two countries," he said. He added, "In terms of the range of domains, including the technology space that the industrial roadmap will aim to achieve, it would include both air and space

technologies, maritime technology, including the underwater domain awareness. It's a new space which is coming up naturally, the equipment and the systems related to the land warfare, and also robotics and artificial intelligence as also autonomous vehicles and platforms, and cyber defence." French President Emmanuel Macron is on a visit to India and was also the Chief Guest in the Republic Day Parade today.

Kwatra also described the details of the third visit of the French President to India and shared that in this visit President Emmanuel Macron is accompanied by a 40-member delegation. He said, "French President is accompanied by a 40-member strong delegation. The delegation includes three ministers, ministers of foreign affairs, defence and culture. As we speak, the external affairs minister is meeting his French counterpart, the newly appointed foreign Minister of France Stephane Sejourne... This is the 6th time that a French leader has come for India's Republic Day, the maximum for any country..." When asked about the Safran-India Shakti jet engines deal, the Indian envoy to France, Jawed Ashraf informed that the issue has always been a dis-

cussion between the two leaders and is part of the defence industry roadmap. He said, "This is a subject of ongoing discussions... Now, the issue is really about arriving at a set of specifications that comply with our future fighter jet requirements. So this always features in the conversation between the President and the Prime Minister, because what we are looking for is not just a manufacturing transfer of technology, which essentially keeps you going with the same crutches that you have been going on for the last six decades but to work in the actual design phase, metallurgical aspects, etc." Envoy Jawed Ashraf added, "So Safran is fully willing to do it with 100 per cent transfer of technology in design development, certification, production and so on and so forth.

INDIA'S FIRST FEMALE ELEPHANT-KEEPER NAMED FOR PADMA SHRI

TDG NETWORK
GUWAHATI

In what will be her life's crowning moment at the age of 70, Assam's Parbati Baruah, India's first female elephant keeper or 'mahout', will be one among 110 unsung yet distinguished persons to receive the country's fourth-highest civilian honour—Padma Shri—from President Droupadi Murmu.



India's first female elephant keeper Assam's Parbati Baruah to receive Padma Shri

The honour will be doubly special for Parbati, as she will be the second in the family after her elder sister, Pratima Pandey Baruah, to be conferred with the country's fourth-highest civilian award. Pratima was conferred with Padma Shri earlier for her contribution to Goalpariya, a popular Assamese folk music. Speaking to ANI on Friday, Parbati, a scion of the royal family of Gauripur in Dhubri of eastern Assam, said she has been around elephants since she was a child. Trawling back into the past, she said her family had an elephant mahal, where the jumbos were kept in large numbers after being tamed and domesticated.

"I am very happy to be chosen for this recognition after so many years. I thank all, and, in particular, the state and the central governments for this honour," Parbati told ANI on Friday. "I spent the better part of my life with and around elephants. I dedicated my life to their welfare. I kept on doing my work and God has now blessed me with this recognition. I will continue to work in this field. My life is dedicated to elephants and the preservation and welfare of the wildlife in general," she added. Despite growing up as a royal scion in Dhubri, Parvati's earliest memories largely figure elephants and it wasn't long before she found her true calling—elephant-keeping.

Under her supervision, she has so far trained over 600 wild elephants, besides imparting training to elephant-keepers. She has also toured various parts of the country, taking part in various sessions, seminars, and fairs, among others. Parbati, who is also known affectionately as 'Haathi ki Pari' (an angel for elephants) became the first female elephant mahout in the country, breaking all gender stereotypes associated with the profession. She spent over four decades pioneering the efforts towards resolving the human-elephant conflict. Starting her journey at the tender age of 14, Parbati inherited the skills from her father and 'guru', Prakritish Chandra Barua. She

imbibed all her elephant-taming and keeping skills from him. "I was introduced to elephants when I was a one-year-old infant. We had an elephant mahal in our house with a full complement of tuskers. We still have them. Growing up, a thought would often cross my mind as to whether I can also acquire the skills of handling elephants like my father," she told ANI. "I asked my father if I could learn the skills. My father said no as it was a male-dominated job. However, I was adamant and learned the skills from him and the nitty gritty around it. I learnt how to deal with elephants, how to heal them, and how to apply herbal medicine to them in case they come down with an ailment. It's a job that one should learn seeing others at work. It cannot be learnt from books," Parbati added. "Catching hold of an elephant and taming it is not easy as there are risks involved. But I was determined to do it. My father was satisfied with my perseverance and work and it continues to this day," she said.

'Truly humbled..., ' Venkaiah Naidu on Padma Vibhushan

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said that he was "humbled" by the Padma Vibhushan conferred upon him. "Truly humbled by the honour of Padma Vibhushan award conferred upon me. As I continue to serve the people after my tenure as the Vice President of India, this honour makes me even more conscious of my role in the national endeavour to create a Shreshth Bharat," Naidu posted on X on Thursday. The former Vice President dedicated this honour to the farmers, women, youth and all my fellow citizens of India. "I dedicate this honour to the farmers, women, youth and all my fellow citizens of Bharat. Let us rededicate ourselves to the service of the motherland and strive to take Bharat to greater heights of glory," he added. Former Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu, along with four other recipients, including the late social worker



Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu

and founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak, were honoured with the country's second highest civilian award, Padma Vibhushan, on the eve of Republic Day. Popular Indian actress Vyjayantimala Bali; actor, film producer, and former politician Konidela Chiranjeevi; and classical Bharata Natyam dancer Padma Subrahmanyam have also been honoured with the Padma Vibhushan on Thursday.

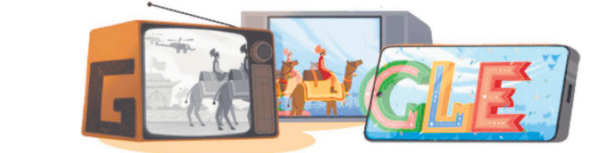
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posthumous awardees. The Padma Awards, which were instituted in 1954, are one of the highest civilian honours of India and are announced annually on the eve of Republic Day. The awards are given in three categories: Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service), Padma Bhushan (distinguished service of higher order), and Padma Shri (distinguished service). The award seeks to recognise achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved. The Padma Awards are conferred on the recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year. The Padma Awards Committee is headed by the Cabinet Secretary and includes the Home Secretary, Secretary to the President, and four to six eminent persons as members. The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.

GOOGLE CELEBRATES INDIA'S 75TH REPUBLIC DAY WITH DOODLE

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Celebrating India's 75th Republic Day, the Google Doodle showcased the parades, through the decades, on different screens: a black-and-white television set, a colour TV, and a mobile phone. The doodle featured by guest artist Vrinda Zaveri depicted the Republic Day parade as it would have been



seen on different screens. Last year, Gujarat-based artist Parth Kothehar crafted an intricately hand-cut paper artwork to illustrate Google Doodle on the occasion of India's 74th Republic Day.

Many elements of the Republic Day parade were represented in the artwork including the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the India Gate, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) marching contin-

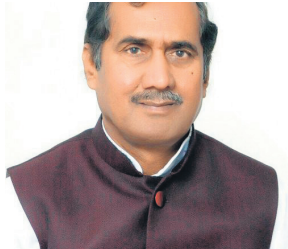
gent, and motorcycle riders. On this day in 1950, India declared itself a sovereign, democratic, and republic state with the adoption of the Constitution. India gained its freedom from the British Empire in 1947 and began drafting its Constitution soon after. The India Constituent Assembly took two years to discuss, modify, and approve the governing document, and

when adopted, India became the country with the longest Constitution. The adoption of this document paved the way for democracy and empowered Indian citizens to elect their own representatives. There are various parades around the country to celebrate the national holiday, with the largest one taking place at Kartavya Path, a ceremonial boulevard in New Delhi.

CM Yogi condoles death of SP MLA Shiv Pratap Yadav

TDG NETWORK
LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed condolences on the demise of Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA Shiv Pratap Yadav from the Gainsari assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh's Balrampur district. Taking to X, CM Yogi wrote: "The demise of Dr



Shiv Pratap Yadav, the MLA from the Gainsari assembly of Uttar Pradesh, is extremely saddening. My condo-

lences are with the grieving family. May Lord Shri Ram grant a place for the departed soul in His divine feet and give strength to the bereaved family to bear this loss. Om Shanti." Shiv Pratap Yadav was undergoing treatment at Medanta Hospital in Gurugram. He breathed his last during the late-night hours of the treatment.

INDIA 2024: CHALLENGES AHEAD

As India’s strategic ties diversify in many fields with the US, the latter must be made to appreciate India’s time honoured adherence to strategic autonomy and non-alignment.

OPINION
KAMAL DAVAR

The dawn of each year, notwithstanding the travails suffered in the outgoing year, generally kindles optimism and the hope of better days to unfold. To all across the world, which inexplicably is at war with itself since the last two years or so, peace and harmony and for those gravely afflicted with unprecedented violence, even the right to merely exist would be asking the least. By all accounts, for India too, 2024 is likely to be a benchmark year with some traditional challenges remaining and some newer ones likely to emerge owing to the myriad geopolitical churning taking place both regionally and globally.

Three years back when the planet was gradually getting over the near cataclysmic COVID 19 pandemic which took nearly 7 million lives globally and caused financial upheavals---- the most severe in a century---- the world was surprised with the mighty Russians unwarranted and unjustified invasion of neighbouring Ukraine.

This unequal war is now nearly 2 years old having caused much destruction in Ukrainian towns bordering Russia with hundreds of thousands of innocent Ukrainians being displaced, with many fleeing to other nations in Europe. Russian strongman President Vladimir Putin also disregarded Indian PM Narendra Modi’s polite call that “ this is not an era of war.”

Out of the blue on 7 Oct

2023, Hamas terrorists from the Gaza Strip bordering Israel attacked innocent Israeli civilians, without any provocation, and slaughtered atleast a hundred of them besides taking many civilians hostages. The Israelis, as expected, retaliated with overwhelming strength employing multiple forms of heavy weaponry including the use of air power, tanks, missiles, artillery. The once prosperous and bristling Gaza Strip now lies much in ruins with the poor Palestinians having suffered over 25000 fatalities with the Israelis unrelenting in halting their operations despite UN strictures and pleas from many friendly nations of Israel including the US. The world watched all these tragedies unfold helplessly.

Apart from the Russian-Ukraine War and the recent Israel-Hamas conflict, many other trouble spots in the world portend violence afflicted happenings. Armenia-Azerbaijan, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Qatar, Afghanistan and in our immediate neighbourhood, violence festers also in Pakistan and Myanmar too is in turmoil.

Last month another domain in instability has been added with Houthis and Somali rebels indulging in sea piracy and hijacking merchant ships along the Red Sea igniting the mercantile strategic West Asian waterways ostensibly to deter ships heading for Israel but also indulged in hijacking an India bound ship. The latter, of course, was freed by swift

and a professional action by the Indian Navy which now has deployed nearly a dozen ships in these waters to ensure no disruption in our maritime supply chains.

The Russian-Ukraine and Israeli-Hamas conflicts have thrown up many a diverse telling lesson for all nations including India. We will do well to analyse these lessons at an appropriate level, as relevant to the Indian landscape. Militarily and, equally importantly, the economic impact of the recent geopolitical churning especially impacting our oil supplies from West Asia, Russia and Iran will have to be clinically factored in our policies and overall strategies.

India 2024, by no means, has an easy path to traverse and thus it calls for a “whole of nation approach” to navigate India through the turbulent waters of the year which has dawned. We have much to celebrate but equally much to care about.

Firstly, in my humble view as a proud Veteran of our beloved country, there is far too much of animosity bordering on hatred among our politicians of differing hues in the nation which is a self-destructive factor in taking the nation forward. We have had good personal relations among members of various political parties in the past, since Independence, and despite ideological or any differences among them mutual cordiality was always existent. Whether from the ruling party or the Opposition, some form of mutual regard for each other is sine qua non.

Overall, India is doing reasonably well in its diplomatic endeavours and managing the vexed Russia-US relations deftly and in keeping with its national interests. However, US President Joe Biden cancelling his trip to India as the chief guest for



Overall, India is doing reasonably well in its diplomatic endeavours and managing the vexed Russia-US relations deftly and in keeping with its national interests. However, US President Joe Biden cancelling his trip to India as the chief guest for our Republic Day Parade cannot be taken lightly and some form of our displeasure should be conveyed to Washington.

our Republic Day Parade cannot be taken lightly and some form of our displeasure should be conveyed to Washington. Biden’s refusal to come to India owing to India’s alleged involvement in the planned assassination of Khalistani terrorist Gunwant Pannun is an outrageous charge and US and Canada should be suitably sounded. As India’s strategic ties diversify in many fields with the US, the latter must be made to appreciate India’s time honoured adherence to strategic autonomy and non-alignment. Equally, India will have to maintain its traditional friendly relations with Russia both to keep its huge armament dependencies on Russia in order and also continue purchasing Russian oil at cheaper rates.

As regards diplomacy is concerned, am afraid we are somewhat faltering in the neighbourhood and much

revival of the South Asian spirit and cooperation is warranted not only for the benefit of all South Asian nations but to keep China’s unbridled ambitions and hegemonistic tendencies at bay in this region. China is likely to continue to remain confrontational towards India in all respects and thus we have to remain well prepared in all respects and assertive on our uneasy borders with them. A conciliatory approach towards them will be a self-defeating exercise as the nation has learnt many times over since decades. China’s overtures towards Bhutan will need suitable counter measures to be taken by us and Bhutan’s security and well-being kept with us as hitherto. Equally, China’s forays into Bangla Desh, Sri Lanka and Nepal will also need to be managed with care by us.

Pakistan, in self-created

turmoil, can be left to their own volition while we keep a stern eye on their terror mischief creating habits. Hopefully some sense may dawn on them after their general elections with Nawaz Sharif coming back to power--- though rather difficult gauging their past.

With India going in for general elections in a matter of few months from now on, the Indian Armed Forces and other security agencies will have to be on full alert to prevent mischief from across or within. 2024 promises to be an eventful year which will set the tone for the coming years for India as it rightfully seeks and strives for its seat on the global high table. The endeavour to strengthen all constituents of its Comprehensive National Power and ensure inter-societal harmony should be our guiding principles in our march forward.

