

## Police use water cannons to disperse Bihar civil services aspirants in Patna

PATNA, DEC 29: Police on Sunday used water cannons and mild force to disperse protesters demanding the cancellation of the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) exam held here on December 13.

The protesters, who were joined earlier in the day by Jan Suraj founder Prashant Kishore at Gandhi Maidan, attempted to march towards the chief minister's residence in the evening, prompting police to take action, district magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh said.

The protesters also tried to jump over barricades while marching from Gandhi Maidan towards JP Golumber, he added.

"The protesters gathered at Gandhi Maidan despite the administration's warning that any demonstration there would be considered unauthorised. The district police have registered an FIR against 21 known persons, including Prashant Kishore, his party president Manoj Bharti, city-based tutor Ramanshu Mishra and 600-700 unknown persons for organising a gathering of students at Gandhi Maidan even after denial of permission by the authorities", the DM told PTI.

Kishore, who arrived in the afternoon and left after about an hour, criticised



Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for "going to Delhi on a private visit but having no time for the youth of his own state."

He also suggested that students start a "relay fast" so that fewer people risk their health for the cause.

"The CM does not have time to listen to the grievances of the protesting aspirants and has gone to Delhi. The protest will continue till their demand for the cancellation of the exam is not accepted. I am always with the protesting students", Kishore said while addressing the BPSC aspirants.

Some protesters were detained by police near JP Golumber when they refused to vacate the roads.

"Water cannons and mild force were used to disperse protesters as some of them blocked traffic by lying on the roads near JP Golumber", the DM said.

The DM said, "The government has been sensitive towards the concerns of the youth. The chief secretary has agreed to meet a five-member delegation approved by BPSC aspirants who have been pressing for an audience with the CM or some highly placed official. But protesters seemed to be disorganised and unable to nominate five persons".

Talking to reporters, a BPSC aspirant said, "We never expected that the government would treat us like this. We are fighting for our own rights...we have

nothing to do with those who are coming here to support our stir for political gains". Police also arrested two Patna-based tutors — Ramanshu Mishra and Rohan Anand — on charges of instigating students, said a top police officer of Patna district.

"Both are out on conditional bail and are undergoing treatment as they are not well", an official said.

The candidates, who have been protesting for days, are seeking the cancellation of the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) due to allegations of a question paper leak in all centres, arguing that re-examination in just one centre would be unfair.

## 'For Blissful Life attain Divine Knowledge'

### Massive Turnout at Nirankari Zonal Mahila Samagam

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS  
JAMMU, DEC 29

Sant Nirankari Mission organized the Zonal Mahila Samagam at Samba, a spiritual congregation aimed at celebrating the vital role of women in fostering love, unity, and spiritual awakening. This remarkable congregation brought together women from across the region, showcasing their dedication to the mission's core values of humanity, selfless service, and spiritual enlightenment.

The Zonal Mahila Samagam was Presided over by Behan Nirmal Manchanda Ji Gyan Pracharak and Sanyojak Gurugram Haryana. Speaking at the Samagam, she said that the overwhelming participation at this Mahila Samagam is a testament to the strength and resolve of women to lead by example, fostering spiritual and social well-being for all with unique example of women empowerment. Today women through their inspirational discourses, devo-



tional songs, and poems promoting peace, harmony and love. It is all with the grace of Satguru that we live a blissful life after attaining the Divine Knowledge. While being spiritually enlightened, one must remain connected with the Unchangeable Almighty God Nirankar to lead a unshakeable life. It is important to remain in society of Noble and Pious Saints.

Satguru manifests our lives with all good virtues and teaches us way of living free from ego and hatred. She further elaborated that in order to live a peaceful life, one should remain devoted in the holy feet of Lord Masted Satguru who bestows us with firm faith in God Nirankar and sense of Brotherhood and to practise all such human trait living a peaceful life with

fellow beings.

Ajit Singh Zonal In-charge Jammu welcome all and said that the Samagam drew a record-breaking participation of over 5000 women devotees from various cities and towns, making it one of the largest women's spiritual gatherings in the region.

KC Bhagat Sanyojak Samba presented vote of Thanks.

## 'True statesman, kind, dedicated public servant': Biden pays tribute to Manmohan Singh

WASHINGTON, DEC 29: US President Joe Biden on Saturday paid heartfelt tributes to former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, describing him as a "true statesman," "kind and humble person," and "dedicated public servant."

Dr Singh, who served as India's 14th Prime Minister and was widely regarded as one of the nation's most distinguished economists, passed away on Thursday night at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi.

