

Touchstones: Pant, Lungi, dhoti, salwar

The other day, a reader sent me a funny post about the huge amount paid to Rishabh Pant (Rs 27 crore) while the South African cricketer, Lungi Ngidi, was paid a mere Rs 1 crore as franchise fees. The bottomline said, ‘Knew that a Pant is costlier than a Lungi. But didn’t know that it is 27 times costlier!’ My maiden name was Pant too, and then another funny episode came to my mind. I must have been about 11 years old and studying in Nainital. In those days, the production quality of our Hindi textbooks was pathetic and the broken line sketch accompanying a poem by the poet Sumitranandan Pant in my textbook made it difficult to make out the contours of the poet’s face. Also, I had inherited my textbook from an older cousin (as was the custom in those frugal days), who had added lavish flourishes to the picture: so, earrings hung from poor Pantji’s ears, a bindi adorned his forehead and a nath dangled from his nose. The poet also proudly sported long, curled locks so I had a gender-baffling portrait of this famous Romantic (chhayavadi) poet in front of me. Our Hindi teacher, who knew my mother was a writer, asked me one day: ‘Ira, are you related to Sumitranandan Pant?’ I looked at that funny picture, and since his name was Sumitranandan, assumed foolishly that it must be that of a woman. ‘Yes,’ I replied airily, ‘she is my aunt.’ For years after that, that teacher would ask me, ‘So, how is your aunt, Ira?’ and I would blush. Funny as it seems today, it is a reminder of how privileged we were to know the literary fraternity of Allahabad, where our family went after Nainital. Allahabad in the 1960s was where some of the most iconic Hindi writers and poets lived. Periodically, they would gather at someone’s house for a sahiyik goshti (literary soiree) and discuss their work to each other. Many young and aspiring writers joined such sittings to read out their work and have it critiqued and assessed by such eminent names. Their modest lives and mutual respect are a distinct memory and something to remember in these times when every young writer wants to write a bestseller, and make a pile of money by selling it to a big publisher. There are actually agencies now that offer their services (at a huge cost, naturally) for editing (and often re-writing the original work), marketing and ensuring high visibility. I suppose these are a sign of our fiercely competitive times for I see such hustling everywhere. In films, music and the performing arts, the shy, self-effacing person stands no chance. The hype created by this ecosystem has seriously damaged creativity in most spheres and many ‘outstanding’ first performers and writers sink without a trace soon enough. In contrast, the place occupied by an older generation is beyond all this. Whether writers, lyricists, poets or artists, their reputation has been built over time and reading or listening to their work is a perennial pleasure. Related to this is another concern and that is our dismissal of anything that is not written in English. The wealth of talent that exists in our regional languages is something I have written about earlier and now with good translations, I hope this trend will hold. The enormous popularity of Tamil and Telugu cinema is an example of how subtitling or dubbing into Hindi makes it possible for viewers to open their eyes to a new world and genre. The most visible proof of this is our English language media that had, until quite recently, occupied prime time space. Regional language newspapers and local broadsheets were considered beneath their notice and something that was bought by the sahib log for their staff. The shoe is on the other foot now: our mainstream English media gets left behind, for, the regional language media far outstrips these old ladies of Bori Bunder where advertising is concerned. Look at our Parliament, the glib English speakers who wear expensive handloom and flash designer bags and glasses, grab all the media attention. Most of them are inheritors or dynasts and patnis.

Rewriting the rules of survival in Gir territory

The resilience of the big cats is a testament to nature’s ability to adapt, even in the face of human encroachment and environmental change

“The world is not to be put in order. The world is order incarnate. It is for us to harmonise with this order.”