Role of mediation in Indian marriages

OPINION
DR. APOORVA DIXIT



Across India’s vibrant tapestry of cultures and traditions, one common thread binds us – the sanctity of marriage. Yet, even the knots of love can fray, leaving couples entangled in disputes that threaten the very fabric of their union. In these moments of emotional turmoil, a beacon of hope emerges – mediation. For decades, the adversarial nature of courts, with its protracted processes and emotional toll, has cast a long shadow over matrimonial disputes. The very insti-

tution meant to mend cracks often widened them, leaving families fractured and scarred. Thankfully, a silent revolution is underway, propelled by the transformative power of mediation. Unlike the adversarial battlefield of courtrooms, mediation offers a safe space for dialogue. A neutral, trained mediator acts as a bridge, guiding couples through the labyrinth of their grievances. This shift in perspective empowers both parties to be heard, understood, and, most importantly, respected. For Indian marriages, steeped in complex familial dynamics and social pressures, this non-judgmental approach is invaluable. Issues like dowry, financial incompatibility, or interference from families can be addressed with cultural sensitivity, paving the way for solutions tailored to the couple’s unique circumstances. Furthermore,

mediation offers a glimmer of hope for reconciliation. Unlike legal pronouncements that often mark an irreversible ending, mediation empowers couples to rediscover their connection, rebuild trust, and potentially salvage their relationship. This is particularly crucial in India, where the concept of “ghar bachao” (saving the home) holds deep emotional weight. However, despite its advantages, the path to widespread adoption of mediation in India is not without its challenges. Awareness levels remain low, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, societal stigmas attached to seeking help and a lack of trained mediators hinder its accessibility. Overcoming these hurdles requires a multi-pronged approach. Increased legal mandates for mandatory mediation can act as a catalyst. Training a diverse pool of culturally competent mediators, including those from rural communities, is crucial. But most importantly, we must collectively shed the misconception that seeking help is a sign of weakness.

The Supreme Court of India has played a significant role in promoting mediation as a preferred mode of dispute



The Supreme Court of India has played a significant role in promoting mediation as a preferred mode of dispute resolution in matrimonial matters.

resolution in matrimonial matters. Recognizing the emotional complexities and sensitive nature of marital discord, the Court has emphasized the benefits of mediation in facilitating amicable settlements and preserving relationships. While mediation is not a guaranteed solution for all matrimonial disputes, it offers a valuable alternative to the adversarial

nature of litigation. The Supreme Court’s strong advocacy for mediation has paved the way for a more amicable and constructive approach to resolving marital conflicts in India.

Mediation is not a panacea, nor is it appropriate in every case. However, its immense potential to navigate the emotional minefield of marital conflict cannot be ignored. It

offers a chance to mend torn threads, not with cold legal pronouncements, but with threads of understanding, empathy, and a renewed commitment to love. This is a path worth paving, for the sake of not just individual couples, but for the very fabric of family and community in India. Let us embrace the promise of mediation, ensuring that in the face of marital discord, India’s families find not conflict, but a pathway to healing and, perhaps, even reconciliation. Let us mend the torn threads, not with law, but with love.

*Dr. Apoorva Dixit is Assistant Professor (SG), School of Law, G D Goenka University, Gurugram.

PERSPECTIVE
CASTE MATTERS

JAGADISH SHETTAR’S GHAR WAPSI LEAVES CONGRESS RED-FACED

Shortly before the Lok Sabha elections, the announcement by prominent Lingayat leader and former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar to rejoin the BJP has left the Congress red faced. Shettar who had shifted to the grand old party ahead of the 2023 Assembly polls after being denied a ticket to contest from his Hubballi-Dharwad seat, which he had won six times, has now put the BJP back in the reckoning for the crucial Parliamentary confrontation. The 67-year old leader, who was nominated to the Legislative Council, has quit his seat, and shall now be the BJP nominee for the Lok Sabha from North Karnataka. The Congress apparently failed to utilize his services and though the former CM has cited multiple reasons for his ghar wapsi, it is well known that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, deputy CM, DK Shiva Kumar and party chief Mallikarjun Kharge had chosen not to involve him in important events.

Given his stature as the most influential member of his community after BS Yeddyurappa, the Congress committed the same mistake as the BJP had prior to the Assembly elections, and thus shall now have to bear the consequences of this decision. Shettar has a huge following in Northern Karnataka and had he been given enough importance, he would have managed to put the Congress on the front seat, in at least seven Lok Sabha seats in the region. Now this advantage goes to the BJP which is expected to perform better than what it was likely to before his coming back. In 2019, the BJP had won 26 out of the 28 Karnataka seats. Now the number may not be as high as it was, but it should remain respectable. Shettar had quit the BJP since he had major issues with BL Santosh, who seems to have been marginalized now, at least so far as his interference in Karnataka is concerned. Therefore, in the Karnataka-Bombay belt, the strong Lingayat community would now shift its weight behind the Saffron Brigade. It is learnt that his switch over back to his original party had been kept as a well-guarded secret, and Shettar, who had been in touch with prominent Lingayat leaders, took the decision after being re-assured of his position by Yeddyurappa and the BJP chief J.P.Nadda. The Ghar Wapsi took place at the BJP Headquarters in Delhi.

According to some political analysts, the inauguration of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya has been a game changer, and a large number of people in the State feel that so far as Assembly elections were concerned, the Congress was the right party. However, they prefer Narendra Modi as their leader for the national polls. Shettar along with Yeddyurappa and the late Ananth Kumar, had helped in making the BJP as a major force in Karnataka. It is now anticipated that some other leaders who had moved to the Congress like Laxman Savadi may also come back to the Saffron Brigade. The problem within the Congress has been that both Siddaramaiah and Shiva Kumar have been engaged in a internal feud ever since the party returned to power. Shiva Kumar’s supporters feel that their leader would replace Siddaramaiah once the elections get over.

All this is likely to change now and the Congress may go in for a status quo, at least for some time in order to prepare itself for the Lok Sabha elections. The movement forward is not going to be easy and without the support of the Lingayat community, which apparently is divided, the Congress is on the defensive. State Minister MB Patil is a prominent Lingayat face within the Congress but his influence is not going to be sufficient to garner the votes of his community. The Vokkaligas are divided between the former Prime Minister HD Deva Gowda and Shiva Kumar, and thus the backward and Muslim card is going to be the Congress’s secret weapon.

However, so far as the Muslims are concerned, even though they have been backing the party, they would be happier if some of their representatives besides Zameer Ahmed Khan, a minister in the government and a Siddaramaiah favorite, are given some prominence. Shettar would never have left the Congress, had he been made to feel at home in his new party, where insecure leaders ensured that he was kept away. His attempts to meet Sonia Gandhi did not succeed and while his supporters had expected him to be a part of the State Cabinet, he was kept away.

Even during major meetings, Shettar apparently felt sidelined and his belief in the Sangh ideology, with which he grew up since his ABVP days prevailed in the end. If Himanta Biswa Sarma, has been the best catch for the BJP from the Congress stable in the last few years, the Congress failed to realise the electoral potential of Shettar, whose presence itself would have enhanced the party’s prospects. What Lingayat leaders in the Congress feared was that he would overshadow them and thus gain importance if he was involved in major party activities. The Congress has termed his ghar wapsi as betrayal but it has nobody but itself to blame. The leadership is evidently only interested in consolidating its position rather than finding ways and means of expanding the party base. The Congress which could have got nearly 20 seats in the Lok Sabha in Karnataka is now back to square one and would have to fight for each constituency with the aggressive BJP under the overall leadership of Modi breathing down its neck. Congress needs to both introspect on what went wrong in its dealing with Shettar, and now how it can regroup and perform in the Lok Sabha polls.

PANKAJ VOHRA



BREAKING BARRIERS

As India celebrated its 75th Republic Day on Friday, Kartavya Path witnessed the might of All-Women Tri-Services contingent comprising Agniveers. Here we look at the role of women in defence services from a historical perspective.

TBG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

When most other girls were dreaming of pink dress, some preferred to adorn themselves with the uniform of the defense forces.

Rome was not built in the day so is the entire human civilization. Humanity has traversed through thousands of years and have evolved and grown into a close-knit society where we all have an important role to play. History is full of stories about great human figures that got catapulted to heroic statures and some have even attained God like status.

But all these humans share a common thread. Almost all of them were males. We hardly see any female figures except for a few who could make inroads into the patriarchalism that prevails all over the world.

Women have always been identified as playing second fiddle to men. Their role had always been restricted to bearing kids, looking after household affairs and obviously attending dotingly to her father and later to her husband. Except for a few societies, the girl child is always kept at second slot when compared to her male siblings who are better fed, groomed and always get the best of the available resources.

But the last century has seen a lot of changes and more so the last two decades. There has been a surge in women taking up responsibilities and assuming an active role in fields which were considered to be traditional forte of men. Time has moved especially in favor of the fairer sex.

The role of women in defense forces has evolved over the years, with many countries recognizing the valuable contributions that women can make in various capacities within their armed forces. The traditional view of defense forces as predominantly male-oriented institutions has given way to a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diverse skills and talents that women bring to the table. The role of women in defense forces can be examined in several key areas:

Thanks to the educational system, developing infrastructure, technological developments and obviously the opening up of the economies. Interestingly women have been dominating

WOMEN IN COMBAT SERVICES

In the Indian Armed Forces women are allowed to join in combat service support branches and in non combatant roles only and they can only become officers except the Corps of Military Police of the Indian Army where women can become sepoy too. The Indian Air Force had 13.09% (2018) and 8.50% (2014) women; the Indian Navy 6% (2018) and 3% (2014); the Indian Army 3.80% (2018) and 3% (2014). As of 2020, three officers have the rank of lieutenant-general or equivalent, all in the Medical Services. In May 2021, 83 women were inducted as sepoy for the first time in the Indian Army, in the Corps of Military Police.

the educational, health, hospitality, telecommunication, IT and ITES sectors but recently they are slowly but steadily moving in so called masculine domain that is armed forces.

Traditionally people felt uncomfortable even with the mention of the women fighting with the arms. It was felt that only men are fit to be in combats and women were seen as anomalies. But this has been proved as an archaic thought. Now women have started asserting themselves.

They feel that all opportunities should be open to both men and women and they have proved

It was only in the year 1992 that the Army, Air Force and Navy began inducting women as Short Service Commission (SSC) officers. This was the first-time women were allowed to join the military outside the medical stream.

their worth in every field. The recent decision of The Supreme Court regarding grant of permanent commission to women officers in armed forces will go a long way in changing the perceived gender bias against women. Women had their first induction in British Indian Army in 1927 as Military Nursing officers and as medical officers in 1943 to look after the troops, families and public during deployments which included female section of the population.

According to <https://static.mn.gov.in/data>, it was only in the year 1992 that the Army, Air Force and Navy began inducting women as Short Service Commission (SSC) officers. This was the first-time women were allowed to join the military outside the medical stream and as of now there are more than 9500 women in military. Now they have created a place for themselves as fighter pilots in IAF and as administrators in supporting services. Women are also included in combat roles

in five paramilitary forces, called the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs).

They are allowing women entry from the rank of constable to direct entry officers. Now women are representing more than five percent of these forces. The government has plans that women would account for thirty three percent representation in CRPF and CISF and fifteen percent in the BSF, SSB and ITBP in coming days. In Armed Forces, women have come a long way and have matched pace with the time. But there is so much still to be done. The armed forces have to be

accommodative in assimilating the women power in all wings whether it be combat, administration or medical. It is the responsibility of both the government and the society at large to recognize the women power and let them achieve their full potential. We need to work upon a roadmap that entails societal changes, acceptance and inclusiveness of women in all spheres of life.

It is quite evident that the role of women in defense forces has evolved over the years, with many countries recognizing the valuable contributions that women can make in various capacities within their armed forces. The traditional view of defense forces as predominantly male-oriented institutions has given way to a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diverse skills and talents that women bring to the table. The role of women in defense forces can be examined in several key areas:

COMBAT ROLES

The Indian Army has started inducting women into combat support roles. Women are eligible for roles in the Corps of Military Police, marking a significant step toward allowing them to serve in combat-support capacities.

The Indian Air Force has allowed women to serve as fighter pilots, breaking gender barriers in the traditionally male-dominated field of combat aviation.

SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION

The Indian government has been working towards providing more opportunities for women in the defense forces through the grant of Permanent Commission (PC). This allows women officers to have a longer and more stable career in the military, beyond the initial Short Service Commission (SSC) period.

NAVAL ROLES

The Indian Navy has been actively working to include women in various roles. Women are now serving as officers in the Indian Navy, contributing to different branches, including aviation and the naval arm.

SUPPORT ROLES

Women have been serving in various support roles across all branches of the defense forces. These roles include medical services, logistics, administration, intelligence, and communication.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Women officers contribute to the training and education of personnel within the defense forces. They serve as instructors in various defense training institutes, sharing their expertise with new recruits.

LEGAL & EDUCATION SERVICES

Women officers are actively involved in legal and education branches, providing legal expertise and contributing to the educational and training aspects of the defense forces.

PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS:

Indian women have been participating in international peacekeeping missions under the United Nations. They play a crucial role in maintaining

peace and security in conflict zones and are involved in various humanitarian activities.

It's important to note that while there have been significant strides, challenges such as gender bias, cultural norms, and societal expectations continue to be addressed. The Indian Defense forces are making ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive environment, recognizing the valuable contributions that women bring to the military.

REPUBLIC DAY 2024

Indian women are nowhere less in any way and they excel and present their calibre in every field. On the occasion of the 75th Republic Day, Nari Shakti took centre stage as women soldiers march down the Kartavya Path.

For the first time, an all-women contingent of the Armed Forces Medical Services marched on Kartavya Path, led by Major Srishti Khullar, with Capt Amba Samant from the Army Dental Corps, Surg Lt Kanchana from the Indian Navy, and Flt Lt Dhivya Priya from the Indian Air Force. Meanwhile, the Indian Navy tableau also highlighted the themes of 'Nari Shakti and 'Atmanirbharta', also showing aircraft carrier INS Vikrant and Navy ships Delhi, Kolkata and Shivalik and Kalavari Class Submarine. Another highlight of Republic Day was the motorcycle display that enthralled the guests and audience at Kartavya Path. The Central Armed Police women personnel exhibited their prowess of 'Naari Shakti'. 265 women bikers on motorcycles showcase bravery and valour. Apart from these, the Delhi Police all-women band, led by Band Master SubInspector Ruyangunuo Kense also participated in the Republic Day parade for the first time on Friday. The Delhi Police Brass and Pipe Band comprises of 4 Women Sub-inspectors and 81 Women Constables. The band played the 'Delhi Police Song. Delhi Police marching contingent which is the 15-time winner of the best marching contingent also marched down Kartavya Path. For the first time in its history, an all-women contingent is participating in the Republic Day Parade and is led by Addl. Deputy Commissioner of Po-



lice Shweta K Sugathan, IPS. The Red Safa clad smartly attired women, from the Delhi Police marching contingent comprise of one Addl. DCP, three women Sub-Inspectors, 44 women Head Constables and 100 women Constable. This contingent has a unique distinction of participating in the Republic Day Parade ever since India became a Republic in 1950. Its motto is 'Shanti, Seva our Nyaya' meaning 'Peace, Service and Justice'. The Republic Day 2024 celebrations began after Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid floral tributes at the National War Memorial to honour bravehearts of the Indian armed forces.

