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INSIDE

WORLD 9
PUTIN BOASTS OF GAINS IN UKRAINE AT ANNUAL NEWS CONFERENCE

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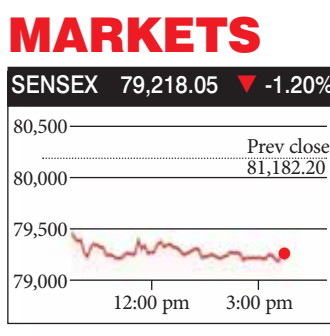
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Sensex sinks below 80k



PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmark Sensex on Thursday plunged about 965 points to crash below the 80,000 level due to heavy selling in global equities after the US Federal Reserve signalled fewer rate cuts next year. Besides, deep losses in consumer durables, banking and IT stocks amid foreign fund outflows added to the gloom, analysts said. Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05. During the day, the blue-chip index cracked 1,162.12 points or 1.44 per cent to 79,020.08. As many as 2,315 stocks declined while 1,680 advanced and 100 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink

below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70. In the past four days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,915.07 points or 3.54 per cent and the Nifty declined 816.6 points or 3.29 per cent. "The Indian market saw a widespread decline following a global sell-off driven by the US Fed's hawkish stance on interest rates. Sectors sensitive to interest rates, such as banking and real estate, significantly bore the brunt. "However, the BoJ's decision to keep its interest rate steady, which surprised economists, aided in reducing the selling pressure. Despite this, investor caution persisted amid ongoing FII selling, with a strategic shift towards defensive sectors like pharma as evidenced by their outperformance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.



From the 30 blue-chip pack, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra were the biggest laggards. On the other hand, Sun Pharma, Power Grid and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers. Markets were plundered,

tracking negative global cues as benchmark indices slipped below their psychological levels on broad-based selling after the US Fed's hawkish stance raised concerns over further rate cuts next year. Rising US bond yields have pushed global currencies, including the rupee to new lows, while renewed foreign fund outflows from domestic equities could prompt investors to turn risk averse," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. The rupee dropped 14 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at an all-time low of 85.08 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.30 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.28 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT tanked 1.20 per cent, consumer durables (1.15 per cent), IT (1.13 per cent), capital goods (1.07 per cent), teck (1.05 per cent) and financial services (1.05 per cent). BSE Healthcare emerged as the only gainer. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended sharply lower on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,316.81 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.08 per cent to USD 73.33 a barrel. The BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 502.25 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 80,182.20, taking its downtrend to the third day on Wednesday. The Nifty declined 137.15 points or 0.56 per cent to 24,198.85.



Uttar Pradesh, Haryana Govts must impose complete ban on firecrackers: SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana Governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers until further orders. The Delhi Government has also imposed a round-the-year ban on firecrackers in the National Capital. The SC has also ordered the states falling in the National Capital Region (NCR) to constitute teams of various officials to ensure strict compliance with the anti-pollution measures under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). During the hearing, Senior advocate Shadaan Farasat, appearing for the Government, conveyed this to a Bench of Justices AS Oka and AG Masih hearing the question of air pollution in the National Capital. He emphasised that for this measure to be effective, neighbouring NCR states must adopt similar bans, as firecrackers could still be brought into Delhi from those states. "We are of the view that this ban will be effective only when other states forming part of the NCR region impose similar measures. Even the state of Rajasthan has

WEATHER

AQI	451
MAX	23°C (+1)
MIN	5°C (-3)

imposed a similar ban in that part of State of Rajasthan which falls in NCR regions. For the time being we direct the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to impose a similar ban which is imposed by the state of Delhi", the Bench said. The Bench was informed that while Haryana had permitted the use of green crackers, Rajasthan had imposed a complete ban on firecrackers in the areas falling within the NCR. The Bench further stated that such a ban would be effective only if other NCR states imposed similar restrictions. The matter has been listed for further hearing on January 15, 2025, to consider additional directions on the firecracker ban. The Supreme Court had earlier expressed concerns over inadequate enforcement of firecracker bans in Delhi-NCR. On December 12, the Supreme Court directed the Delhi Government and NCR states to decide on a complete year-round ban on firecrackers, including their manufacture, storage, sale, distribution, and use. "We direct NCR states to constitute the teams of members of police, revenue officials to monitor the implementation of GRAP IV measures. We say that the members so created in this team will work as officers of this court. They will regularly submit reports of compliance and breaches to CAQM [Commission for Air Quality Management] so that immediate action be taken by all concerned," it directed. The Bench was hearing the case concerning the Delhi air pollution crisis. The Court has been monitoring action taken by authorities in the adjoining States to curb stubble-burning incidents, among other things. Meanwhile, in a notification issued by the Delhi government's environment department on Thursday, there shall be a complete ban on manufacturing, storage, selling (including delivery through online marketing platforms) and bursting of all kinds of firecrackers in NCT of Delhi throughout the year with immediate effect."