The picture was mesmerising — two farmers, their hands resting on weathered knees, seated calmly amid golden fields. Just a few paces behind them, two sub-adult male Asiatic lions stood tall, their watchful eyes surveying the landscape. It was a photograph that seemed almost surreal. Social media was abuzz with opinions — was it real or just another digital fabrication? My curiosity got the better of me, and I found myself drawn into an investigation, piecing together accounts from Gujarat’s forest officials, wildlife experts and local communities. What emerged was a tale of change, adaptation and an evolving coexistence between humans and the wild. The Asiatic lions, with their shorter manes and regal strides, have a history as expansive as their former range — from Greece to India. By the early 20th century, their empire had dwindled to the dry deciduous forests of Gir in Gujarat. Less than 200 lions remained, clinging to survival in the sanctuary that would become their last refuge. Gir National Park, a sprawling mosaic of forests, scrublands and grasslands, has been a lifeline for these lions. Here, prides thrive in familial bonds, hunting deer, antelope and wild boar in the soft light of dawn and dusk. Among them, the Maldharis — traditional herders — have long lived as neighbours, their livestock an occasional temptation for the hungry predators. Efforts to mediate this uneasy coexistence, from compensation schemes to grazing alternatives, have shaped the park’s conservation narrative for decades. These conservation measures and relentless efforts of the Forest Department have resulted in a significant increase of lions. As per the latest census, the number of lions in Gir is above 650. But the Gir forest itself is changing. Teak plantations, planted over the years, have grown dense, transforming open expanses into shadowy corridors. The forest floor is now a thick carpet of dry teak leaves, crackling underfoot with every step. For lions, stealth — so crucial for hunting — has become a challenge. The leaves, while innocuous to the untrained eye, act as an acoustic alarm for the prey, scattering potential meals before a lion can pounce. The leaves also pose another threat: they are a tinderbox, waiting for a spark to ignite biodiversity loss, destroying ground nests, invertebrates, and the fragile ecosystem underfoot. Furthermore, the lions have outgrown the carrying capacity of protected area, and, therefore, the prides often move out of the notified boundaries of the national reserve. As per



wildlife experts, the notified area of the park (1,410 sq km) is just enough to support 350-400 lions, and hence, some lions have sought solace beyond the protected area of Gir’s boundaries into the agro-pastoral landscape of Saurashtra, covering nine districts. Surprisingly, their new home, the agricultural fields, which are open stretches, mimic the savannahs of their evolutionary past, and hence offer space to roam and better opportunities to hunt. Blue bulls, wild boars, and deer — drawn to farmers’ crops — have unwittingly brought lions into the fold. For the big cats, it’s a buffet; for the farmers, it’s a blessing in disguise. “We don’t mind the lions,” one farmer told me. “They keep the crop raiders away.” This unspoken alliance between the predator and the farmer has cultivated a remarkable tolerance, even towards the occasional hunt of domestic cattle by these lions. Unlike in dense forests, the fields allow lions to hunt with ease, and the well-fed pride reduces damage to crops. It is important to note that this phenomenon isn’t unique only to Gujarat. It was observed in eastern India where tea plantations were

grown over a century ago. The leopards of the area found it easy to hunt and hide in the newly-developed tea garden habitat, rather than dense woodlands. It seems these apex predators are more adaptable than we once believed. But not all is idyllic. With lions venturing closer to human settlements, the risk of conflict looms. Therefore, the growing overlap of human and lion habitats underscores the need for proactive measures. Community education, better livestock management and innovative coexistence strategies will be essential. Engaging locals as stakeholders, not just spectators, in conservation efforts could turn potential conflicts into collaborative solutions.

The story of Gir’s lions is far from over. From the dense teak forests to the sunlit agricultural fields, these big cats are rewriting the rules of survival. Their resilience is a testament to nature’s ability to adapt, even in the face of human encroachment and environmental change. For me, the photograph that started this journey has become more than just an image — it’s a symbol of coexistence.

Reviving Aravallis

Project to reclaim vanishing hills takes shape

THE Aravalli Green Wall Project, an eco-restoration initiative by the Union Environment Ministry, promises to be a turning point in combating land degradation and desertification. Covering over 1.1 million hectares across Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi, this 1,400-km-long and 5-km-wide green corridor aims to restore the Aravalli hills’ ecological vitality. Once a thriving ecosystem of hills, forests, fauna, aquifers and natural drainage, the Aravallis now bear the unfortunate distinction of being the country’s most degraded forest range. Over 30 hillocks have already vanished, particularly in Haryana’s Gurugram, Faridabad, Mewat, Mahendragarh and Rewari districts. Relentless urban expansion has replaced verdant landscapes with concrete jungles, disrupting the ecological balance. Within decades, habitats thriving for millennia now teeter on the brink of extinction. The cost of this development has been immense, with the loss of



indigenous species, widespread deforestation and drying up of critical groundwater recharge zones. Inspired by Saudi Arabia’s green initiatives, the Green Wall Project

aims to reverse this destruction. Indigenous species and community engagement lie at its core. Haryana’s proactive measures, such as reviving 75 water bodies and restoring 35,000 hectares of degraded land, exemplify the potential of collaborative efforts among states to tackle this environmental crisis. The World Bank is supporting the Aravalli project with funding for initiatives like afforestation, water conservation and pollution control.