HISTORY

In 1888, the British Indian Army (BIA) established a military branch known as the Indian Military Nursing Service (IMNS), which recruited female nurses. This was the first time that the BIA recruited female service members into its ranks. Female IMNS nurses served during World War I and World War II, 350 of whom either died, were taken as prisoners of war or were declared missing in action; one of the

largest casualties suffered by the IMNS occurred on February 1942, when the SS Kuala, which was transporting several nurses, was sunk by Imperial Japanese Armed Forces bombers.[4] In May 1942, the Women's Auxiliary Corps was established to assist BIA operations; by the end of World War II, it had recruited 11,500 women.

Noor Inayat Khan, who was of Indian descent, served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during World War II. She was secretly sent to German-occupied France to assist in SOE operations there. Khan was betrayed and captured before being subsequently executed at the Dachau concentration camp, and was posthumously awarded the George Cross for her service. Kalyani Sen, the first Indian servicewoman who visited the United Kingdom, served in the Royal Indian Navy's Women's Royal Indian Naval Service during World War II. In 2021, the Indian Armed Forces' National Defence Academy entrance exam was opened up to female cadets.

In the Indian Armed Forces

WOMEN IN REGULAR COMMISSIONS

Under the Army Act of 1950, women were ineligible for regular commissions except in "such corps, departments or branches which the central government may specify by way of notifications." On 1 November 1958, the Army Medical Corps became the first unit of the Indian Army to grant regular commissions to women. Since 1992, women were first inducted in to various branches of Indian Army only in short service commission. In 2008, women were first inducted as permanent commissioned officers in Legal and Education corps, in 2020 they were first inducted in 8 more corps as permanent commissioned officers. As of 2020, women are not yet allowed as combatants in the Parachute Regiment of the Indian Army or other special forces, but they can join paratroopers wings of their respective arms like para EME, para signals, para ASC, etc.

As women are allowed to join in combat service support branches and in non combatant roles only and they can only become officers except the Corps of Military Police of the Indian Army where women can become sepoy too. The Indian Air Force had 13.09% (2018) and 8.50% (2014) women; the Indian Navy 6% (2018) and 3% (2014); the Indian Army 3.80% (2018) and 3% (2014). As of 2020, three officers have the rank of lieutenant-general or equivalent, all in the Medical Services. In May 2021, 83 women were inducted as sepoy for the first time in the Indian Army, in the Corps of Military Police.

As of 2020, Women are not yet allowed as combatant in the combat specialist forces, such as Ghatik Force, para commandos, etc. The para commandos is a voluntary service and the recruitment procedure of Para and Para SF does not strictly mention any gender for the soldiers that can participate. It is not clear if any women have been able to participate or qualify for this ELITE force. The Indian Airforce and the Indian Navy have allowed women to join the Garud Commando Force and the MARCOS respectively.

It is not clear as of 2023, if any women have been able to qualify. Dr. Seema Rao, also known as "India's Wonder Woman" is India's first woman commando trainer, having trained over 15,000 Special Forces of India (including the NSG, MARCOS, GARUD) as full-time guest trainer for 20 years without compensation as a pioneer in close quarter battle (CQB).

DELHI HIGH COURT REFUSED TO SUSPEND SENTENCE OF KULDEEP SINGH SENGAR’S BROTHER CONVICTED FOR DEATH OF VICTIM’S FATHER

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court in the case Jaideep Singh Sengar @ Atul Singh v. CBI observed and has refused to suspend the sentence of the brother of expelled BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar, who is convicted for causing the death of the father of the 2018 Unnao rape victim. The bench headed by Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma in the case observed and has dismissed the application moved by one Jaideep Singh Sengar wherein seeking suspension of his 10-year sentence awarded in March 2020, during the pendency of his appeal against the same.

In the present case, Jaideep Singh, along with Kuldeep Singh Sengar and five others were convicted by the trial court in 2020.

It being the case of Singh's that he was diagnosed with oral cancer in custody and had remained under the observation and supervision of doctors at AIIMS. The court granted him bail in November 2020 after considering his medical conditions, and since then, the said interim bail was extended from time to time till January 18 last year.

The court in June last year suspended his sentence considering his fragile medical condition, as an interim measure for 8 weeks, which was also extended and the Singh was out

of prison after that. It was also submitted before the court that the sentence of five co-accused persons was suspended, he also deserved to be allowed relief on the ground of parity.

On the other hand, the CBI opposed the plea on the ground that Singh had served only about 30% of his sentence i.e. three years out of ten years.

The bench of Justice Singh in the case observed and found no merit in Singh's plea moved seeking suspension of the sentence and accordingly, dismissed the same.

The court in the case observed the period of custody undergone by Singh, his medical condition, the severity and gravity of the offence committed by him and the impact of public confidence in Courts for the purpose

of deciding his application for suspension of sentence.

Further, the court stated that the appellant herein has remained in judicial custody for a period of about three years, which is much lower than half of the total sentence awarded to the appellant i.e. rigorous imprisonment for ten years. Thus, the present appellant cannot also seek any relief on the ground of parity.

The court also perused the medical report submitted by AIIMS wherein it was stated that the movements of the upper limbs and neck of Singh are functional, and thus, he does not require any assistance in his day-to-day activities.

Therefore, the said court is of the opinion that the medical report is clear on the point that the medical condition of the

appellant is not of a nature that he cannot serve the sentence awarded to him, in the jail.

The court clarified that the observations shall not be construed as an opinion on the merits of the case.

The court in the case observed that the victim was repeatedly gang-raped in 2017 by Sengar and his accomplices when she was a minor.

The court convicted Sengar for raping her and for murdering her father in connivance with police officers of Makhi, a village in Unnao district. He has been sentenced to life imprisonment. Further, the trial in the matter was transferred to Tis Hazari Courts by the Supreme Court in 2019 in the transfer petition moved by the survivor.

The Apex Court while taking cognisance of the rape survi-

vor's letter written to then Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, had transferred all five cases registered in connection with the incident from a Lucknow court in Uttar Pradesh to the court in Delhi with directions to hold the trial on a daily basis and complete it within 45 days.

The counsel, Advocates Mr. Pramod Kumar Dubey, Senior Advocate with Mr. Hemant Shah, Mr. S.P.M. Tripathi, Mr. Akshay Rana and Mr. Deepanshu Nainwal appeared for the Petitioner.

The counsel, Mr. Nikhil Goel, SPP for CBI with Mr. Kartik Kaushal, Advocate; Mr. Mehmoood Pracha and Mohd. Shameem, Advocates represented the complainant.

Accordingly, the court listed the matter for further consideration on May 05, 202024.

Delhi High Court Refused To Stay proceedings Initiated Against BJP Leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa In Criminal Defamation Case

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court in the case Manjinder Singh Sirsa v. State NCT Of Delhi And Anr observed and has refused to stay the criminal proceedings against BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa in a criminal defamation case filed by former president of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Manjit Singh GK.

The bench headed by Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma upheld in the case observed and has upheld the order of trial court passed on November 29 last year wherein the court upheld that the summons to be issued to Sirsa by an ACMM court.

The court stated that the prima facie examination of the impugned order and without going much into the merits of the case, lest it affects the case of the petitioner or respondent no. 2 at a later stage before this Court or Trial Court, thus, the said court finds that the learned ASJ has examined in detail, the issue of registration of FIR in relation to letter dated April 04, 2016 and simultaneous proceedings in the present complaint case for commission of offence of defamation, and at this stage, this Court does not find any reasons to stay the proceedings in the present complaint case.

It being the case of Singh that Sirsa, and other accused persons, had been defaming him regularly through social media posts, videos and press conferences which are available on the internet and have not been removed.

It has also been alleged by him before the court that he was called 'golak chor and

kalankit pradhan' by the accused.

The court while dismissing the plea seeking stay on criminal proceedings stated that the offence of defamation in the case was not a one-time offence committed in 2020 and thus, there was no infirmity with the observations of the trial court.

It has also been clarified by the said court that the observations were only prima facie in nature and shall not be construed as opinion on the merits of the case.

The counsel, Advocates Mr. N. Hariharan, Senior Advocate with Mr. Jasprit Singh Rai, Mr. Yoginder Handoo & Mr. Ash-

The bench headed by Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma upheld in the case observed and has upheld the order of trial court passed on November 29 last year wherein the court upheld that the summons to be issued to Sirsa by an ACMM court.

win Kataria appeared for the Petitioner. The counsel, Mr. Manoj Pant, APP for the State with Inspector Chetan Mandia, EOW; Mr. Mohit Mathur, Senior Advocate with Mr. Naginder Benipal, Mr. Sumit Misra & Mr. Mayank Sharma, Advocates for R-2 represented the respondent.

Andhra Pradesh High Court Issued Notice On Pleas Questioning Competency Of Govt Pleader, AGPs

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Andhra Pradesh High Court in the case observed and has issued notice to the State, Ministry of General Administration and Law and Legislative Affairs of the State on a batch of pleas challenging the appointment of the Government Advocate and two AGPs allegedly made against the provisions of AP Law Officers, the Appointment and Conditions of Service Instructions, 2000.

It has been contended by the petitioner or party that the persons in question do not have the minimum required standing

with the bar of 5 years and the advocate who was appointed to the post of Government Pleader was not registered with the Bar at Andhra Pradesh High Court as it is mandated under the 2000 Instruction.

The court observed that the Special Government Pleader per contra relied upon the 2003 judgement of the case State of Andhra Pradesh v. Pushpendar Kaur, wherein the court held that the guidelines for appointment were not statutory in nature, but executive.

The court held that the advo-

cate appointed by the Government shared an attorney-client relationship and the Government was at liberty to appoint who it thought appropriate.

The bench headed by Justice B. Krishna Mohan in the case observed and has issued the notice to the Advocate General under his capacity as a representative of the State, the Ministry of General Administration and Law and Legislative Affairs of the State.

The court while considering the facts and circumstances

The court observed that the Special Government Pleader per contra relied upon the 2003 judgement of the case State of Andhra Pradesh v. Pushpendar Kaur, wherein the court held that the guidelines for appointment were not statutory in nature, but executive.

stated that the purpose of going into the averments made by the party in person in all these three writ petitions, the counters of the respondent Nos. 1 to 3 are required.

The court stated that the

party in person has also been granted liberty to serve notice to the Advocate General in his personal capacity and the advocate appointed to the post. Thus, the issuance of notices to the respondent No.4 and re-

spondent No.4 5 from the Registry is deferred for the present, which can be considered after filing of the counters by the official respondents as it also lacks prima facie substantiation of allegations made against them.

However, the party-in-person insisted to take out personal notice.

Accordingly, the court listed the matter for further consideration on February 08, 2024.

The counsel, party in person, Gundala Siva Prasad Reddy appeared for the Petitioner.

The counsel, S. Sriram, Advocate General represented the respondent.

Madras High Court: Take Steps To Ensure Upcoming Bus Stands Are Disabled Friendly

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Madras High Court in the case Vaishnavi Jayakumar v The Chennai Metropolitan Development observed and has directed the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority to ensure that the upcoming bus terminals in Koothambakkam, Venpakkam, Varadarajapuram and Mamallapuram are constructed by duly complying with the Harmonized Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India, 2021.

The bench comprising of Chief Justice SV Gangapurwala and Justice Bharatha Chakravarthy in the case was hearing the petition moved by disability rights activist Vaishnavi Jayakumar wherein seeking directions to the CMDA to ensure that the newly constructed Kilambakkam Bus Terminus is compliant with the design and standards prescribed in the Harmonized Guidelines.

The counsel, Public Prosecutor G Sudheer represented the respondent.



The court in the case observed that the joint inspection was conducted and an access audit report was also shared with the petitioners in which 17 deficiencies were pointed out and the authorities informed the court that work orders were issued for seven deficiencies and would be issued for the remaining deficiencies also.

It has also been informed by the authorities that the work contract for the remaining deficiencies will be issued within two months and the tender would contain all the details of the works to be carried out in accordance with the audit report and the guidelines.

Therefore, when the said court was informed that

new bus stands were also being constructed, the court remarked that the same would also have to be constructed by following the guidelines.

It was also suggested by the court that the Access auditors could make periodic inspections during the construction of the bus stand and make suggestions whenever necessary.

KERALA HIGH COURT GRANTED BAIL TO MAN WHO ALLEGEDLY MADE ABUSIVE AND CASTEIST REMARKS AGAINST MINISTER K. RADHAKRISHNAN ON FACEBOOK

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Kerala High Court in the case observed and has granted bail to the appellant who was in judicial custody for allegedly making abusive and casteist remarks against the Minister for Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes and Devaswom, K. Radhakrishnan in Facebook in connection with his visit to Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple.

The bench headed by Justice K Babu in the case observed while granting bail that this court have gone through the case diary. Thus, the investigation is almost in the final stage. Thus, on a perusal of the materials placed before the court, I am of the view that further detention of the appellant is not required.

In the present case, the crime was registered under

Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code, IPC (promoting enmity between different groups), Section 120(o) (penalty for causing nuisance and violation of public order) of the Kerala Police Act and Section 3 (punishment for offences atrocities) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The court stated that the appellant had allegedly commented on a Facebook post along with a photograph of the Minister which was defamatory. Thus, the allegation against the appellant was that the comment contained abusive words using the caste name of the Minister.

It was alleged before the court that that the comment was made on the post to defame the appellant and to create enmity among different groups based on caste and community to disturb public tranquillity.

It was alleged before the court that that the comment was made on the post to defame the appellant and to create enmity among different groups based on caste and community to disturb public tranquillity.

The counsel appearing for the appellant submitted before the court that he had no intention to defame the Minister or to create enmity between different groups based on caste or community.

It was also submitted that the appellant had only accidentally shared the Facebook post and had also made a public apology.

The court noted that the appellant had surrendered before the investigating officer and that he was arrested and produced before the Court. Further, the court noted that the appellant has been remanded to judicial

custody.

The court while considering the facts and circumstances of the case observed and has granted bail on findings that the investigation was almost over and no further detention was required.

The counsel, Advocates K Shaj, Beena N. Kartha, C. Ijlal, Poornima Rajan, Arun Chand, Bharat Vijay P. Majid Muhammed K., Minu Vittoria Paulson, Gopika Gopal, Archana Suresh Archana P.P. appeared for the appellant.

The counsel, Public Prosecutor G Sudheer represented the respondent.

SUPREME COURT POSTS KERALA'S SUIT AGAINST CENTRE OVER BORROWING CURBS ON FEB 13 TO CONSIDER INTERIM RELIEF APPLICATION

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case State of Kerala v. Union of India observed and has asked the Centre to file its response to an interim relief application filed by the Kerala government, as part of its plea against alleged interference by the central government in the state's finances.