"Will run a nationwide movement on Ambedkar issue"



Congress on Thursday accused the BJP of diverting attention from the issue of Home Minister Amit Shah's "insult" to BR Ambedkar and said Shah must resign and apologise for his remarks. Addressing a joint Press conference at the AICC headquarters, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi condemned Shah's remarks on Ambedkar and said they would continue to protest across the country.

"The BJP wants to divert attention from Shah's remarks on Ambedkar and that is why they are raising other issues," Kharge stated. He said they (Congress leaders) were only demanding the resignation of Home Minister Shah and were protesting "in support of our demands, but the BJP MPs blocked us from entering Parliament." "They pushed me, I lost my balance and sat down," the Congress chief said, adding that he condemns Shah's remarks

on Ambedkar. Kharge said they will run a nationwide movement on Ambedkar issue. Rahul said the Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh thinking is "anti-Constitution" and "anti-Ambedkar". "The BJP is indulging in distraction. We want the apology and resignation of home minister over his remarks on Ambedkar," Gandhi said, adding that they would continue to raise their demand and the Adani issue.

"Will physical strength be used in Parliament?"



Accusing Rahul Gandhi of "pushing and shoving" its Members of Parliament at the Parliament premises, Bharatiya Janata Party said he does not deserve to be the Leader of Opposition after an "indecent and shameful" conduct. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters hours after fracas unfolded during protests by the ruling, and Opposition parties, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan put the blame on

Rahul for bedlam which left two MPs injured. "Rahul Gandhi does not deserve to hold the post of the Leader of Opposition," he said. Chouhan said that the party was also painted at the treatment meted out to its tribal MP from Nagaland, S Phangnon Konyak, who alleged in the Rajya Sabha that Rahul shouted at her after coming in "close proximity" that made her feel uncomfortable during a demonstration outside the Parliament's Makar Dwar.

"Will physical strength be used in Parliament? Will musclemen and goondas come to Parliament? In which direction is the Congress taking the country's democracy?" said the BJP leader, who was flanked by Union Minister Piyush Goyal and party MPs Anurag Thakur and Anil Baluni. The Agriculture Minister said people elect their leaders to Parliament hoping they will put forth issues "with facts and logic. But the Congress is changing it"

Traffic alert: Avoid Kalindi Kunj, congestion due to Delhi-Mumbai Expressway construction

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Commuters have been creeling under massive disruptions at the busy Kalindi Kunj junction, due to the construction of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. The Delhi Police, in an advisory on Thursday, urged the commuters to avoid the area due to the ongoing construction of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, including that of a bridge at Agra Canal Road, which is expected to continue for the next couple of months. "The ongoing construction of the delhi-mumbai expressway, including the construction of a bridge at agra canal road, is expected to continue for the next couple of months. Due to

this, significant traffic congestion has been observed at Kalindi Kunj junction, especially as commuters from adjoining states pass through the area," it said. The police instructed the commuters that in light of the ongoing construction and resulting traffic disruptions, the general public is advised to plan their journeys in advance and seek alternate routes to avoid delays. They asked people travelling to avoid the area around Kalindi Kunj junction during peak hours to prevent inconvenience. Commuters travelling from Faridabad to Noida are advised to take Mathura Road and Road number-13 to bypass the congested area. Those

travelling from Noida to Delhi have been advised to use the DND flyover. Public transport is highly recommended to reduce congestion on the roads and avoid roadside parking to ensure smooth traffic flow, the advisory added. A commuter took to X to express his frustration over the persistent jams in the area, stating that while the Kalindi Kunj stretch is hardly 2 km long and should not take more than five minutes to cross the bridge with moderate traffic, it takes 30 to 40 minutes to cross this tiny stretch. Another one asked others to avoid Kalindi Kunj from Noida to Delhi at all cost. Sharing the ordeal he faced to cross the stretch, he said, "It took me an hour just to cover a distance of