However, the project’s success depends on enforcing conservation laws to prevent illegal mining and encroachments. Preserving legal safeguards, such as the Punjab Land Preservation Act, is crucial. The states must transcend political boundaries to protect these shared ecological treasures. The Green Wall Project is a fight to reclaim the Aravallis and reverse decades of destruction. With robust public-private partnerships and community involvement, the initiative offers hope to revive these ancient hills.

Consumers Beware! — Why feedback has lost its meaning

If businesses are genuinely interested in consumer response to their queries, there ought to be respect for the negative feedback and acknowledgement of suggestions for improvement

You walk into a shoe store, buy a pair of flip-flops and even as you are stepping out, you hear a ‘ping’ on your mobile. You know what it is: a WhatsApp message from the brand, requesting your feedback on your shopping experience! When you get out of a cab, you are asked to rate your experience. You get off an airplane, and the airline wants your feedback on the service. You go to a restaurant and the owner requests you to fill out a questionnaire. You get your car serviced and you are urged to give your opinion on the service performance. You call the customer care number of a business and you are immediately asked to rate your satisfaction with the resolution of your complaint.

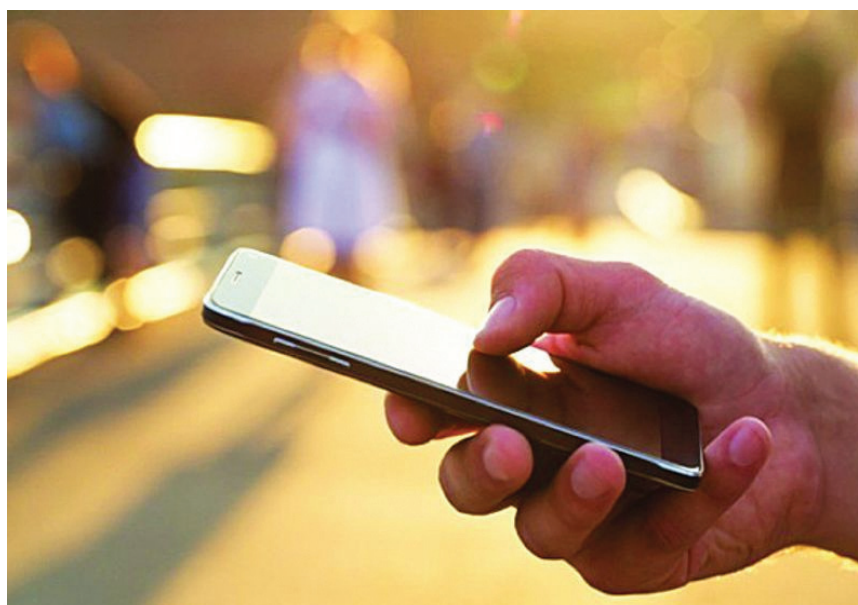
From hairdressers and telecom operators to couriers, gymnasiums, hospitals and online and offline stores, businesses are chasing you for feedback, cluttering your message boxes and WhatsApp with survey forms that are supposed to help them improve the quality of their goods and services! However, the formats of these surveys make you wonder whether they are serving consumer interest in any way!

Here is a sample: “On a scale of 0-5, how likely are you to recommend the store to your friends or colleagues?” asks a typical ‘customer satisfaction’ survey. If you say it is unlikely that you would recommend it to anyone, the questionnaire should ask you to cite reasons and request suggestions for improvement. However, the online feedback form gives you only four predetermined answers to choose from. If your answer is not one of them,

that’s too bad! You try to suggest improvements, but after two lines, the online questionnaire abruptly closes, never mind that you have not even completed your sentence.

If businesses are genuinely interested in consumer response to their queries, there ought to be respect for those giving them negative feedback and a desire to seek and acknowledge suggestions for improvement. After all, consumers are investing their time in responding to these surveys in the hope of seeing better services and products. In fact, most consumers say that the way these feedback forms are designed, there is no opportunity for them to give meaningful suggestions and even where they do get such a chance, they do not see any improvement based on their constructive criticism. So much so that the ‘feedback request’ seems more like a meaningless, routine exercise, a charade to give consumers a false impression that the businesses care for their views and opinions.

Here is an example of a consumer who ordered some clothes from an online marketplace while on a holiday in another city. The clothes were delivered the next day as promised, but were not what she had ordered. However, the website showed that the item chosen by her had been delivered. Since the



customer interface on the website did not provide for resolution of such a complaint, she was forced to call the helpline number, not once, but three times, without success.