In the present case, the State of Kerala moved the apex court last December, wherein asserting that the

Centre's actions were impinging on the state's ability to fulfill its commitments outlined in its annual budgets.

The Supreme Court in the case observed and has issued the notice in this plea earlier in January, seeking the central government's response.

The bench comprising of Justice Surya Kant and Justice KV Viswanathan was hearing the present matter wherein the original suit was filed under Article 131 of the Constitution of India.

Therefore, the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government has underscored the imperative for the state to exercise its constitutional rights to borrow in alignment with its budgetary requirements, essential for the progress, prosperity, and development of the state.

The counsel, Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the State of Kerala, stressed the urgency of the situation, citing the impending budget deadline on Janu-

ary 31.

He in the case requested an expedited response to prevent the suit from becoming infructuous.

On the other side, the coun-

sel, Attorney General R Venkataramani, representing the central government, contested the urgency, wherein it asserted that the issues at hand fell under economic

management policy.

Therefore, it has been claimed by him that the state's urgency were nothing but an attempt to mask its own failures.

The bench in the case observed and has directed the Centre for filing a reply on the interim relief application within a week and for a rejoinder to be filed within three days thereafter.

The court in the case observed that the original suit, challenging the Ministry of Finance's directives and

amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, highlights the lowered borrowing limit imposed on the state, potentially precipitating a severe financial crisis.

Further, it has been contended by the Kerala Government that the state urgently requires around Rs 26,000 crore to meet its financial obligations.

As per the suit, the state's exclusive authority to regulate its finances was being encroached upon by the

Centre, leading to substantial arrears in welfare schemes and other commitments.

Therefore, the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government has underscored the imperative for the state to exercise its constitutional rights to borrow in alignment with its budgetary requirements, essential for the progress, prosperity, and development of the state.

Accordingly, the court listed the matter for further consideration on February 13, 2024.

TOP OF THE DAY

ISRAEL WORKING ON RESTORATION OF GAZA AREA COMMUNITIES

TEL AVIV: Israel's Land Enforcement Authority is working to restore the communities surrounding Gaza that were destroyed in the October 7 attack. To that end, teams from the Authority are deployed in the region in order to carry out a detailed mapping of the damages. The Authority said this will speed up the process of providing compensation to the residents. According to the data of the Land Enforcement Authority, so far 10,000 buildings have been surveyed in about 20 localities in the Gaza area. The Land Enforcement Authority stated, "The authority plays a central role in mapping and documenting essential information, the cooperation with the various bodies, helps in providing aid and financial compensation to the residents of the enclave and enables support for the affected residents."

THREE SECURITY PERSONNEL INJURED IN MILITANT ATTACK IN PAK: POLICE

PESHAWAR: At least three security personnel were injured after some unknown militants attacked a security post in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said on Friday. The incident happened late on Thursday when the unknown militants threw hand grenades at the security post in the province's Malakand district. "Some militants targeted Khan Garhi levies check post in Malakand District in KK Province."

ISRAEL, GREECE INCREASE ENERGY COOPERATION

TEL AVIV: Israel's Minister of Energy and Infrastructure Eli Cohen spoke with the Minister of the Environment and Energy of Greece, Theodoros Skylakakis. During the conversation, they agreed on increasing cooperation in projects shared by both countries, among other things in the underwater electric cable that will connect Israel to Cyprus and from there to Greece and the Israel-Europe natural gas pipeline project.

SHARJAH PUBLISHING CITY FREE ZONE INTRODUCES FIRST 'INSTANT LICENCE'

SHARJAH: Sharjah Publishing City Free Zone (SPC Free Zone) has unveiled its latest offering -- the "Instant Licence Service". This comprehensive instant business licence has been developed to redefine the process of establishing businesses in Sharjah, offering a swift and cost-effective solution for business owners. The service is a first-of-its-kind, encompassing a spectrum of essential components crucial for establishing and operating businesses in Sharjah.

PAK POLLS: EX-PM IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY WEBSITES BLOCKED

Sharing a post in this regard on its official X account, PTI tagged official handles of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, Pakistan's Interim Information Minister and and Interim IT Minister.

AGENCIES
ISLAMABAD

Head of the general elections on February 8, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Friday said its websites were 'blocked' in Pakistan as it called for a response from the federal authorities, Dawn reported.

Deprived of its 'bat' symbol for the upcoming elections, the PTI has fielded its leaders as independent candidates with different electoral symbols, according to the report.

To tackle confusion among voters and to ease access to polls-related information, the PTI launched an online portal on its website and a backup site. The party has also introduced a feature whereby voters can message on Imran Khan's official Facebook account to get information about PTI-backed candidates, according to Dawn.

PTI questioned why its websites have been blocked

in Pakistan in a post shared on X. The party's official X account tagged the official handles of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Pakistan's Interim Information Minister Murtaza Solangi and interim IT minister Umar Saif.

The party asked, "Can you explain why PTI's websites are blocked in Pakistan?" It further questioned, "People are still getting symbol information from Imran Khan's Facebook page so the question is what purpose is this block serving?"

PTI's social media team member Jibran Ilyas also tagged Saif in his post and asked "Can you tell Pakistanis why the websites of [the] country's most popular political party [are] blocked by you?"

Notably, multiple internet outages have been witnessed across Pakistan that coincided with the party's online events. On January 20, internet services were interrupted an hour before Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's



Imran Khan

"virtual power show," Dawn reported.

Prior to that, similar internet disruptions were reported on December 17 and January 7 as well, which resulted in the party urging the Supreme Court to notice of the internet suspension.

Pakistan's caretaker government had blamed "technical" issues and system installations for the disruptions. Earlier this week, information minister Solangi had said that there was "no guarantee" that such inci-

dents would not occur in the future.

In the same press conference, PTA Director General Ahmed Shamim Pirzada "technical glitches" and system upgrades for the outages. He had said, "You can face this for the next two to three months."

On Wednesday, Imran Khan said the Punjab government has imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to hamper the upcoming power show by Pakistan Tehreek-

e-Insaf's candidates, Dawn reported.

The former PM made the remarks after attending court proceedings of GBP 190 million, Toshakhana, and cypher cases. Accountability judge Mohammad Bashir deferred the indictment of Khan in the £190m reference as the defence counsel was absent.

Khan said Pakistan's caretaker government, a few individuals in the establishment, and the Election Commission of Pakistan are united against his party, according to Dawn report.

He stressed that PTI had an overwhelming vote bank within the armed forces, and the party will not be deterred whatever coercive measures were adopted to suppress its voice.

Imran Khan said he never witnessed such pre-poll rigging in Pakistan's history, and they planned to rig elections set to be held on February 8. However, he added that they would see the public rage on election day.

Yemeni rebels repeatedly attack merchant ships, Suez Canal traffic drops by 40 per cent

AGENCIES
TAIPEI

The traffic volume of the Suez Canal dropped by more than 40 per cent as Yemen rebels repeatedly attacked merchant ships.

According to United Nations data, the Yemen rebels' Commercial traffic through the Suez Canal has dropped by more than 40 per cent in the past two months since the Houthis attack, sparking United Nations concerns about global trade.

Jan Hoffman, president of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), told reporters today, "We are very concerned that attacks on shipping in the Red Sea will exacerbate global trade tensions and add to existing trade disruptions caused by geopolitics and climate change. More serious."

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development said that in the past two months, ships were diverted from the Red Sea to South



Africa's Cape of Good Hope, resulting in a 42 per cent drop in traffic through the Suez Canal. Egypt's Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean and Red Sea.

Hoffman said that more than 80 per cent of international trade in goods is transported by sea. "Sea transport is indeed the lifeline of global trade."

According to data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the number of container

ships passing through the Suez Canal each week has decreased by 67 per cent compared with the same period last year, and more than 20 per cent of global container trade passes through the Suez Canal.

"Considering that it was mainly large container ships that were diverted from the Suez Canal, the decline in container traffic was even greater," Hoffman said. Oil tanker traffic fell by 18 per cent, and bulk ship traffic

carrying grain and coal also fell by 6 per cent. While natural gas transportation was flat.

Overall, 12 per cent to 15 per cent of global trade, or approximately 20,000 ships, pass through the Red Sea every year, travelling between Europe and Asia.

The situation is getting more serious as other international maritime trade routes are also in danger of being disrupted. Since Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago, the movement of goods through the Black Sea has been severely restricted, sending global grain prices soaring.

In addition, drought in Central America has caused water levels in the Panama Canal to drop, significantly reducing traffic through this important route.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development warned: "Long-term disruption of major trade routes will disrupt global supply chains, leading to delivery delays, increased costs and potential inflation."

US LAWMAKERS VISIT TAIWAN TO SHOW SUPPORT AMID TENSIONS WITH CHINA

AGENCIES
TAIPEI

Two United States House of Representatives members told former Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and Taiwan President-elect Lai Ching-te on Thursday that their current visit to Taipei was meant to showcase bipartisan support from the US Congress for Taiwan, Central News Agency Taiwan reported on Friday.

It reported that the visiting delegation sends a clear message that the US Congress, across

party lines, firmly supports Taiwan and its prosperity and security, Representative Mario Diaz Balart of the Republican Party told Tsai during a closed-door meeting, according to a press release issued by the Presidential Office.

Diaz Balart and Democrat Ami Bera, both co-chairs of the congressional Taiwan Caucus, arrived in Taiwan on Wednesday for a three-day visit, less than two weeks after Taiwan held presidential and legislative elections.

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE TURN OUT TO GREET MAHRANG BALOCH WHO LED MONTH-LONG PROTEST IN ISLAMABAD

AGENCIES
KARACHI

Hundreds of people turned out to greet Dr Mahrang Baloch, the woman who led a month-long sit-in protest in Islamabad to highlight the issue of police torture and missing persons in Pakistan's troubled Balochistan province, as she returned to Quetta along with the participants of the protest march.

Maharang and the participants of the protest march, which started from Balochistan's Turbat, were on Thursday welcomed by hundreds of people, including women, children and students at the Sariab area



Dr Mahrang Baloch

near Balochistan University as they returned to Balochistan.

The protest march attended by hundreds of Baloch people belonging to variousities, human rights organisations, political parties and other walks of life had

started under the umbrella of the Baloch Yakjehti Council (BYC) and garnered a lot of attention when it reached Islamabad from Turbat where it had originated in December.

The protest started after an alleged extrajudicial killing of Balaach Mola Bakhsh for which the Balochistan Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) was blamed by the protesters who had to face tear gassing, baton charges and shelling in Islamabad.

The protest later turned into a massive protest to end the enforced disappearances of students, political workers, and human rights defenders in Balochistan.

Russia backs Sri Lankan government over Online Safety Bill; calls matter purely internal

AGENCIES
COLOMBO

Russia has backed the Sri Lankan government's decision to adopt the controversial Online Safety Bill, saying that the matter was purely an internal matter for the island nation and any kind of interference over it will be unacceptable.

Sri Lankan Parliament on January 24 approved with amendments the controversial Online Safety Bill that seeks to regulate online content amid criticism from the opposition that claimed it will stifle freedom of speech.

The new legislation would lead to the establishment of the Online Safety Commission which is empowered to make punitive rulings on offenses.

A false statement online would be liable, if convicted, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand Sri Lankan rupees.

In a statement, Russian Ambassador in Sri Lanka Levan Dzhagaryan said that Russia was closely following the situation about the Online Safety Bill in the country. His comments came in the backdrop of the US envoy here saying that she was concerned about the potential impact of the bill.

"We are following the situation with the Online Safety Bill in Sri Lanka, which has been adopted by the Parliamentary majority in all readings recently. We also take notice of all comments and reactions on this legislature both from the domestic political sphere and among the foreign powers accredited in this country," he said.

He also said that it is a purely internal issue of Sri Lanka. "We suppose that regulations of the online sphere are solely domestic issue of the Republic of Sri Lanka. In this regard we want to highlight that in our point of view any interference into this internal issue from aside by the foreign powers is absolutely irrelevant and unacceptable," he said.

By contrast the US Ambassador in Colombo Julie Chung said that the US was concerned about the potential impact of the bill.

In a post on X, Chung said: "The US remains concerned about the potential impact of Sri Lanka's online safety bill....."

She said the bill jeopardised democratic values.

"The US urges Sri Lanka to prioritise transparency and ensure any legislation does not stifle the voices of its people," she said.

The Sri Lankan Opposition, which called the bill as undemocratic as it would hamper freedom of expression, has vowed to repeal it when in power.

Human Rights Watch condemned the bill as one which clamped free expression of public views in Sri Lanka's election year.

The Asian Internet Coalition said the bill was a blow to Sri Lanka's efforts to bolster the digital economy.

The government was accused of rushing through the bill without sufficient public debate.

UAE: PARTICIPANTS PITCH AI STARTUP IDEAS AFTER SUCCESS OF MBZUAI PROGRAMME

AGENCIES
ABU DHABI

The inaugural Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI) Entrepreneurship Courses concluded with 12 AI-based startup business plans presented at an on-campus event in Masdar City.

22 students gained the entrepreneurial skills, tools, and networks needed to commercialise their AI solutions in the UAE, and three startups were fast-tracked for financial grants from MBZUAI.

Jointly launched by MBZUAI's Incubation and Entrepreneurship Centre (MIEC) and startAD, the Abu Dhabi-based startup accelerator powered by Tamkeen and anchored at NYU Abu Dhabi, the programme aims to boost the AI startup ecosystem in Abu Dhabi.

The top three AI-assisted technologies and applications are Audiomatic, which provides automatic and emotionally intelligent audio production for video content, including customised scores, sound effects, and narrations; Limb, an application providing accessible physiotherapy information such as exercise correction and pain management features; and Momzo, a complete AI assistant for women's maternity to motherhood powered by generative AI.

"These are the first AI-focused entrepreneurship courses at the university and in the UAE and come on the eve of an expected AI start-up boom led by generative AI," MBZUAI's Vice Presi-

dent of Public Affairs and Alumni Relations Sultan Al Hajji said.

He added, "The entrepreneurship courses actively encourage students to take advantage of the favourable entrepreneurial environment in Abu Dhabi and ignite the potential to transform their research and engineering know-how into a business. The startup pitches highlight specific-industry and application-use cases and have the potential to make a significant impact on society with their bold, sophisticated, and innovative concepts."

Managing Director of startAD Ramesh Jagannathan said, "The MBZUAI IEC programme immersed AI innovators in the exciting world of innovation and entrepreneurship, where they learned to apply business literacy heuristics to their ideas. According to an Accenture Report, AI will add \$182 billion in annual gross value to the UAE's economy by 2035. These startup projects demonstrate high potential and are poised to strengthen the UAE's knowledge economy."

The 22 graduates represent more than ten nationalities, with 41% being women. All participants graduated from the intensive five-week entrepreneurship courses, which included eight workshops and three community engagement events covering topics such as idea generation, market discovery, prototyping, and pitching.