just 250 meters recently. They keep constructing new things to cut short duration from one place to another, however they completely forget that in that process we, the ordinary commuters, have to suffer on a daily basis," he said, adding that authorities should first plan the whole thing in a way that it doesn't hamper the day to day lives of the people. Constructed with a budget of Rs 5,500 crore, the expressway offers a new route for travel to Faridabad, Palwal, and Sohna. It is India's longest expressway project, connecting Delhi and Mumbai. The project aims to directly link the national capital Delhi with Mumbai, linking multiple economic centres across five states: Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. The eight-lane greenfield expressway spans a total length of 1,386 km, designed to reduce travel time between Delhi and Mumbai by 50 per cent, aiming for a travel duration of just 12 hours. Beyond connecting the two major cities, it is intended to improve accessibility to economic hubs such as Jaipur, Kishangarh, Ajmer, Kota, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Bhopal, Ujjain, Indore, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and Surat. The project commenced operations with the inauguration of its first segment between Sohna (Haryana) and Dausa (Rajasthan) by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12 February 2023.

Diet is foundation of better health, pure mentality: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that the primary source of essential nutrients for the body is diet, and the purity of diet amplifies its significance. He stated that the importance of dietary purity was emphasized by Lord Krishna in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, where he explained that purity of thought is only possible through pure food.

The Chief Minister praised the work of Akshaya Patra Foundation, stating that it is serving a new life to school-children by providing them with nutritious meals. He also noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former President APJ Abdul Kalam had both praised the midday meal programme run by the

Akshaya Patra Foundation, which supports education through ample food distribution. Yadav attended a programme under the Prime Minister's Nutrition Power Construction Scheme, where more than one crore mid-day meals were distributed in the urban areas of Bhopal. The event was organised by the Akshaya Patra Foundation at its premises in Rohit Nagar. The Chief Minister inaugurated the programme by lighting a lamp and flagged off food distribution vehicles. Additionally, he distributed midday meals to 10 school children symbolically. He was welcomed with a shawl and a memento.

Yadav also visited the centralised kitchen of the Akshaya Patra Foundation, where he witnessed the automated

process of meal preparation and participated in making dal-roti. He explained that under the Prime Minister's Nutrition Power Construction Scheme, mid-day meals for government schools in Bhopal are supplied from this centralised kitchen. The event was attended by Panchayat and Rural Development Minister Panchayat and Rural Development Minister Panchayat, Transport and School Education Minister Uday Pratap Singh, and Panchayat and Rural Development State Minister Mrs. Radha Singh. A short film showcasing the activities of the Akshaya Patra Foundation was also screened during the event.

CM Yadav further mentioned that the Akshaya Patra Foundation, with a team of 76 employees and 38 vehicles, is providing pure, nutritious, and

quality mid-day meals to 645 schools in Bhopal. He expressed amazement at the mechanised processes used to prepare 40,000 rotis simultaneously, and to cook dal and vegetables. He emphasised that the process of making food through the medium of saints fosters a sense of purity, and that the Foundation's mission will help in the creation of a healthier society with a pure mentality in the future.

On this occasion, CM Yadav also greeted Ravi Jhunjhunwala, Chairman and Managing Director of HEG Limited, Padmashri Madhu Pandit Dasa, Founder and Chairman of Akshaya Patra Foundation and Acharya Ratan Dasa, President of the Bhopal Cluster, along with all the collaborators and employees of the Foundation for their noble ser-

vice. Panchayat and Rural Development Minister Prahlad Singh Patel, while addressing the gathering, said that the Akshaya Patra Foundation is providing students with nutritious and delicious food in schools. He said that the Foundation's approach of offering food based on the children's preferences is helping to keep them engaged and enrolled in schools.

The Akshaya Patra Foundation's programme not only provides children with nutritious food but also plays a significant role in their health and mental development. Through this initiative, a positive transformation in the field of education is being made, taking a concrete step towards improving the overall well-being of children.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav inspects the kitchen during a mid-day meal programme organised by Akshaya Patra Foundation in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

IIFM organises two-day International conference

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Bhopal, in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh Minor Forest Produce Federation, inaugurated a two-day international conference on "Empowering Women through Minor Forest Produce" on Thursday, as part of the International Herbal Fair 2024.