What was even more frustrating was that after every call, she got a text message on her cellphone asking her to evaluate the customer care service. She gave it the lowest ranking every time, but there was no way for her to explain, through the survey, that the customer care personnel could not even understand the problem, let alone come up with a solution. Any wonder then that consumers feel that filling up these forms is a futile exercise, a waste of time and the

feedback messages are an annoyance.

I am not discounting the importance of customer feedback to businesses, but commenting on the poor format used by them and the lack of transparency and accountability in the entire process. How is it that businesses never acknowledge the suggestions made by consumers, nor inform them of the action taken based on the responses? In fact, one wonders what happens to all those feedback forms that customers so painstakingly fill in the hope of seeing an improvement in service. Surely, consumers too are entitled to feedback! And how about feedback forms with simple, open-ended questions such as “What did you dislike about our service” or “What problem did you face with our customer service” or “How can we improve our customer interface?”

If businesses are serious about consumer opinions, they must provide them with an opportunity to have their say, voice their grievances. Feedback should be designed to elicit meaningful information from consumers on the deficiencies in the system and utilised to bring about positive changes. And consumers must get feedback from businesses on the action taken on their suggestions and complaints. That would not only enhance consumer interactions with businesses, but also improve the quality of consumer feedback and thereby the quality of goods and services.

Trainee IPS officer accused of assault in wedding brawl, cross complaints lodged

► **Vikas Dhayal, a UPSC coach, alleged that on December 6, during a wedding at Mahak Tala Farms, IPS trainee Rahul Balhara struck him on the head with a whiskey glass, causing him to collapse.**

NEW DELHI. A cross-complaint was filed at Kapashera police station after a heated altercation between a 2023-batch trainee IPS officer and a UPSC coach escalated into a violent incident at a wedding, police said on Sunday. Vikas Dhayal, a Rajendra Nagar resident and UPSC coach, alleged that on December 6, during a wedding at Mahak Tala Farms, IPS trainee Rahul Balhara struck him on the head with a whiskey glass, causing him to collapse. Dhayal shared a video purportedly showing the assault, including images of his blood-covered face and clothes.

Expressing his outrage on social media platform X, Dhayal wrote, "This is what one year of IPS training teaches you: getting drunk on power, assaulting people without consequence." He further alleged that Balhara, after clearing the UPSC exam, engaged in similar violent behaviour. Despite his complaint to the police, Dhayal claimed no FIR was initially registered. He accused cops of acting only after



his social media post went viral. In a subsequent post, he stated, "Delhi Police took no action against Rahul Balhara despite clear CCTV evidence. Instead, they lodged a complaint against me, even though I didn't touch anyone."

Dhayal has also been issued a notice by the cops to join the investigation following a complaint by Balhara. Advocates Anshul Kumar and Pranjal, representing Vikas Dhayal, told this newspaper that the police are pressuring Dhayal to withdraw his complaint by

implicating four other persons. "We submitted our complaint before Balhara did, yet the police registered Balhara's complaint first and issued notice to Dayal to join the probe," said Anshul. Anshul also claimed that Balhara and Dhayal had known each other since their college days, and Balhara had allegedly assaulted other people on multiple occasions even before being selected as an IPS officer.

Police said that no FIR has been registered in the case yet, but an investigation has commenced following complaints from both parties. "We are reviewing the CCTV footage of the incident. Preliminary information indicates that a dispute occurred between two persons, during which one person struck the other with a glass. We have received complaints from both sides, and both are currently being investigated," a senior police officer said. Last month, in a similar incident in Gurugram, a 28-year-old man lost his life when he and the attacker reportedly had a drunken altercation which led to the deadly assault.

This is Hindustan, country will run as per majority's wishes: High Court judge

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court, made the controversial remarks while speaking on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) at a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) event in Pragayagraj.

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court, said he had no hesitation in saying that "Hindustan would run as per the wishes of the majority people" living in the country. "This is the law... The law, in fact, works according to the majority. Look at it in the context of family or society... Only what benefits the welfare and happiness of the majority will be accepted," Justice Yadav was quoted as saying by LiveLaw while speaking on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) at a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) event in Pragayagraj.

The Uniform Civil Code seeks to establish a set of standardised personal laws that apply to all citizens, regardless of religion, gender, or caste. This would cover aspects such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, and succession. Without naming the Muslim community, the judge said that practices like having multiple wives, triple talaq and halala were "unacceptable." "If you say that our personal law allows this, it will not be accepted. You can't disrespect a woman who has been recognised as a goddess in our Shastras and Vedas. You can't claim the right to have four wives, perform halala, or practice triple talaq. You say, 'we have the right to triple talaq and not give maintenance to women'. But this right will not work. The UCC isn't something that the VHP, RSS, or Hinduism advocate. The country's top court also talks about it," he added. The judge acknowledged that there were social evils in Hinduism like child marriage and Sati, "but reformers like Ram Mohan Roy fought to end these practices".