Acknowledged as the 'Architect of India's economic reforms,' Dr Singh led the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government as Prime Minister for two consecutive terms from 2004 to 2014, leaving a last-

ing legacy on India's economic and diplomatic landscape.

In an official statement issued by the White House, President Biden said, "Jill and I join the people of India in grieving the loss of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh."

He emphasised that "the unprecedented level of cooperation between the United States and India today would not have been possible without the Prime Minister's strategic vision and political courage."

President Biden credited Dr Singh for key milestones in Indo-US relations, including the landmark US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement and the establishment of the Quad between Indo-Pacific partners.

He added that Dr Singh charted pathbreaking progress that will continue to strengthen our nations and the world for generations to come. "He was a true statesman. A dedicated public servant. And above all, he was a kind and humble person," Biden stated.

Recalling his personal interactions with Dr Singh, Biden mentioned their meetings during his tenure as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2008 and as Vice President during Dr Singh's official visit to the US in 2009.

"He also graciously hosted me in New Delhi in 2013," Biden said, noting their shared belief in the US-India relationship as one of the most consequen-

tial in the world.

Expressing his condolences, he added, "During this difficult time, we recommit to this vision to which Prime Minister Singh dedicated his life. Jill and I send our deepest condolences to former First Lady Gursharan Kaur, their three children, and all the people of India."

Earlier on Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had also expressed his sorrow, calling Dr Singh "one of the greatest champions of the US-India strategic partnership."

Blinken highlighted Dr Singh's pivotal role in advancing the US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement and his contribution to India's rapid economic growth.

## Rift in Trump camp over immigrants: Foreign workers split Elon Musk and hardliners

WASHINGTON, DEC 29: Weeks before President-elect Donald J. Trump is to take office, a major rift has emerged among his supporters over immigration and the place of foreign workers in the US labour market.

The debate hinges on how much tolerance, if any, the incoming administration should have for skilled immigrants brought into the country on work visas.

The schism pits immigration hardliners against many of the President-elect's most prominent backers on the technology industry — among them Elon Musk, the world's richest man, who helped back Trump's election efforts with more than a quarter of a billion dollars, and David Sacks, a venture capitalist picked to be czar for artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency policy.

The tech industry has long relied on foreign

skilled workers to help run its companies, a labour supply that critics say undercuts wages for American citizens.

The dispute, which late on Thursday exploded online into acrimony, finger-pointing and accusations of censorship, frames a policy quandary for Trump. The President-elect has in the past expressed a willingness to provide more work visas to skilled workers, but has also promised to close the border, deploy tariffs to create more jobs for American citizens and severely restrict immigration.

Laura Loomer, a far-right activist and fervent Trump loyalist, helped set off the altercation earlier this week by criticising Trump's selection of Sriram Krishnan, an Indian American venture capitalist, to be an adviser on artificial intelligence policy. In a post, she said she was concerned that Krishnan, a naturalised US citizen who was born in India, would

have an influence on the Trump administration's immigration policies, and mentioned "third-world invaders".

"It's alarming to see the number of career leftists who are now being appointed to serve in Trump's admin when they share views that are in direct opposition to Trump's America First agenda," Loomer wrote on X, the social media platform owned by Musk.

Loomer's comments surfaced a simmering tension between longtime supporters of Trump, who embrace his virulent anti-immigrant rhetoric, and his more recently acquired backers from the tech industry, many of whom have built or financed businesses that rely on the government's H-1B visa programme to hire skilled workers from abroad.

In response, Sacks called Loomer's critiques "crude", while Musk posted regularly this week about the

lack of homegrown talent to fill all the needed positions within American technology companies.

The expertise the US companies need "simply does not exist in America in sufficient quantity," Musk posted on Thursday, drawing a line between what he views as legal immigration and illegal immigration.

Throughout the election cycle, Musk helped amplify the debunked theory that the Democratic Party was encouraging undocumented immigrants to cross the border to vote, thus replacing American voters.

A naturalized citizen born in South Africa, Musk has spoken out frequently against immigration, characterising it as a threat to national sovereignty and endorsing messages calling noncitizens "invaders".

This week, however, he came out strongly in favour of H-1B visas, which are given to specialised foreign workers.

## Afghan forces retaliate, target Pak sites

KABUL, DEC 29: Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said on Saturday that its forces hit several points inside Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes last week.

Pakistan last Tuesday launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province. The strikes killed dozens of people, mostly women and chil-

dren.