The event focused on the critical role of women in sustainable forest-based livelihoods and discussed strategies to enhance their participation and recognition in the non-timber forest product (NTFP) value chain. Distinguished dignitaries present at the inaugural session included Shri Bibhash Kumar Thakur, Managing Director of MP Minor Forest Produce Federation; Shri

The event focused on the critical role of women in sustainable forest-based livelihoods

Ashok Barnwal, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh; and Dr. Advait Edgaonkar from IIFM. The conference brought together experts, policymakers, and practitioners from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Australia, and various Indian states, alongside representatives from NGOs, CSR initiatives, and academia. Discussions centered on empowering women in NTFP-based enterprises by addressing challenges such as limited market access, lack of training, and restricted decision-making

opportunities. The conference highlighted the potential of NTFPs—such as fruits, nuts, medicinal plants, wild honey and resins—in empowering marginalized communities, particularly women, by fostering women-led, sustainable forest enterprises.

Advait Edgaonkar underscored the importance of recognizing and enhancing women's contributions to the NTFP value chain. He also mentioned that IIFM, Bhopal is the Scheme Operating Agency for Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS) "PRAMAAN" which will be helpful in marketing and branding of NTFPs. The conference aimed to foster dialogue, share success stories, and develop actionable strategies to ensure women's roles are supported and valued in this critical sector.

Pathology lab employee nabbed for recording in changing room

Bhopal: Employee of a pathology lab was detained by Arera Hills police after a recording in mobile phone was found hidden on the ceiling of the changing room.

A hidden camera was found in the changing room of Medi Scan, an MRI centre located in Malviya Nagar, Bhopal. On Thursday, the victim woman and her husband who came for an MRI spotted the camera. The woman's husband claims that the mobile phone was hidden in the false ceiling in the changing room where women come to wear gowns before MRI.

When he protested after seeing the camera, the staff misbehaved with him. On receiving information about the ruckus, the Arera police reached the spot. Police have detained an employ-

ee of the lab. Many videos have been found on his mobile. According to Manoj Patwa, TI of Arera Hills police station, the youth living in Jehangirabad had reached the centre with his wife. The wife reached the changing room. While wearing the gown, she looked towards the ceiling. She saw something kept between the false ceiling of POP (plaster of Paris). She informed her husband about it and when the husband checked, he found a mobile phone which was recording video. The police have sealed the changing room. The statements of the employees will be recorded. The woman's husband told that when he checked the mobile, video recording was going on in it, a 27-minute video had already been made. It had footage of many women.

Lokayukta raids house of ex-RTO constable

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Lokayukta sleuths raided the house of former RTO (Regional Transport Office) constable Saurabh Sharma and seized cash Rs 17 lakh, gold and 40 kg of silver and documents of movable and immovable property from Saurabh's house in Arera Colony. DSP Virender Singh said that about 40 kg of silver has also been found in the investigation so far. Saurabh Sharma has been a constable in the Transport Department (RTO). He took voluntary retirement a year ago. Currently, he is involved in the real estate business. A raid has also been conducted at one of his hotels. Information has also been received about action at one of Saurabh's friend's

places. Both have been accused of 'dealing agents' to get posted at transport checkpoints. Saurabh has built an illegal empire worth crores of rupees across the state in just 12 years of service. Saurabh Sharma is currently in Dubai and at his house his mother and domestic help were present. Saurabh Sharma had joined the real estate business even before taking VRS. He was close to many influential people of the state. So, fearing action, he took VRS and became a builder. Lokayukta has found evidence of his properties in many districts of the state including Bhopal. In the action taken so far, the Lokayukta team has found evidence of Saurabh's investment in a hotel and a

school. ADG Lokayukta Jaideep Prasad said that action is being taken at two locations of Saurabh Sharma. At 7 am, two teams were sent to his different locations. A complaint was received against him earlier. Action has been taken after its investigation. Earlier Saurabh got a compassionate appointment, his father was earlier posted in the Transport Department. Saurabh hailed from Gwalior and used to live an ordinary lifestyle but his lifestyle changed within just a few years of service. Complaints about this started being made at the department and other places. Saurabh decided to take VRS. After this he started investing in property with many renowned builders of Bhopal.



Congress workers stage a protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar in the Parliament, in front of Ambedkar's statue at the Board Office in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Cong members demonstrate with taps alleging corruption in Jal Jeevan

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The fourth day of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly's winter session also witnessed uproarious scenes. On Thursday, Congress MLAs reached the Assembly carrying tap fittings, accusing the government of corruption in the Jal Jeevan Mission and raising slogans. The proceedings were adjourned for 10 minutes due to the commotion. When the session resumed, Leader of the Opposition Umang Singhar alleged that no developmental work was being undertaken in Congress constituencies. He announced that Congress MLAs had decided not to accept their salaries and submitted a letter to the Speaker requesting that their salaries be utilized for development projects in their respective areas. Singhar criticized the BJP government, stating that while it had promised to deliver potable water to every household, the