He also said that Hindus do not expect other communities to follow the same culture and traditions, but they are "definitely expected not to disrespect the culture of this country, the great personalities, and the god of this land." "In our country, we are taught not to harm even the smallest animals, not to kill ants, and this lesson is ingrained in us. Perhaps that is why we are tolerant and compassionate; we feel pain when others suffer. But in your culture, from a young age, children are exposed to the slaughter of animals. How can you expect them to be tolerant and compassionate?" While expressing hope for a nationwide UCC, he said that building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya took time, but "the day is not far when it will be clear that if there is one country, there should be one law, and one penal law."

2 SpiceJet flights diverted over technical glitches mid-air, one was hit by bird



NEW DELHI. In separate incidents on Monday, two SpiceJet flights—one heading to Shillong and the other to Kochi—were diverted due to technical issues, ensuring the safety of all passengers and crew members. A Delhi-Shillong SpiceJet flight faced a technical glitch mid-air and was diverted to Patna. The aircraft landed safely at Patna's Jay Prakash Narayan International Airport at 8.52 am, according to Patna Airport Director Anchal Prakash.

"Alternative arrangements are being made for the passengers," he stated. It was a normal landing, and all passengers and crew members on board were reported safe. In another incident, a Kochi-bound private carrier carrying 117 passengers and crew made an "emergency landing" in Chennai after a technical issue was detected mid-flight. The aircraft returned to Chennai, where it landed safely. A SpiceJet spokesperson said, "SpiceJet Q400 aircraft operating from Chennai to Kochi returned back to Chennai due to a technical issue on December 9, 2024. The aircraft landed safely, and passengers were deplaned." Required safety measures were in place and the aircraft made a safe landing, officials at the airport said.

No repeated petitions: Supreme Court rejects plea to remove farmers from highways

NEW DELHI. The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a petition seeking directions to immediately clear the blockage of national and state highways in Punjab, where farmers have been protesting for almost a year. "Why are you filing repetitive petitions? We have taken some initiatives already... Don't think we are the only ones who are concerned with issues, there are other people also. We will not tag the petition, we are already on a larger public interest issue. This case is not about multiple petitions," a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan told the petitioner, a Punjab-based social activist.

The plea had claimed that the "people of Punjab and neighbouring states are facing great difficulty as they are unable to reach hospitals on time in case of medical emergency, as even ambulances are being stopped from running on national and state highways". It also sought directions to the Centre and state to remove restrictions on farmers' protests and to ensure that national highways and railway tracks were not blocked by the agitating farmers for smooth public movement.

Farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February this year after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces. On Sunday, a delegation of 101 farmers suspended their march to the national capital from the Shambhu protest site after nine farmers were allegedly injured during clashes with law enforcement. The farm leaders will hold an internal meeting to decide the further course of action.

In the wake of the farmers' renewed attempt to march towards Delhi, security has been heightened at the Punjab-Haryana border, with barricades and prohibitory orders under Section 163 (formerly Section 144) in place to prevent the gathering of more than five people.

Besides Shambhu, the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana has also been sealed under tight four-layered security, with 13 contingents deployed. On December 6, farmers tried to move toward the national capital but suspended their bid after several protesters sustained injuries when security personnel fired tear gas shells at the border.

Need to work towards preserving unity, sovereignty: India on Syria crisis

The Ministry of External Affairs said that the Indian embassy in Damascus is in contact with the Indian community and called for a peaceful, inclusive power transfer while urging respect for Syria's unity and sovereignty.

NEW DELHI. The Ministry of External Affairs said on Monday (December 9) that the Indian embassy in Damascus is in touch with the Indian community. The ministry also called for a "peaceful" and "inclusive" process of power transfer in Syria after rebels claimed control of the capital, Damascus, marking the end of President Bashar al-Assad's rule. "We are monitoring the situation in Syria in the light of on-going developments. We underline the need for all parties to work towards preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We advocate a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process respecting the interests and aspirations of all sections of Syrian society," a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said on Monday.

The Ministry added that India's embassy in Damascus is in touch with the



members of the Indian community in Syria. "Our Embassy in Damascus is in contact with the Indian community, for their safety and security," the statement added.