Comments from the Taliban Defence Ministry on Saturday, posted on X, said its forces targeted Pakistani points that "served as centres and hideouts for malicious elements and their supporters who organised and coordinated attacks in Afghanistan." Ministry spokesperson Enayatullah Khwarzami gave no further information about the strikes, including how they

were carried out and if there were any casualties on either side.

However, a pro-Taliban media outlet, Hurriyet Daily News, cited ministry sources as saying that the strikes killed 19 Pakistani troops and three Afghan civilians. No one from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry was immediately available for comment.

People celebrated Afghanistan's retaliation in

the country's southeastern Khost province, according to the organiser, Rasheedullah Hamdard.

Thousands turned out to show their happiness and assure the Afghan military of their support against Pakistan. Khost neighbours Paktika, which was targeted last week, "All of them were chanting angry slogans against this action by Pakistan, such as death to Pakistan," Hamdard said.

## For US, a humbling trip to Afghanistan: Talibs check in and out with strictness

NEW YORK, DEC 29: The Talib looked as ragged as his outpost, a trailer banked on a snowy mountain pass. Holes were bored into its sides to ventilate a sputtering wood stove.

Upon seeing foreigners, the Talib, with an unkempt beard and layers of ill-fitting sweaters, ordered us out of the car.

For more than an hour, my colleague Bryan Denton and I waited on the trailer floor as he reviewed our documents. Beside him, two guards slept beneath heaped blankets. It smelled as if they had been there a while.

The Talib asked questions: Why had we come to Afghanistan? Where were we going? What were we doing? We told him what we had told so many other Taliban members. I covered the war as a New York Times correspondent and bureau chief. Now I wanted to see the war from another perspective, to see what lessons — and secrets — the US left behind.

Most Talibs had been, if not friendly, at least open to the idea. A few longtime American sources had vouched for us in Kabul, the Afghan capital, with Taliban members they knew. But this was thousands of miles away, and this Talib, marooned in a frontier outpost, was suspicious.

I began to wonder if our luck had run out. Bryan turned to me and frowned.

The guard began recording us with his phone, sending our hearts racing. Almost no recording of a foreigner in similar circumstances has ended well this century.

But the Talib had other things on his mind. "Can you please indicate that you have been treated well and that no harm has come to you?" he asked, presumably collecting evidence in case we complained to his superiors.

One of the stranger things about our travels was how freely the Taliban allowed us to explore. For most of the war, they had shot, bombed or ab-



ducted any foreigner they could find. Times colleagues had been kidnapped or killed.

Yet no matter where we were, if we produced our paperwork, we were granted access to places that few foreigners had ventured in nearly two decades: the other side of the war.

We spent nights in half-constructed buildings, in barren deserts and perched on the edge of raging rivers. We inter-

viewed hundreds of people and surveyed more than 1,000 others about war crimes committed by American allies.

I often think of this moment in relation to Vietnam. In that war, decades passed before the US engaged its former enemy. By then, parts of history were lost.

Here is what we learned: Time and again, we found, the Americans set the stage for their own defeat well before the

Taliban marched to power in August 2021.

The US empowered warlords and criminals to conduct the war on its behalf, individuals who inspired so much hatred that their very presence became a Taliban recruiting tool. This propensity was embodied by no one more than Lt. Gen. Abdul Raziq, the police chief of Kandahar Province.

Our reporting revealed that he and his men were responsi-

ble for Afghanistan's largest known campaign of mass disappearances during the war.

By blindly trampling into places they did not understand, the Americans seeded hatred. Errant airstrikes not only killed innocents. They killed American allies — the very people who supported them the most.

In the rugged region of Nuristan, we traced the origins of one of the deadliest assaults on American soldiers. We discovered that American troops had created the enemies that they feared the most — and in places that they never needed to be.

After the war, the Taliban declared that, no matter which side you had been on, the fighting was over. Former enemies were prohibited from settling scores — and for the most part people listened.

The Taliban has also declared an end to poppy, seemingly accomplishing one of Washington's key war goals.

We visited the remnants of a poppy boom town in the desert,

an area that once served as a \$10 million-a-month Taliban financial hub and governance laboratory.

The district, Bakwa, had once been a barely inhabited stretch of desert. But thanks to American efforts to eradicate poppy — and the opium trade — people had flocked to the desert district, where the Taliban embraced them.

US President Biden blames the Afghan Army for crumbling so quickly. President-elect Donald J. Trump blames Biden.

Both versions ignore the history in places like the north of Afghanistan, a region where values like democracy and women's rights might have actually lasted.

There, the US empowered militias to fight the Taliban. Instead, these groups tortured, kidnapped and massacred civilians. They created such hatred towards the Afghan government and its American allies that people turned to the Taliban.