The 12 startup business plans covered a variety of verticals, including AI safety, AI for health, AI for social good, and more.

HAUTE-COUTURE



Models present creations by Yuima Nakazato during the Spring/Summer 2024 Fashion Week in Paris, France. IMAGE CREDIT VOA

Report on sex abuse in Germany’s Protestant Church documents at least 2,225 victims

AGENCIES
GERMANY

At least 1,259 people working for the Protestant Church of Germany have committed sexual abuse in the last decades and at least 2,225 victims were affected by the abuse, according to an independent report published Thursday.

The numbers are based on the study of documents and files from the regional churches and the Lutherans’ diaconal relief and social welfare organization, known as Diakonie.

However, the authors said they were not able to analyze the personnel files of all pastors and deacons

within the church, but primarily disciplinary files. They estimated that the real number of perpetrators is much higher, with nearly 3,500 people who have committed sexual abuse, German news agency dpa reported.

It’s the tip of the tip of the iceberg, said Martin Wazlawik from Hannover University, who coordinated the study on sexualized violence in the Protestant Church in Germany.

The church commissioned the study in 2020 and financed it with 3.6 million Euros (USD 3.92 million), with the goal of analyzing structures within the church that pro-

mote violence and abuse of power. As an umbrella organization of 20 regional churches, the EKD represents 19.2 million Protestant Christians in Germany.

At the presentation of the study in Hannover, the head of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany, also known as EKD, apologized to the victims wholeheartedly.

As an institution, we have also been guilty of countless crimes against countless people, Hamburg Bishop Kirsten Fehrs said, adding that she was deeply shocked by the overall picture presented by the study.

Ever since I have been

dealing with this topic, I have been sincerely shaken by the abysmal violence that has been inflicted on so many people in our church, Fehrs said, adding that the church would accept the results of the study with humility.

This report comes several years after Germany’s Catholic Church published staggering numbers on sexual abuse by its clergy.

In 2018, a church-commissioned report concluded that at least 3,677 people were abused by Catholic clergy in Germany between 1946 and 2014. More than half the victims were 13 or younger, and nearly a third served as altar boys.

UK MUSEUMS RETURN GOLD, SILVER ARTEFACTS TO GHANA UNDER A LONG-TERM LOAN PACT

AGENCIES
LONDON

Two British museums are returning gold and silver artifacts to Ghana under a long-term loan arrangement — 150 years after the items were looted from the Asante people during Britain’s colonial battles in West Africa.

The British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, together with the Manhyia Palace Museum in Ghana, on Thursday announced the “important cultural” collaboration,

which sidesteps UK laws that prohibit the return of cultural treasures to their countries of origin. Those laws have been used to prevent the British Museum from returning the Parthenon Marbles, to Greece.

Some 17 items in total are involved in the loan pact, including 13 pieces of Asante royal regalia purchased by the V&A at auction in 1874. The items were acquired by the museums after they were looted by British troops during the Anglo-Asante wars of 1873-74 and 1895-96.

“These objects are of cultural, historical and spiritual significance to the Asante people,” the museums said in a statement. “They are also indelibly linked to British colonial history in West Africa, with many of them looted from Kumasi during the Anglo-Asante wars of the 19th century.”

The items covered by the loan agreement represent just a fraction of the Asante artifacts held by British museums and private collectors around the world. The British Museum alone says it has 239 items of As-

ante regalia in its collection. Nana Oforiatta Ayim, special adviser to Ghana’s culture minister, said the deal was a “starting point”. Ultimately, the regalia should be returned to its rightful owners, she told the BBC.

“I’ll give an analogy, if somebody came into your house and ransacked it and stole objects and then kept them in their house, and then a few years later said, ‘You know what, I’ll lend you your objects back,’ how would you feel about that?” she said.

US CARRIES OUT WORLD’S FIRST NITROGEN GAS EXECUTION

AGENCIES
ALABAMA

In the world’s first known execution by nitrogen hypoxia, the US state of Alabama put to death Kenneth Eugene Smith, a prisoner on death row for his role in a contract killing more than three decades ago, The Washington Post reported.

Smith’s execution was preceded by months of legal battles over whether it was constitutional to use nitrogen hypoxia in capital punishment, as the method was not known to have ever been used before in a prison setting.

Alabama prison officials kept many of the details about how they would carry out the new method a secret from the public.

Smith, 58, was pronounced dead at 8:25 pm (local time) on Thursday at the William C Holman Correctional Facility in Attmore.

Alabama officials had previously tried and failed to execute Smith by lethal injection in 2022.

Notably, states that still use the death penalty have struggled to obtain lethal injection drugs, with law-

makers and prison officials adopting alternative methods as backup options. Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma have approved nitrogen hypoxia, while other states have brought back the long-disused firing squad, The Post reported.

Despite the historic nature of Smith’s execution, only five independent witnesses from the news media were able to observe the process. Smith’s family, as well as the family of his victim, Elizabeth Sennett, attended Thursday’s execution.

For months, medical professionals and human rights advocates had argued that Alabama’s efforts to use an untested execution method on Smith amounted to human experimentation, claims Smith’s lawyers took all the way to the US Supreme Court. The US top court rejected Smith’s last-ditch request to intervene late Thursday. The court’s three liberal justices - Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson - noted their dissent in the court’s order, which did not explain the majority’s reasoning. The Washington Post reported Sotomayor called Alabama’s

Kenneth Eugene Smith, a prisoner on death row for his role in a contract killing more than three decades ago, was put to death.

method “untested” and said “the world is watching.” “Having failed to kill Smith on its first attempt, Alabama has selected him as its ‘guinea pig’ to test a method of execution never attempted before,” she wrote.

Kagan, joined by Jackson, wrote separately to say that she would have put the execution on hold to give Smith and his lawyers more information about the state’s new protocol to allow him to fully challenge the execution method.

A jury voted 11-1 in favor of life in prison at Smith’s second trial before a judge overrode its verdict and sentenced Smith to death. The practice, known as judicial override, has since been eliminated in all 50 states; Alabama was the last state to do so, in 2017, The Post reported.

In previous court filings, Smith’s attorneys said there was a real risk that Smith would vomit and choke to death during his execution.

Marshall, Alabama’s attorney general, said that was unlikely, noting that Smith would have taken his last meal more than eight hours before the execution. Should Smith vomit, the state said, officials would remove and clean the mask and clear Smith’s airway before continuing.

In two key changes to Alabama’s execution procedure, the Alabama Supreme Court in 2023 extended the typical 24-hour timeline for execution warrants to let the governor set the timeline and eliminated the process of automatically reviewing death penalty cases for “plain errors” during the trial phase.

Smith was convicted in Sennett’s 1988 death in Colbert County, Ala. Sennett was found beaten and stabbed in her home, which was staged to look like a robbery. Investigators later found that Sennett’s husband, the Rev. Charles Sennett, had hired a hit man to kill her and collect on her life insurance policy to cover his debts,

FRENCH FARMERS BLOCK ROADS, DUMP PRODUCE AS PROTEST MOVES CLOSER TO PARIS

AGENCIES
PARIS

Farmers said the protests, now in their second week after breaking out in the southwest, would continue as long as their demands are not met, posing the first big challenge for new Prime Minister Gabriel Attal.

“All possibilities are still on the table,” Arnaud Gaillot, the head of the Young Farmers (Jeunes Agriculteurs) union told journalists when asked about reports farmers could start to disrupt traffic in Paris as soon as Friday.

French intelligence services have warned the government that regional farming unions have called on their members to converge on the capital, Le Parisien newspaper and BFM TV said.

As Attal convened senior ministers with the aim of announcing concrete proposals on Friday, farmers used bales of hay and tractors to block major highways across France, the European Union’s



French farmers protesting for their demands.

biggest agricultural producer. “We always have more rules to follow, we are always asked for more and we earn less and less. We cannot live from our work anymore,” 61-year-old farmer Jean-Jacques Pesquerel from the Calvados Coordination Rurale union said.

Crates of tomatoes, cabbages and cauliflowers that one group of farmers said had been imported were strewn across the A7 highway that

links Marseille and Lyon, France’s second and third-biggest cities. On the southwestern edge of Paris, dozens of tractors led a go-slow during the morning rush-hour.

Asked when the protesters would lift roadblocks, Gaillot said to ask Attal. “It is he who holds the key.”

The powerful FNSEA farming union late on Wednesday handed the government a list of their demands, including

better enforcement of a law designed to safeguard farm-gate prices.

The union also called for continued diesel tax-breaks for agricultural vehicles, the immediate payment of EU agricultural subsidies, guarantees on insurance payouts related to health and climate, and immediate aid for winemakers and organic farmers.

“Urgent responses are needed,” said FNSEA’s head, Arnaud Rousseau.

French retailers are locked in annual price negotiations with suppliers, which the government wants concluded by the end of the month. Farmers say they will be on the sharp end of efforts to haul prices lower.

Fearing a spillover from farmer unrest in Germany, Poland and Romania, the French government has already postponed a draft farming law meant to help more people become farmers, saying it will beef up the measures and ease some regulations.

FRENCH PRESIDENT’S OFFICIAL VISIT TO INDIA FOR REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS: TAKING THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDIA AND FRANCE TO NEW HEIGHTS

This week remained a mix bag for the global affairs and international relations. Amid the unfortunate news of violence in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, India’s visit of the French President, Emmanuel Macron, to grace the occasion of the Republic Day celebrations, opened a new door for positive discussions and opportunities in international relations. Both India and France have been working as trusted strategic partners since 1998, and after the official visit of Indian Prime Minister to France in the month of July 2023, this visit denotes many positive developments for the entire world.

French President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to India for Republic Day celebrations highlights the deepening strategic partnership between the two nations.

Last year, both the nations celebrated completion of 25 years of their fruitful and trusted strategic partnership. This visit is a testimony to the strengthening strategic partnership between India and France and underscores the growing cooperation in various sectors such as defence, security, space, and civil nuclear energy, education, trade and cultural exchanges. During his visit, President Macron participated in a road show in Jaipur, Rajasthan along with the Indian Prime Minister to showcase the trusted partnership between both the nations. He also paid a visit to Jantar Mantar and Hawa Mahal, the archetypes of ancient Indian science and wisdom. His agenda would likely include high-level meetings with Indian leaders to discuss further collaboration and exchange views on

WORLD RECAP

ANSHU JOSHI



regional and global issues of mutual interest. Additionally, the visit may witness the signing of important agreements and initiatives in areas such as defence cooperation, joint research in science and technology, information technology collaboration, education and sustainable development. This visit also serves as an opportunity for both nations to showcase their commitment to multilateralism and address key challenges such as climate change, energy security, terrorism, and promoting an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific as well as Indian Ocean regions.

Before this visit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited France last year from 14-16 July and graced France’s Bastille Day (National Day) celebrations on 14 July as the guest of honour along with the Indian technology collaboration. This honour denoted the trusted and time-tested partnership of France with India. In past 25 years, we can clearly see how France stood with India during its tough times. Apart from providing technological help in the domains of India’s civil nuclear programs, space technology and defence, France also supported India when it conducted its peace-

ful nuclear test in 1974 and 1998. Both the times, countries like the US opposed India. In 1974, both Canada and the US ended their nuclear engagement with India. But France, like a trusted friend, kept supporting India and provided fuel for India’s Tarapur nuclear plant. In 1998 also, when the US imposed sanctions on India, France vocally supported India and condemned the sanctions imposed by the US. Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the French Space Agency (CNES) are engaged in many joint research programmes and satellite launches. Apart from Rafale, we must not forget that powerful Miraj fighter aircrafts were also provided by France to India. Also, France always remains vocal for providing permanent seat to India in the United Nations Security

Council (UNSC); it also supports India in Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). On the other hand, India helped France in getting the membership of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

In all these years, France has become the second largest arms supplier to India. It is also helping India with its technology transfer so that India can develop jet engines on its own. Apart from strengthening the bilateral partnership, both India and the France are working meticulously on the prioritised global objectives. Present Israel-Hamas war, Russia-Ukraine war, the challenges coming from China in Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean, and the need to fight global terrorism and extremism provide both India and France to further develop their future road-

map of partnership. From climate change containment to promoting sustainable development, from boosting people-to-people connects to collaborating in the field of education, from the domain of digital transformation to co-developing innovative technologies and increasing trade, there are many areas of opportunities for both India and France to engage at both bilateral as well as multilateral level. Apart from India, France too is concerned about the security of Indo-Pacific as it is the only EU member nation, which has overseas territories in this region. Also, more than 90 percent of its exclusive economic zone is located in the Indian and Pacific oceans. More than 8000 French soldiers are deployed in Indo-Pacific region and that’s why the visit of Macron to India

becomes more significant.

Though this is a multipolar, multilateral world where multiple actors, based on their priorities and complex interdependence work together, bilateral focus still plays a focal role in promoting this culture of working together. On the other hand, the more an actor tries to run solo, more are the chances of its fall. India knows it well and hence instead of investing its energy in running solo, it engages and collaborates with the likeminded nations like France. This is the golden key of success in global politics; and the official visit of the French President to India will surely open new windows of opportunity for both the nations, as well as for the world.

The author is Professor, School of International Studies, JNU

TAROT SPEAKS

AARTI BABUL BHASIN



ARIES
(MARCH 21st-
APRIL 19th)

Review & be open to new opportunities. Do charity. Listen to heart-felt advise. Change will set in & plans will get executed. Mantra: "SELFREALISATION"



TAURUS
(APRIL 20th-
MAY 20th)

A desire to move on to something more meaningful. Difficult times get over. Gifts of money. New Career opportunities. Paying off or receiving loans. Mantra: "NURTURE".



GEMINI
(MAY 21st-
JUNE 20th)

A celebration & need to have fun. Good business decisions. Charity work. Career advancement. Keep a check on ego. Mantra: "COMPASSION"



CANCER
(JUNE 21st-
JULY 22nd)

Release harsh judgements. Be a team player. Do not give up on what you have created. Expect things to get better. Mantra: "STRENGTH"



LEO
(JULY 23rd-
AUGUST 22nd)

Pessimistic approach need a check. Be thoughtful, creative, warm & sensible. Do research before taking decisions. Mantra: "AWAKENING"



VIRGO
(AUGUST 23rd -
SEPTEMBER 22nd)

Things not turning out as expected. Wedding proposals, falling in love. Need to take a balanced approach. Chose your battles wisely. Mantra: "COMPLETION"



LIBRA
(SEPTEMBER 23rd -
OCTOBER 22nd)

Life is magical. You have resources to manifest. Contended family life. Unnecessary worry about finances.