Rebels in Syria announced on Sunday that they had seized control of the capital, Damascus, in a swift offensive, and proclaimed the end of President Bashar al-Assad's decades-long "tyranny". The 59-year-old autocratic leader fled the war-hit country and

landed in Moscow where he was given asylum following the toppling of his 24-year-old regime by opposition forces in a lightning offensive. The Syrian capital saw celebrations as fighters and a section of residents took to the streets cheering. Rebel factions, led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), declared Damascus "liberated" and said, "We announce the freedom of our city and the fall of the tyrant Assad". The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group began its lightning offensive two weeks ago, capturing the key cities of Aleppo, Homs, Hama before proceeding to Damascus unopposed and seizing control of the Syrian capital on Sunday. Government forces loyal to Assad were forced to retreat as rebels captured control of key cities one by one, in a move that challenged the Assad family's nearly six decades of autocratic rule.

Unite against anti-India forces: Kiren Rijiju on 'Sonia Gandhi-George Soros link'

► **Union Minister Kiren Rijiju urged unity against forces working against India, referring to the BJP's allegations linking Sonia Gandhi to the George Soros Foundation, which allegedly has taken anti-India stances.**

NEW DELHI. A day after the BJP alleged that Congress leader Sonia Gandhi had links to the George Soros Foundation, which has allegedly supported anti-India stances, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, referring to the same on Monday, said that everyone should unite against forces working against India. "The issue that has come to light in the country right now is George Soros. Whether it is the name of Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi," Rijiju said. His comments came at a time when Congress was protesting inside and outside Parliament, demanding discussion over businessman Gautam Adani's indictment in the US. "I want to tell the leaders of the Congress party that everyone should unite against the forces working against India. The issue of George Soros has already been raised in

Parliament," the minister said at a press conference.

He added, "I want to appeal to the leaders of the Congress party and its workers that if even their leaders are found to have links with anti-India forces, they also should raise their voices". The Parliamentary Affairs Minister claimed that the BJP "does not see this issue politically" and stressed that "we want to run the House". "We do not see it as an issue relating to the Congress party, Rahul Gandhi. We should take the issue seriously, if it is related to anti-India forces," he said. The winter session of Parliament continued to witness disruptions on Tuesday as well, leading to adjournments amid opposition protests. While the Congress and INDIA bloc partners demanded a discussion on Gautam Adani,

the BJP called for a debate on the alleged link between Soros and Congress.

The BJP on Sunday claimed that former Congress president Sonia Gandhi had links to an organisation financed by the George Soros Foundation and which has backed the idea of separating Kashmir from India. The saffron party further charged that this "association" shows the influence of foreign entities on India's internal affairs.

The BJP also claimed that Rahul Gandhi's press conference on Gautam Adani was live telecast by George Soros-funded OCCRP, which the Congress leader "used as a source to criticise Adani". The Congress has been alleging an "internal nexus" between Prime Minister Modi and Gautam Adani, suggesting that Adani has received undue favours from the government.

The cost of pollution: Delhi's construction workers bear the brunt of winter pollution measures

As air quality in Delhi-NCR deteriorates every winter, the city braces itself for strict pollution-control measures under Graded Response Action Plan. This annual cycle, however, wrecks havoc on the livelihoods of construction workers.

Delhi. November's plunge in air quality to the "severe" category under the Air Quality Index (AQI) triggered a blanket ban on all non-essential construction work. This directive halted activities across hundreds of sites, leaving thousands of workers jobless. For these labourers, the bans are not just an inconvenience—they represent a significant disruption to their already precarious existence.

Shambhu Kushwaha, a worker from Bihar, described how his family went without food for an entire day due to the sudden halt in work. "I used to earn roughly 500 rupees a day, but I haven't been able to find work for several weeks now. If this continues, I don't know how I will feed my family," he said. For daily earners like him, the loss of even a single day's wages can destabilize household finances.

Some workers have also sought alternative means of income. Jitendra, a welder from Madhya Pradesh, has begun washing utensils at a Dhaba to make ends meet.

However, such options are limited and unreliable, leaving most labourers with no choice but to contemplate returning to their hometowns.

Desperation has led some workers to flout the ban, risking fines and legal action. In south Delhi's Kailash Colony, labourers continue working under the cover of temporary tin enclosures. A security guard at one such site revealed, "When authorities come, they pretend to be just staying here. They are taking the risk because they have no other option."

Others, like Naresh Kumar from Uttar Pradesh, remain unaware of the restrictions altogether. Employed at a Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) construction site in Sarai Kale Khan, Kumar said, "Nobody told us to stop work. If they do, I'll have to go back home." Public sector projects like RRTS, deemed "essential services," are exempt from the ban, but their workers are still worried about the future. Demands for



compensation

On November 27, hundreds of construction workers staged a protest near the Delhi Lieutenant Governor's office in Civil Lines on Wednesday, demanding compensation for income losses caused by the ongoing ban.

Organized by the Building Workers Union, affiliated with the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), the workers submitted a memorandum to the Lieutenant Governor's office and the Labor Department, urging immediate action. They demanded increased daily

compensation rates—Rs 783 for unskilled workers, Rs 868 for skilled workers, and Rs 954 for highly skilled workers—and called for a structured policy to address livelihood losses during pollution-related restrictions and strikes.

Protesters, carrying placards with messages like "Stop attacking the livelihood of workers" and "We demand daily minimum wage, fair compensation," marched from the Sushruta Trauma Centre to the Lieutenant Governor's office but were stopped by police. "During the Covid-19 lockdown, the government provided Rs 5,000 monthly assistance to workers.

Why can't they do the same now?" asked Madan Bhatra, a worker from Bihar. The union also demanded a five per cent allocation in the Delhi government's budget for worker welfare and action against alleged corruption in labour offices, which they claim hinders access to government benefits.



Triptii Dimri

Looks Elated As She Kicks Off Christmas Festivities With Rumoured BF Sam Merchant



Triptii Dimri got into the Christmas spirit, and kicked off the holiday season with her rumoured boyfriend Sam Merchant last night. The actress gave fans a sneak-peek into her fun-filled outing yesterday as she painted the town red with Sam Merchant, and their friends. The actress looked cheerful and posed for several pictures as she fully embraced the holiday spirit.

Triptii Dimri took to her Instagram stories on Saturday to share some glimpses from the Christmas festivities. The 'Animal' actress, her rumoured beau Sam Merchant and their friends enjoyed a special event in Mumbai, called 'Starry Starry Night.' Two selfies clicked by Sam Merchant show Triptii Dimri and their friends posing happily. Meanwhile, other pictures and videos give us a glimpse of the event. The actress beamed with joy in the pictures, and was seen wearing a brown sweatshirt with blue denim jeans. Meanwhile, Sam was also dressed casually and was seen in a black tee. The last picture is a selfie of Triptii wherein she is seen relaxing at the end of the day, with a 'Merry Christmas' cushion next to her. Check out the pictures below!

While neither Triptii nor Sam has ever acknowledged their dating rumours, their pictures and social media posts for each other only add fuel to the rumours. Just a few days ago, as IMDD named Triptii as the 'Most Popular Indian Star of 2024,' Sam Merchant gave her a shoutout and expressed how proud he is of her. Sharing the news on his Instagram story, he wrote, "Making us proud," along with several evil eye, clapping and sunglasses emoji. A few days ago, Triptii was spotted enjoying a bike ride with Sam Merchant in the city. Pictures and videos shared by the paparazzi showed her riding pillion behind Sam. As the photographers approached, the actor was seen turning her face away to avoid the cameras.

According to media reports, Triptii began dating Sam after her rumored breakup with Karnesh Sharma, Anushka Sharma's brother. The two were said to have parted ways in December 2022.

Rajkumar Rao Celebrates Entertainment Leader Of The Year Award On Social Media: 'Forever Grateful'



Rajkumar Rao's journey in Indian cinema is a testament to resilience, passion, and an unwavering commitment to his craft. From humble beginnings to becoming one of the industry's most celebrated actors, Rao's story is as inspiring as the characters he portrays. This year, he added yet another milestone to his illustrious career with Stree 2, a horror-comedy that broke box office records, earning ₹505 crore globally in just 10 days. Recognizing his immense contribution to content-driven storytelling, the CNBC-TV18 India Business Leader Awards 2024 named him the Entertainment Leader of the Year. Celebrating the accolade, Rao shared his gratitude on Instagram, posting pictures from the event and writing, "Such an honour to be awarded the Entertainment Leader of the Year at @cnbctv18india India Business Leader Awards. Forever grateful to the audiences, creators, and teams that make this journey possible. #Gratitude."

Rajkumar Rao's rise to stardom wasn't without its challenges. In a candid interview with Barkha Dutt, he reflected on his financial struggles growing up in Gurugram, where even basic needs like school fees were sometimes out of reach. "I was raised in a joint family in Gurgaon, and I was not raised with money. We didn't have enough. But she never made us feel it," Rao said, referring to his mother. "There were times when school teachers paid our school fees because financially, it used to become very tough, for months. Money was an issue, but she never made us feel that there was a problem. She would arrange it somehow. For me to think that I would be a film actor one day was an impossible dream. But my mother really supported me." Moving to Mumbai in 2008 came with its own set of challenges, from surviving on a tight budget to navigating an unfamiliar city with no connections. Rao described those years as some of the toughest in his life.