Focus & be a leader. Mantra: "MAGIC"



SCORPIO
(OCTOBER 23rd -
NOVEMBER 21st)

Good news about finances. New area of study. May find beginnings challenging. A promising business venture. Signing of new contracts. Mantra: "LEADERSHIP"



SAGGITARIUS
(NOVEMBER 22nd -
DECEMBER 21st)

Listen to your intuition for successful completion of projects. Work with patience & review decisions. Happy family life. Financial security. Mantra: "PATIENCE"



CAPRICORN
(21st DECEMBER -
20th JANUARY)

Accept change to create abundance. Things look good. A relationship begins a new phase. Competing goals. Mantra: "FORTUNE"



AQUARIUS
(21st JANUARY -
FEBRUARY 18th)

Victory! Good news is expected. Successful time in career & finances. Wedding proposals or birth announcements. Mantra: "COMPASSION"



PISCES
(FEBRUARY 19th -
MARCH 20th)

Have a different perspective to avoid conflicts. Beginnings are challenging. A stalemate. A love of life. Mantra: "AWAKENING"

Aarti is a certified facilitator for Past Life Regression Therapy, Inner Child Work & therapeutic Guided Meditations. An intuitive tarot reader & a channel for collective consciousness. The Oneness, she also holds personal, group sessions & workshops. You can reach her on 9987546317 & on Instagram as Live a Little Sessions.

PICTURE PERFECT

Dia Mirza and Aditi Rao Hydari during the Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards 2024 event. (ANI)



'FIGHTER' BOX OFFICE DAY 1: HRITHIK ROSHAN, DEEPIKA PADUKONE-STARRER TAKES FLYING START

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Actors Hrithik Roshan, Deepika Padukone and Anil Kapoor starrer aerial action thriller film 'Fighter' took a flying start at the box office on its opening day. The film has minted Rs 24.60 crore on Day 1. Taking to Instagram, trade analyst Taran Adarsh shared a post which he captioned, "After an ordinary/average start in morning and noon shows, *Fighter picked up pace post 5 pm onwards on Day 1 [working day before the big holiday]... Agree, the biggie should've targeted a higher number on its opening day, but the



good news is that the audience feedback is excellent and that should translate into big numbers today [Day 2; *RepublicDay holiday] and if it continues the momentum on Sat and Sun, a healthy *extended weekend* total will be on the cards.

with the merits of the film in mass circuits... However, the mass pockets should come on board today [*RepublicDay holiday] and if it continues the momentum on Sat and Sun, a healthy *extended weekend* total will be on the cards.

Thu Rs 24.60 cr. *India biz. *Boxoffice," he added. Helmed by Siddharth Anand, the film also starred Karan Singh Grover and Akshay Oberoi in pivotal roles. 'Fighter' was released in the theatres on Thursday and received amazing reviews and positive word of mouth from the audiences.

The film features Hrithik as Squadron Leader Shamsher Pathania aka Patty, Deepika as Squadron Leader Minal Rathore aka Minni, and Anil as Group Captain Rakesh Jai Singh aka Rocky fighting for the country. It marks Hrithik and Deepika's first-ever on-screen collaboration.

On 75th Republic Day, Salman Khan extends wishes to his fans

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

As India marked its 75th Republic Day on Friday, Superstar Salman Khan took to his social media handle and extended heartfelt wishes. Taking to X, Salman wrote, "Wishing A Very Happy Republic Day To All."

President Droupadi Murmu commenced the celebrations of the 75th Republic Day on Friday by unfurling the national flag at Kartavya Path. President Murmu on her arrival at Kartavya Path was received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Simultaneously, the National Anthem was played and the 21 Gun Salute was presented to the President. As per tradition, the National Flag was unfurled followed by the National



Anthem with a booming 21-gun salute given with indigenous gun system 105-mm Indian Field Guns.

President Murmu and her French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, who is the chief guest at this year's

Republic Day celebrations were escorted by the President's Bodyguard- 'Rashtrapati Ke Angrakshak'. The Gun Salute was presented by the Ceremonial Battery of 871 Field Regiment (SHINGO) ex HQ 36 Artillery Brigade.

The Ceremonial Battery is commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Vikas Kumar, SM. 21 Gun Salute is the highest military honour presented to the National Flag from the Kartavya path.

The gun salute is synchronized with three simultaneous actions viz-a-viz, unfurling of the National Flag, Playing of the National Anthem by the Service bands and the national salute rendered by the President's Bodyguard. Meanwhile, on the work front, Salman has still not announced his next project.

BRAIN PICKING



When truth is on your side, you don't need support.



- HRITHIK ROSHAN
(Indian actor)

HRITHIK ROSHAN, AKSHAY KUMAR TO AJAY DEVGN, CELEBS EXTEND WISHES



TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

As India marked its 75th Republic Day on Friday, several B-town celebs took to their social media handles and extended heartfelt wishes. Taking to Instagram, actor Hrithik Roshan shared a video that he captioned, "Over the course of the last couple years, I have learnt how little is really known of the extent of the work undertaken by our Defence forces to keep our lands, skies and seas protected. Today India marks it's 75th year of becoming a Republic - here's to our brave men and women at the borders who personify the Spirit of India! Jai Hind."

clip on X of himself and his 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' co-actor Tiger Shroff running holding India's National Flag as the song Vange Mataram plays in the background. He captioned the video, "New India, new confidence, new vision.. our time has come. Happy Republic Day. Jai Hind...Jai Bharat."

Actor Alia Bhatt shared a clip of the Indian Tricolour on her Instagram stories which she captioned, "Happy Republic Day." Kareena Kapoor Khan also posted a video of the Tricolour with the song Lehra Do playing in the background. She captioned the post, "Happy Republic Day (Indian Flag emoji) Jai Hind."

CHIRANJEEVI HONOURED WITH PADMA VIBHUSHAN, RECEIVES HEARTFELT CONGRATULATIONS



TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

'RRR' actor Ram Charan on Friday extended heartfelt wishes to his father and south superstar Chiranjeevi on being awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian honour in the country. Taking to his official handle on X, Ram Charan wrote, "Congratulations @KChiruTweets on the prestigious 'Padma Vibhushan'! Your contribution to Indian cinema and society at large has played an instrumental role in shaping me and inspiring countless fans. You are an impeccable citizen of this great nation.. Immense gratitude to Government of India & @narendramodi Ji for this honour and recognition. A big shout-out to all fans & well-wishers for their support. Here's to your well-deserved honour *Megastar *PadmaVibhushan *PadmaVibhushanChiranjeevi."

The recipients of this year's Padma awards were announced on Thursday evening. Expressing his delight at being named the recipient of the top national honour, Chiranjeevi said, "After hearing this news, I became speechless. I'm really overwhelmed. I am humbled and grateful for this honour. It's only the unconditional and invaluable love of the people, audiences, fans, my blood brothers and blood sisters that allowed me to reach here. I owe my life and this moment to you. I always try to express my gratitude in ways that I can, though I know I can never do enough." Chiranjeevi is among the most influential and successful actors and worked in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil and Kannada films. He is known for his movies such as 'Vijetha', 'Indra', 'Shankar Dada M.B.B.S.', and most recently he was seen in 'Bhola Shankar'.

South superstar NTR Jr and the 'RRR' director SS Rajamouli on Friday extended heartfelt wishes to actor Chiranjeevi on being awarded the Padma Vibhushan - the second-highest civilian honour in the country.

AKSHAY KUMAR, TIGER SHROFF TAKE ON PRITHVIRAJ IN 'BADE MIYAN CHOTE MIYAN'

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

The teaser of Bade Miyan Chote Miyan dropped and fans have gone wild on social media. Directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, Bade Miyan Chote Miyan features the two action heroes, Akshay and Tiger, who will be seen together in an action film for the first time. Malayalam star Prithviraj plays the villain in this film.

Shot across stunning locations such as Mumbai, London, Abu Dhabi, Scotland, and Jordan, this pan-India film is creating buzz for its grand scale and Hollywood-style cinematic visuals. The film features Prithviraj in an intriguing villainous role, while also starring Sonakshi Sinha, Manushi Chhillar, and Alaya F in significant roles. The film's theatrical release is on Eid 2024.

Director Ali Abbas Zafar shares, "Extreme hard work and commitment of shooting in multiple countries with the

most talented crew from different parts of the world has gone behind bringing Bade Miyan Chote Miyan to the audiences and who better than Akshay Sir and Tiger, India's original action heroes who would translate the challenging sequences so effortlessly and yet root the film to its target mass audience. More than thrilled to bring this film for their fans and audiences on big screens on Eid April 2024"

Adding to this, producer Jacky Bhagnani says, "The teaser tells its own story with larger-than-life action and the perfect portrayal of iconic roles by Akshay Sir and Tiger Shroff.

Additionally, Prithviraj adds a surprising twist, making him the hidden gem. I am thrilled to have our action heroes on board; Ali's magic is evident once again.

We hope audiences feel the dedication of our entire team and appreciate the efforts we've put into this project."

SUNIDHI CHAUHAN SINGS 'AE WATAN' ON OCCASION OF REPUBLIC DAY

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Singer Sunidhi Chauhan celebrated the 75th Republic Day by singing a beautiful rendition of the patriotic song 'Ae Watan' from the film 'Raazi'. The clip was shared by filmmaker Farah Khan on Instagram where Sunidhi can be seen standing in front of an Indian flag and singing the song in her soulful voice without any musical instruments. Along with the post, she wrote, "Beautiful way to celebrate the #republicday. With neighbours n society friends.. Thank you @sunidhichauhan5 for this rendition."

Sunidhi reacted to the post and dropped the heart and joined hands emoji in the comment section. As soon as she dropped the video, netizens flooded the comment section with heart emojis. 'Ae Watan' song is from the film Raazi featuring Alia Bhatt and Vicky Kaushal. Sung by Sunidhi Chauhan with music from Shankar Ehsaan Loy, this patriotic song has a special place in the hearts of people. The Republic Day 2024 celebrations



began after Prime Minister Narendra Modi began paid floral tributes at the National War Memorial to honour bravehearts of the Indian armed forces. PM Modi was received by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on his arrival at the National War Memorial. This year, the guards were commanded by an Indian Army Officer, Major Indrajeet Sachin from the 6th Battalion of Sikh Regiment. President Droupadi Murmu led the country in the grand celebrations

of its journey of Amrit Kaal that began post the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations to commemorate 75 years of the country's independence. Based on the twin themes of 'Viksit Bharat' and 'Bharat - Loktantra ki Matruka', this year's parade witnessed the participation of around 13,000 special Guests - an initiative that will provide an opportunity for people from all walks of life to take part in the celebrations and encourage Jan Bhagidari in this national festival.

THE RISE OF MOMPRENEURS: HOW REMOTE WORK FOSTERS ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG MOTHERS



MS YULIA ASLAMOVA

With the rise of remote work in the global industry, moms can now embrace the role of mompreneurs and break free from traditional restrictions to attain financial independence. Mompreneurs represent mothers who work from home to manage their own enterprises in addition to caring for their children. As traditional concepts of work and family develop, mompreneurs are grabbing the chance to achieve an improved balance between work and life while achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations. Furthermore, empowerment through technology due to the development of the internet and subsequent advances in technology, the challenges preventing women from pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors have greatly decreased.

With the abundance of technologies and resources available to them now, mompreneurs can launch and run businesses from a distance. These creative solutions, which range from social media marketing to e-commerce platforms, have made it simpler than ever for moms to transform their passions into successful businesses. For women, the traditional employment structure frequently presented difficulties, especially when juggling the demands of society and family obligations. On the other hand, mothers can now earn independently and have flexible lifestyles owing to remote employment.

Here's a look at how mompreneurs were empowered by remote work to break free from conventional limitations and establish successful professions on their own terms-

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY

The freedom that remote work provides is one of the main reasons mothers are choosing to work remotely. The responsibilities of parenthood often clash with traditional 9-5 professions, making it difficult for moth-



ers to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Mompreneurs can establish their own timetables when they work remotely. They can now prioritize their family obligations without compromising their ability to advance professionally. For mothers who wish to pursue their careers and actively participate in their children's lives, this increased flexibility is revolutionary.

COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

The advent of the digital age changed how people communicated and worked

together. Working remotely gives mompreneurs a plethora of opportunities for networking and teamwork. Mothers can interact with clients, partners, and other business owners worldwide using social media, online platforms, and virtual communication tools. This helps them navigate the difficulties of job and parenting by expanding their professional networks and giving them a sense of belonging and support.

ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Women are now more em-

powered to launch their own enterprises because of the tools and platforms that remote work has made available to them. The digital sphere has a multitude of prospects, ranging from online service-based businesses to freelance consulting and e-commerce endeavors. Thanks to low startup expenses and the opportunity to reach a worldwide customer base, more and more women are pursuing their hobbies and skills as entrepreneurs. Many of the constraints that have previously prevented women from beginning their own businesses,

such as the necessity for major financial commitments, physical storefronts, or vast networks, are eliminated by remote employment. Women can follow their business dreams and create independent revenue streams that complement their interests and areas of skill by utilizing remote employment.

INCREASED JOB SATISFACTION

Women who work remotely experience greater job satisfaction and general well-being. Women have more power and autonomy over their work when the pressures and limitations of a traditional office setting are eliminated. They can design a customized workstation, plan their days around their best hours for productivity, and follow preferred work procedures. They feel more empowered and take responsibility for their work, which enhances job satisfaction and promotes a healthy work-life balance. Furthermore, women who work remotely are able to prioritize self-care, which enhances both their physical and mental health.

SUCCESS STORIES OF

MOMPREENEURS

In the dynamic realm of professional achievement and motherhood, two extraordinary women stand out as shining examples of resilience and time management.

Sayedra Nada, an Influencer Talent Manager at DRIM, has seamlessly blended her role with additional responsibilities as a support operator for over a year. A mother of four, she navigates household responsibilities with remarkable grace. Sayedra's incredible time management skills not only defy the notion that balancing work and family is impossible but also inspire her teammates at DRIM.

Payal Ranjan, another exemplary supermom, adeptly manages the delicate dance between work and motherhood. As an Influencer Talent Manager at DRIM, she has not only excelled in her role but has grown within the company to take on added responsibilities as a Personal Mentor and Tester. Payal's passion for fitness shines through as she also dedicates time to teach Zumba, showcasing her ability to pack multiple roles into her daily life.

These success stories exemplify the strength, determination, and multifaceted abilities of mompreneurs who navigate both professional and personal spheres with admirable finesse. Their stories serve as an inspiration for others facing similar challenges, proving that with dedication and effective time management, the seemingly impossible can be achieved.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED!

When hiring remote workers, mothers have a plethora of essential characteristics to offer. Employers should actively seek out and develop their resilience, multitasking skills, and unrelenting commitment to achievement. Companies can develop more dynamic, adaptable, and productive remote workforces by identifying and utilizing the special talents that moms have to offer. In addition to advancing individual careers, accepting mothers as essential components of the remote work environment fosters a more diverse, successful, and vibrant workplace.

The author is the Head of Asia, DRIM Global.

Examining Section 69 of IPC: Balancing equality & preventing misuse

TDG NETWORK

In the recent episode of "We Women Want," the focus was on addressing women's issues, celebrating achievements, and delving into the complexities of gender balance and equality. The discussion took a critical turn towards laws designed to provide equal rights to women, with particular scrutiny on Section 69 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Section 69 targets individuals who make false promises to marry a woman, coupled with engaging in sexual intercourse through deceitful means. The concern raised on the show, featuring Alkanshree Dahar, founder, and managing partner of the Law Officers of India, and Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj, a journalist, filmmaker, and equal rights activist, centers around the potential misuse of this provision, leading to disadvantages for men. Alkanshree Dahar pointed out a potential conflict with Article 14 of the Constitution, expressing concerns that the section might be inadvertently treating women as "more equal" instead of equal.

A crucial question was raised about the court's ability to discern the intentions behind a person's promises to marry, emphasizing the difficulty in determining initial motives. The discussion underscored the need for a balanced approach in crafting laws that uphold equality without opening avenues for misuse. While acknowledging that lawmakers aim to address genuine concerns and protect individuals from exploitation, the conversation highlighted the unintended consequences that may arise during the implementation of such laws. The dialogue on "We Women Want This" serves as a call for a comprehensive review of Section 69 and similar provisions to ensure that the pursuit of gender equality does not inadvertently lead to imbalances or unintended repercussions. As society strives for fairness and justice, thoughtful consideration in the formulation and implementation of laws remains crucial. Following are some points for the discussion:

Equality: The emphasis on gender equality is essential, and laws should

be framed in a way that ensures equal protection for all individuals, irrespective of their gender.

Historical Wrongs: While addressing historical wrongs is important, it's crucial not to swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction, leading to potential injustices against the other gender.

Impact on Relationships: Overly strict laws can impact interpersonal relationships, leading to distrust and fear. Men, fearing false accusations, might hesitate to enter into relationships or marriage.

Need for Gender-Neutral Laws: The call for gender-neutral laws is justified. Laws should be designed to protect individuals from exploitation and harm, regardless of their gender. This approach aligns with the principles of equality and fairness.

Complexity of Relationships: Relationships are complex, and determining the intent behind promises made during a relationship can be challenging. This complexity makes it difficult to enforce laws that focus on promises without clear evidence

of deceit.

Potential Misuse: The concern about potential misuse of laws, as seen in cases where false accusations are made for personal vendettas, highlights the need for careful consideration during the drafting of legislation.

Impact on Society: Draconian laws can erode trust within society, affecting the fabric of relationships. Unintended consequences, such as reduced marriage rates, could result from a climate of fear and distrust.

Revisiting Legislation: There is a call for a comprehensive review of existing laws, especially those dealing with relationships, to ensure they align with the principles of justice, fairness, and gender equality.

In summary, the conversation underscores the importance of carefully crafting laws that protect individuals without disproportionately favoring one gender over the other.

Striking a balance and fostering an environment of trust within society should be at the forefront of legislative efforts.

CERVICAL CANCER IN YOUNG WOMEN: RISING TRENDS & CHALLENGES

DR TH. TOMCHA SINGH

Cervical cancer has long been associated with older age, but recent trends reveal a disconcerting rise in its occurrence among young women. This shift in demographics brings forth a myriad of challenges, from delayed diagnosis to the unique emotional and medical considerations that young patients face.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS:

Traditionally, cervical cancer has been linked to women in their 40s and 50s. However, a concerning shift is underway as an increasing number of cases are being diagnosed in women under the age of 30. This change challenges the prevailing notion that cervical cancer predominantly affects older populations.

DELAYED DIAGNOSIS AND LACK OF SCREENING:

One of the key challenges in addressing cervical cancer in young women is the delay in diagnosis. Routine screening, such as Pap smears and HPV tests, is typically initiated at the age of 21. However, some young women may not prioritize these screenings, assuming that cervical cancer is an older woman's concern. This delay can lead to the detection of cancer at advanced stages, complicating treatment and reducing survival rates.

HPV Infection and Vaccination Gaps:

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) remains the leading cause of cervical cancer. Gaps in HPV vaccination coverage contribute to the rising trend among young women. Improving vaccination rates, especially before sexual debut, is crucial in preventing HPV infection and subsequently reducing the risk of cervical



cancer.

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL FACTORS:

Young women may face unique social and behavioral challenges that impact their cervical cancer risk. Factors such as early sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, and a lack of awareness about safe sex practices can elevate the risk of HPV transmission. Addressing these factors through education and outreach is essential in curbing the rising trend.

FERTILITY PRESERVATION CONCERNS:

Cervical cancer treatments, including surgery and radiation, can impact fertility. For young women who may not have completed their families, this becomes a significant concern. The emotional and psychological toll of navigating fertility preservation options alongside cancer treatment adds a layer of complexity to the overall management of cervical cancer in this demographic.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT NEEDS:

Young women facing a cervical cancer diagnosis often require unique psychosocial support. Dealing with a cancer diagnosis at a young age can disrupt educational and career trajectories, leading to emotional distress. Providing adequate support services, including counseling and survivorship programs, becomes

crucial in addressing the holistic needs of these patients.

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS EFFORTS:

To effectively address the rising trends of cervical cancer in young women, advocacy and awareness efforts are paramount. Educational campaigns should emphasize the importance of early screenings, the role of HPV vaccination, and the need for safe sexual practices. Empowering young women to take charge of their reproductive health is a pivotal step in reversing the current trajectory.

The rising trends of cervical cancer in young women present multifaceted challenges that demand a comprehensive and targeted approach. From improving vaccination rates and advocating for early screenings to addressing social and behavioral factors, the medical community, policymakers, and advocacy groups must collaborate to create strategies that effectively tackle this evolving public health concern. By prioritizing education, fostering awareness, and providing tailored support services, we can hope to mitigate the impact of cervical cancer on the lives of young women and pave the way for a healthier future.

The author is a Radiation Oncologist, American Oncology Institute (AOI) Imphal.

100 WOMEN HERALD REPUBLIC DAY PARADE WITH 'NARI SHAKTI' MUSICAL PRELUDE

TDG NETWORK

On the occasion of India's 75th Republic Day celebration, a significant focus was placed on themes like 'Nari Shakti' (Women's Power) and 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India). Notably, the Republic Day parade saw a groundbreaking moment as 100 women took the lead, heralding the procession by playing traditional musical instruments such as the 'Sankh,' 'Nadaswaram,' and 'Nagada' for the first time.

Adding to the celebration of women's achievements, an all-women tri-service contingent marched proudly along the Kartavya Path. The Indian Air Force's fly-past featured approximately 15 women pilots, symbolizing the strength and prowess of 'Nari Shakti' in the defense forces.

Further highlighting the role of women in various sectors, the contingents of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) exclusively comprised women personnel. The Republic Day parade showcased 26 tableaux, each emphasizing



the theme of women's empowerment. The Manipur tableau, for instance, depicted women engaged in delicate work with lotus stems, showcasing their indispensable contributions to socio-economic

endeavors. Additionally, the tableau featured women skillfully riding boats. Positioned behind the Manipur tableau was a replica of 'Ima Keithel,' an iconic all-women market with a rich history span-

ning several centuries, where women have been the sole operators. This representation underscored the enduring legacy and resilience of women in diverse facets of Indian society.

BEING MY OWN BEST FRIEND



B.K. JAYANTI

When I began my spiritual journey, I was not even aware that I was supposed to be my own best friend. However, when I heard the expression, from the Gita, ‘Your mind can either be your own best friend or your worst enemy’, it became clear that if I cannot be my own best friend, then who can? On my journey, it has been the One above who has taught me the way I can move further ahead on my spiritual path. Without that

Supreme Being of Light, it would not have been possible for me to have become the best friend to myself that I have now become.

During my spiritual journey, I have met thousands and thousands of people from across the world, and realised that for a great many people their minds are not their best friends, but indeed their worst enemies. Why is that? Because on one side they are attempting to move forward, on their own spiritual path, but on the other side their minds are full of negative thoughts, and this is pulling them further back and down. Since the pandemic, people have had more trouble with depression and anxiety, with worry and fear, and this is right across the world, even in places where mental health was not an issue, or at least not an issue that was talked about. Now, there is no place that is immune to these mental health concerns.



The more I stay in touch with the Divine, and the deeper I go within myself, I feel much better about myself.

So where do we begin to become our own best friend? First, by understanding who I am. I am a soul. The precious body houses the inner being, the soul, the conscient light, in the middle of the forehead. When I become fully aware of this wonderful truth, I can go deeper into the self, and I begin to see differ-

ent layers within. First, I notice my thoughts, and then I notice my feelings. Then I become more able to notice what beliefs I am holding, what predispositions or tendencies I have. For example, do I have the predisposition to happiness or am I prone to anxiety? Then there is the whole subject of memory,

which although functioning through the brain, is not in the brain; memory is stored in the soul. So, everything that I am is within this tiny, infinitesimal spark of light, in the centre of the forehead. Anything else external can come and go, and dust will return to dust, but this inner being of light is eternal and

it goes on, and with it goes all thoughts, feelings and memory.

When we first start to look at our thoughts, we realise how wild the mind is, how at any given moment my mind can be operating on 12 different channels simultaneously. Yes, we are happy if we can multitask, but there is a big difference between that and being able to focus and complete a task really well, before we begin another task. Just as with a machine, if it overworks it will come to a standstill, so too with the overheated mind. I need to watch the quality, quantity and speed of thoughts. Thoughts create feelings, and these can bring me up or take me down. I can be my own best friend and have elevated thoughts, therefore elevated feelings, and can ascend to work with love, cooperation and harmony, or go the other way and blame everyone and everything for what is going on in my life.

I need to go deep inside myself, the soul, and connect with my own original qualities. Every single soul carries the qualities of love, peace, joy, truth, and purity – they are within each one in a variety of ratios. Some will have a predominance of love, others of purity, others of peace. We can only access these core qualities when we are introverted. When we are extroverted, we get caught up in materialism, but as soon as we go on the inner journey, we do experience the power of silence and peace that lies within.

The more I stay in touch with the Divine, and the deeper I go within myself, the more these latent qualities will emerge. Then I begin to express these qualities, naturally, in thoughts and words and actions. I can do this very consciously – make the connection with the Divine, draw in the love and power and then what was hidden away within me

will come into the light and be expressed in my life, my relationships, and within my own mind. When I do this, I feel much better about myself, I become more responsible, more accurate, have better relationships and become more efficient in every task. This spiritual adventure is such that we can never become bored. We develop the ability to learn from whoever is with us and whatever is going on.

Be a friend to yourself. Start each day with a conversation with the self, the soul. Then turn to the Supreme Soul and deepen the conversation. Study spiritual teachings every day to keep the mind and intellect full of wonderful inspirations and nourishment. The more I understand all of these things, the more I become my own best friend and inspire others to do the same.

B.K. Jayanti is Additional Administrative Head of the Brahma Kumaris.

SOUL POWER: SPIRITUAL LAW AND ORDER



B.K. SHEILU

Yesterday, India celebrated its 75th Republic Day, marking the date on which the Constitution of India came into effect. When the country gained independence in 1947, its laws were based on British colonial legislation. On 26 January 1950, the Constitution became the governing document of the country.

Why do countries need a constitution? A constitution helps establish a legal system that provides a basis for law and order. It also includes provisions that limit the powers of the government, to prevent the abuse of power and protect individual rights. It establishes the rules and principles that underpin the relationship between the state and its

citizens.

But not all countries have a formal, written constitution. In some countries, religious texts serve as a source of legal authority, while in others, laws, traditions, and customary practices form the basis of the legal and political framework. The absence of a constitution does not imply a lack of governance or legal structure. In fact, there was certainly a time when written constitutions did not exist. How did societies then function and govern themselves?

Many of us would have seen or experienced in the workplace or in other organised groups that the need for written or codified rules is felt when people fail to adhere to unwritten rules or norms, or they do not act in accordance with generally accepted principles. When even written rules are violated, it becomes necessary to introduce penalties for doing so. And when the threat of punishment fails to have a deterrent effect, the time comes to enforce the penalty. If the frequency or severity of



When we live by the innate qualities of the soul, we naturally follow all laws.

the violations grows, the enforcement structures have to be expanded and strengthened to maintain law and order.

In other words, formal arrangements to ensure the smooth functioning of societies have evolved in response to people’s inability or unwillingness to accept and adhere to norms. That does not mean the people alone are at fault. The rules themselves may be seen by some as unjust, benefiting some people at the expense of others. This may well be the case if

those who make the rules are unscrupulous.

The spiral of increasing laws and violations has brought us to present stage where we have elaborate law enforcement systems and, at the same time, societies rife with crime of all sorts.

The root of the problem is spiritual, as is the solution. In every society there are people who follow all the rules, because they recognise the benefit in doing so. Even where a rule needs to be changed, they try to get it done through proper proce-

dures. This is because they cherish certain values, such as peace, truth, and compassion, and choose to live by them.

These qualities are innate to every human soul. When we live in alignment with them, we are peaceful, happy, contented. But when we go against these values, the soul becomes uneasy, upset, and unhappy. These feelings, if not addressed, may trigger further actions that go against spiritual and temporal laws.

The remedy is to recognise and live by the fact

that we are souls – pure, immortal beings of light endowed with all the qualities we need to be happy. We are children of the Supreme Soul, who is an inexhaustible source of the same qualities, which we can draw from Him simply by remembering Him. When we regularly remind ourselves of who we are originally, and tap into the peace and purity within, then the delusions and disappointments born of our external circumstances slowly melt away. We develop the inner resources needed to face challenges – courage, patience, truth, determination and more. The soul then acts according to its core values, because it recognises the wisdom in doing so. Such a person naturally abides by laws.

This is the spiritual method of creating a peaceful and just society where law and order are maintained naturally and voluntarily, without the need for enforcement.

B.K. Sheilu is a Rajyoga teacher at the Brahma Kumaris headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

As my spiritual strength increases, I give up the habit of worrying. Worry serves no purpose but makes me feel tense and miserable. When I stop fretting about things that are beyond my control, I am able to focus on generating optimistic and kind thoughts. Then my life begins to flow in more positive constructive directions. Today let me adopt a light and easy approach to life.

BRINGING LIGHT INTO OUR LIFE



CHIRYA RISELY

Worldwide, souls are experiencing sorrow and lack of peace. We hear of rising levels of feelings of helplessness and anxiety. People are wanting, but not knowing how, to connect to some positive action aligned with their inner values of love, peace, and kindness.