Sobhita Dhulipala-Naga Chaitanya Give Sneak-Peek Into Telugu Wedding Rituals; Share Dreamy PICS From Ceremony



Sobhita Dhulipala and Naga Chaitanya have finally shared the official pictures from their wedding ceremony. The couple got married in a traditional Telugu ceremony on December 4 at Annapurna Studios in Hyderabad. While several visuals from their special day surfaced online, fans were eagerly waiting for the newlyweds to post the official pictures. Much to their delight, Chay and Sobhita have finally dropped some dreamy photos from their wedding ceremony that give fans a sneak-peek into the beautiful traditional wedding rituals. The first picture shared by Sobhita and Naga Chaitanya shows the actress rubbing haldi on Chay's face. As part of Madhuparaka? ritual, Sobhita is dressed up in a white sari with a red border. Meanwhile, another picture shows the bride and groom exchanging jaimalas. Sobhita and Chay are seen playfully exchanging flower garlands. Another picture features Sobhita during the Talabralu ceremony. As part of the Telugu ritual, the bride and the groom pour a rice and turmeric mixture over each other's head. The picture shows Sobhita beaming with joy as the rice mixture is poured over her.

Meanwhile, another picture shows Sobhita wearing a toe ring. In one photo, she is seen seated on a huge, decorated basket that looks like a lotus. She looks stunning in a beautiful golden kanjivaram saree. Another picture shows Naga Chaitanya and Sobhita looking lovingly at each other at the wedding ceremony. The last black-and-white snap is from the Arundhati Nakshatram ritual, where the bride and groom are shown stars representing Arundhati and Vasistha. Naga Chaitanya is seen lovingly holding Sobhita's hand as she pointed out at the stars.

Soon after Sobhita and Naga Chaitanya shared the pictures, congratulatory messages started pouring in. Music composer Vishal Dadlani wrote, "Congratulations guys! The best of all things, always! @sobhitad." Meanwhile their fans showered them with love and blessings. Naga Chaitanya and Sobhita Dhulipala's wedding was attended by celebrities such as SS Rajamouli, Ram Charan, Chiranjeevi, Rana Daggubati, Karthi, Anurag Kashyap, among others.

Kareena Kapoor

Wishes Mother-in-law Sharmila Tagore Happy Birthday, Calls Her 'Coolest Gangsta'

Kareena Kapoor Khan shares a strong bond with her mother-in-law Sharmila Tagore. Today, the veteran actress is celebrating her birthday. And her doting daughter-in-law Kareena has shared some cool photos to wish her happy birthday. The actress has called her coolest gangsta. Fans too reacted. Taking to her Instagram handle, Kareena shared photos and wrote, "Who's the coolest



Gangsta ever? Do i need to say? Happy birthday to my mother in law Just the Best.. In the photos, Kareena is posing with Sharmila Tagore. In other photos, the veteran actress is playing with Jeh. Fans dropped heart emojis in the comment section.

On December 5, the actress graced the opening night of the film festival in Jeddah. The Singham Again actress turned heads with her oh-so-gorgeous purple gown and a sheer

veil. A morning after the star-studded event, Bebo dropped a sun-kissed selfie of herself flaunting her no-makeup look. Not long ago, Kareena Kapoor also posted a multi-picture post giving fans a glimpse of her stunning look at the opening night of the prestigious Red Sea International Film Festival in Saudi Arabia. The beauty arrived in style on the red carpet in an Oscar de la Renta appliqued strapless gown. Her stunning look, paired with crystal-adorned jewels, including rings and dangling earrings, raised the oomph factor, leaving fans in awe of her beauty. Sharing her insights on what makes a movie truly successful in today's cinematic landscape, the actress said that the only successful formula for a film to work is that it has to create magic.

Talking about Kareena Kapoor Khan's professional commitments, the actress has been a part of some exciting projects like The Buckingham Murders and Singham Again.

Rohit Shetty's multi-starrer also starred Akshay Kumar, Ranveer Singh, Ajay Devgn, Tiger Shroff, Deepika Padukone and Arjun Kapoor. Meanwhile, the star has also bagged the Best Actor and Web Original Film (Female) award at the Filmfare OTT Awards 2024 for her role in Sujoy Ghosh's directorial Jaane Jaan.