Life can give us that opportunity and give us the chance to have a life full of meaning, only when we see the material world in a spiritual light. The quality of our life depends on the quality of our thoughts. Our mind is a powerful thing. It is not a cage; it is a garden that requires cul-



As we practise observing our thoughts, we understand that creating a better way of living is in our own hands.

When we fill it with positive thoughts, our life begins to change. Challenges and situations will come, but

they are what make life interesting; overcoming them makes life meaningful. With a spiritual outlook, situations get resolved more easily, because we become solution-oriented. We stop dwelling on the reasons why the situation arose, who is to blame, or how difficult everything has become. We focus on solutions which allows us to use our inner qualities and strengths. We lose our happiness when we think too much and focus only on the problem.

If we watch closely, we will notice that there is an aspect of our mind, our intellect, our conscience, watching our thoughts arise and leave. We need to get in touch with this observing capacity of the mind, as it helps us to step back and see the full picture and notice what we are thinking and change track if necessary. As we watch our thoughts and see how one thought can trigger a flood of other thoughts, we can see if we are heading down an unhelpful path, and if so, steer

our thoughts in a more powerful direction.

As we practise observing our thoughts and adjusting the focus of the spiritual lens, we understand that a creating a better way of living is in our own hands. We focus on the positive, and as we become light-hearted, our interactions are filled with more love. It becomes easy then to embrace the inner values that we want to see in our world. To speak the truth, to take care never to cause sorrow to anyone, to never deceive, to see the good in each one and not notice their defects, to eschew criticism, and offer words of appreciation often. Whether we are fully aware of it or not, God has a plan to change the darkness into light. With spiritual wisdom, strengthened with meditation and understanding, we can bring light into our own life and the lives of others.

Chirya Risely is a Rajyoga meditation teacher, based at the Brahma Kumaris Peace Village Retreat Center, U.S.A.

DJOKOVIC STUNNED: DESCRIBES SINNER LOSS AS 'ONE OF MY WORST' PERFORMANCES

Djokovic acknowledged the semi-final result as a respectable achievement

TDG NETWORK
MELBOURNE

In a surprising turn of events, Novak Djokovic expressed his dismay over his performance in the Australian Open semi-final loss to Jannik Sinner, labelling it as one of the worst in his extensive Grand Slam career of over 400 matches. The 24-times Grand Slam champion, however, remains optimistic about his future prospects and issued a warning to pundits contemplating the end of his illustrious career.

Reflecting on the 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-3 defeat to the 22-year-old Italian, Djokovic admitted, "He outplayed me completely today. I was shocked at my level in a bad way. There was not much I was doing right in the first two sets. I guess this is one of the worst Grand Slam matches



I've ever played, at least that I remember."

Despite the disappointing performance, Djokovic maintained high expectations for himself, emphasizing that he didn't feel at his best throughout the tournament. He acknowledged the semi-final result as a respectable achievement but insisted on

- Novak Djokovic expressed his dismay over his performance in the Australian Open semi-final
- labelling it as one of the worst in his extensive Grand Slam career

holding himself to the highest standards.

Djokovic's expectations have been shaped by his remarkable success on Melbourne's blue hardcourts,

where he has secured 10 titles and an impressive record of 94 wins out of 103 matches over 19 campaigns. However, Sinner's victory marked the end of Djokovic's 33-match

winning streak at the Australian Open since 2018 and his first loss in 11 Melbourne semi-finals.

Reflecting on his overall performance, Djokovic said, "I definitely have a lot to be very proud of in terms of what I have achieved here. The streak was going to end one day. It was going to happen, and at least I gave everything I possibly can under circumstances where I didn't play well. I just hope that I'll get a chance to come back to play at least another time and go through the emotions once more." The Australian Open final on Sunday will mark the first since 2005 without the involvement of Djokovic, Roger Federer, or Rafael Nadal, signaling a shift in the landscape of men's tennis. Djokovic addressed questions about his age, stating, "Let's see what happens in the rest of the season."

Australian Open: Medvedev beats Zverev in epic semi-final

TDG NETWORK
MELBOURNE

In a captivating semi-final match on Friday, Daniil Medvedev orchestrated a remarkable comeback from the brink, defeating Alexander Zverev 5-7, 3-6, 7-6(4), 7-6(5), 6-3 and securing his place in the Australian Open title clash.

The third seed is now in contention for his second Grand Slam trophy, hoping to reverse his fortunes after consecutive final defeats at Melbourne Park in 2021 and 2022 against Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal. In the upcoming final on Sunday, Medvedev will face Italian youngster Jannik Sinner.

Strategically positioning himself well behind the baseline, the Russian player effectively countered Zverev's powerful serves, engaging in prolonged rallies.

Despite an early deficit from a series of double faults, Medvedev displayed



“In the first set, both players displayed subpar performance, and there was room for improvement. Medvedev

Medvedev, appearing fatigued, did not give up and secured the third set in a tie-break. The Russian continued to push hard in a tense fourth set, overcoming a double fault in the tiebreak to level the contest. In the fifth set, Medvedev broke in the fifth game, laying the platform for his great escape.

Despite looking like he had just run a marathon, Medvedev's resilience and strategic play ultimately secured his victory and a chance at the Australian Open title.

resilience by clawing his way back from two breaks down, eventually leveling the score at 5-5. Zverev took the first set with a superb backhand volley after an exhausting 51-shot rally, showcasing his prowess.

In the second set, Zverev broke for a 3-2 lead, helping him wrap it up. However,

Rahul and Jadeja shine as India takes commanding lead on Day 2

TDG NETWORK
HYDERABAD

India displayed a versatile batting approach as they progressed in their bid to outplay England in the first Test on Friday, January 26. Yashavi Jaiswal's entertaining innings of 76 set the tone on the opening day, while India, adjusting to a turning and slowing pitch at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium, opted for a more traditional batting style.

Yashavi Jaiswal added only 4 runs to his overnight score, but KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja contributed fifty-plus scores. Supported by Shreyas Iyer (35), wicketkeeper Srikar Bharat (41), and Axar Patel (35 not out), India reached Stumps at 421 for 7, leading England's first innings total by 175 runs.

Although some considered England's 246 a competitive total, India's aggressive approach on Day 1 seemed calculated to amass runs before the pitch became challenging. The Indian batters dem-



onstrated that spin-friendly pitches can yield runs with the right application and adaptability.

Except for Shubman Gill, who appeared tentative, every other Indian batsman looked comfortable, denying England any opportunity to make a comeback. Ravindra Jadeja, batting with the lower-middle order, appeared confident, while KL Rahul made excellent use of the opportunity at No. 4 in the absence of Virat Kohli, continuing his impressive form.

The Rajiv Gandhi Stadium witnessed a healthy turnout

on Republic Day, and the crowd appreciated India's batting display, including Ravindra Jadeja's sword celebration.

Jadeja finished unbeaten on 81, adding a 63-run partnership with Axar as India showcased their all-round strength, even though R Ashwin, with 5 Test centuries, was run out for 1.

As Stumps were called in the late afternoon, England's bowlers and fielders looked fatigued, realizing that chasing a target, even 171, might be a challenging task when they bat again.

CLAUDIO ECHEVERRI JOINS MANCHESTER CITY'S STAR-STUDDED SIDE

TDG NETWORK
LONDON

One of the top clubs in English football, Manchester City has signed youngster Claudio Echeverri from River Plate for a fee of around £12.5m plus add-ons.

City completed the signing on Thursday without any delay after the Argentine transfer market opened on Wednesday. The 18-year-old midfielder will join 'The Blues' next year in January and will remain with the club until June 2028.

Echeverri made his football debut in June 2023 while playing for Buenos Aries which is managed by former Manchester City defender Martin Demichelis. During his time at Buenos Aries Club, the Argentine made six appearances for the club. The midfielder led his na-

tional side in the Under-17 World Cup in November and December last year. He scored a hat trick in the quarterfinals of the competition against Brazil but his team lost to Germany in the semi-finals.

Echeverri joined River Plate in 2023, where he has played only five games in the Copa Libertadores. He has not been able to score any goal so far for the club but he has assisted once for his teammate.

The River Plate player has featured in 23 games for the Argentina U-17 side where he has scored 13 times. He has also trained with the senior Argentina football team.

Echeverri joins a long list of Argentinians who have joined the Club, including 2022 World Cup winner Julian Alvarez, who transferred from River to City in 2022.

TEAM DIRECTOR HAFEEZ UNLIKELY TO GET LONG-TERM CONTRACT FROM PCB

TDG NETWORK
LAHORE

Pakistan team director Muhammad Hafeez is unlikely to get a long-term contract from the PCB which is presently being run by the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (Sports) through its nominees.

The former Test captain met with the acting Chairman of the board, election commissioner Shah Khawar, and the chief operating officer Salman Naseer in Lahore, to discuss the recent tours to Australia and New Zealand and about his contract.

The former Chairman of the interim committee running the PCB affairs, Zaka Ashraf, had given Hafeez a one-month contract as Director of the Pakistan team on the assurance that his contract would be extended to three years. But while the team was in New Zealand when Ashraf sent the contract to the ministry for approval he was told to hold it. Sources said that when Hafeez met with Kha-



war and Naseer after returning home he was told that his long-term contract was under review by the ministry but it was also conveyed to him that the ministry is not happy with his performances in Australia and New Zealand. The former captain was also conveyed that the final decision would be taken by the incoming Chairman now and they couldn't give him any guarantees. Interestingly Hafeez's one-month contract had expired on December 15 while in

Australia and he carried on working without pay. "Hafeez also reminded Naseer that his dues from the tour should be cleared no matter what the ministry or incoming Chairman decides," one source said. "Hafeez showed interest in continuing as Director of the team but the response he got was not very encouraging," the source added. Pakistan were whitewashed three nil in the Test series in Australia and lost the T20 series in New Zealand by 4-1.

New Zealand names full-strength Test squad against South Africa

TDG NETWORK
WELLINGTON

It's exciting news that star batter Rachin Ravindra is set to make his return to Test cricket at home since 2022. New Zealand Cricket has included his name in the BLACKCAPS Test squad for the upcoming two-match series against South Africa.

Rachin Ravindra, a left-handed batter, has been in impressive form and was recently honoured as the 'Emerging Player of the Year' at the ICC awards, further highlighting his growing stature in international cricket. His inclusion in the squad for the Test series against the Proteas, starting next week at Tauranga's Bay Oval, reflects the team's confidence in his abilities.

The two-Test series between South Africa and New Zealand will take place from February 4 onwards till February 17, with two games set to be played in Mount Maunganui and Hamilton.

Having been brought into the line-up for Henry Nicholls, Ravindra is set to bat in the middle order for the first time in his Test career, with Will Young providing batting cover.

Meanwhile, New Zealand also included top-ranked Test batter Kane Williamson in their squad while experienced quick Tim



Southee will captain Kiwis during the series.

A squad of 13 will assemble for each Test, with pace bowler Will O'Rourke joining the squad for the second match at Hamilton's Seddon Park, and one player coming out of the squad from Tauranga.

Allrounder Mitch Santner also retains his place in the squad following on from strong contributions with ball and bat in Bangladesh.

Ajaz Patel and Ish Sodhi are the other members of the Bangladesh touring squad not included, with the selection group seeking a different balance for the conditions

expected.

This bilateral series became a huge talking point because South Africa is sending a second-string side, consisting of seven uncapped players, including the skipper Neil Brand.

New Zealand coach Gary Stead is looking forward to the series against South Africa, anticipating the Proteas to pose a hard challenge to his team.

"It's an honour to be involved in any Test match and I know the players are looking forward to the start of a big Test summer - in what is a big year of Test cricket home and away.

DOMINANT WINDIES PACEMEN DISRUPT AUSTRALIA'S PLANS IN PINK-BALL CLASH

TDG NETWORK
BRISBANE

The West Indies showcased remarkable resilience on Friday, delivering a stellar batting performance from the tail and following up with a commanding display in bowling to leave Australia trailing by 35 runs in the second test at the Gabba in Brisbane.

Despite a top-order collapse that saw the home side recover from 24-4, they bravely declared at 289-9, just 22 runs behind, during the night session. Fast bowlers Kemar Roach (3-47) and Alzarri Joseph (4-84) were instrumental in causing

maximum damage to the Australian batting lineup.

Earlier in the day, the West Indies were bowled out for 311 after Kevin Sinclair's impressive knock of 50. The Caribbean batsmen then faced a challenging 73 overs under lights, finishing the day at 13-1, with opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul (4) falling to Josh Hazlewood on the last ball before stumps.

Debutant Sinclair expressed his satisfaction, saying, "I feel really, really good to get the fifty on my debut. It's about sticking with the basics for us."

Australia, dealing with the absence of David War-

ner and a top-order collapse, saw new opener Steve Smith fall to Roach for six. A double-strike by Roach, removing Cameron Green (8) and Travis Head (0), prompted a strategy change for the home side.

Despite resistance from Mitchell Marsh (21) and a solid innings from Alex Carey (65), the Australian innings saw wickets fall at crucial junctures. Usman Khawaja (75) anchored the innings, but offspinner Sinclair's crucial wicket brought a shift in momentum.

Captain Pat Cummins (64 not out) stepped up, providing a career-best perfor-

mance to reduce the deficit. The day's play unfolded on Australia's national holiday, with Cricket Australia refraining from referencing "Australia Day" for matches on Jan. 26, aligning with a recommendation from its Indigenous advisory committee.

Earlier, the West Indies, ranked eighth in the world, frustrated the world test champions with the bat, particularly in the last 18 overs of their innings. Roach's untimely run-out and Sinclair's attacking play against spinner Nathan Lyon (2-81) marked significant moments in their innings.

Indian shooters set to fire in Olympic year's first ISSF World Cup

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

It's great to hear about the participation of the 49-member Indian Shooting squad in the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun stage in Cairo, Egypt. The fact that the event coincides with India's Republic Day adds a special significance to the occasion. The focus on the air pistol shooters, with both men's and women's 10m air pistol finals scheduled on January 26, highlights

the determination of the athletes to make their mark. The competition serves as a crucial step for Rifle and Pistol Shooters aiming to secure a place in the national Olympic trials in May. The Shotgunners are also gearing up for the challenge; with the Men's and Women's Trap shooters leading the way in the qualifiers. The prospect of securing spots for Paris, with a final qualifier event in Rio in April, adds an extra layer of importance to the competition.

Notable names like Rajeshwari Kumari, Bhavya Tripathi, Manisha Keer, Zoravar Singh Sandhu, Prithviraj Tondaiman, Bhowneesh Mendiratta, Manu Bhaker, Esha Singh, and Anuradha Devi among others will be representing India and vying for podium finishes. It's interesting to note that some shooters, such as Vivaan Kapoor, Lakshay Sheoran, Rhythm Sangwan, and Varun Tomar, will be aiming for ranking points only, emphasizing the diverse goals of the Indian contingent.