Singhar criticized the BJP government, stating that while it had promised to deliver potable water to every household, the taps installed under the Jal Jeevan Mission were only dispensing air instead of water

taps installed under the Jal Jeevan Mission were only dispensing air instead of water. He accused the government of misappropriating thousands of crores in a 40% commission scandal. Congress MLAs protested with placards bearing slogans such as, "Bring water to homes, end the struggle of women," and "On paper, every home has water, but in reality, who stopped the supply?" Singhar also posted on X, stating that the BJP's Jal Jeevan Mission had turned into a deception with no solid foundation or direction. He alleged that contractors, officials, and ministers were all involved in a 40% commission scheme,

leaving households with taps that had never supplied water. Responding to the Congress' protest, BJP MLA Rameshwar Sharma dismissed the allegations and mocked the Congress, saying they had nothing left to do. He claimed that the Congress was resorting to gimmicks, first protesting with alcohol and now with taps. Sharma added, "We didn't install taps for drinking alcohol." Separately, MLA Narendra Singh Kushwaha raised concerns about power outages in Bhind district, which Minister Tulsi Silawat denied, stating there were no such issues. Dissatisfied, Kushwaha

accused the minister of providing false information. On Thursday, Khurai MLA Bhopendra Singh demanded that the complaint about power cuts in Bhind be taken seriously and suggested suspending the officials responsible instead of shielding them. Congress MLA Vikram Bhuria accused the BJP of facilitating the illegal supply of alcohol from Madhya Pradesh to Gujarat. He claimed that liquor contracts worth ₹250 crore in Jhabua and ₹100 crore in Alirajpur were the highest in the state. Bhuria alleged that contracts worth ₹25 crore in Dindori were awarded because liquor was being smuggled to Gujarat. Responding to these allegations, BJP MLA Rameshwar Sharma stated that liquor contracts were issued in accordance with government rules and open tenders. He suggested that Bhuria should review the rules that were in place during Kamal Nath's tenure.

JAP hosts two-day training for emerging organisations

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A two-day residential training for the emerging organisations of Bhopal and Sehore districts under Jan Abhiyan Parishad commenced at the State Agriculture and Extension Training Institute in the state capital on Thursday.

In his address during the inaugural session, the Executive Director of the Parishad, Dharendra Kumar Pandey, said that the capacity of emerging organisations would be enhanced through this training. The Emerging Organisations Scheme (Navankur Yojana) is an important initiative of the Parishad, through which these organisations have been entrusted with the responsibility of working according to the prescribed criteria. All emerging organisations should carry out significant work for rural development in their respective areas and also focus on topics such as the environment, energy conservation, and organic farming, thereby building

their identity in the region. The main objective of the training is to enhance the capabilities of the emerging organisations by providing them with the necessary skills. The Executive Director also extended his best wishes to the representatives of all the emerging organisations for their success in their work. The training commenced with the lighting of a lamp in front of an image of Bharat Mata. Initially, Varun Acharya, Regional Coordinator, Bhopal, highlighted the objectives of the training. This was followed by a session on the concept of village development, delivered by Regional In-charge Amitabh Srivastava. The programme was conducted by Kokila Chaturvedi, District Coordinator, Bhopal, with a vote of thanks by Parul Upadhyay, District Coordinator, Sehore. The training session was attended by district and block coordinators from Bhopal and Sehore districts, along with representatives from the emerging organisations.

Burglary at house of Crime Branch TI

Bhopal: Within a span of five minutes miscreant escaped with Rs 1 lakh cash, gold chain and ring on Wednesday afternoon from Bhopal Crime Branch TI Ashok Maravi's house at 6 no. stop; burglary was captured in CCTV footage in which face of miscreant surfaced. In the incident a miscreant entered the house at 12.22 pm and stole the goods and left at 12.27 pm. The accused is seen coming and going in the CCTV footage installed outside the house. Habibganj police have started investigating the case. It is suspected that the thief carried out this incident after doing reconnaissance. At the time of the incident Maravi also had a pet dog at home but the miscreant locked it in the store room. The incident was revealed when Maravi came to drop his son home from school. Habibganj police station in-charge Ajay Soni said that Ashok Maravi was in the Crime Branch office at the time of the incident. His wife Kiran is posted in the Police Training and Research Institute and was at her office at PTRI. Their son had gone to school while the house was locked and taking advantage as no one was present in the house, the miscreant escaped with the valuables.

RMNH organises workshop on promoting official language

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Regional Museum of Natural History (RMNH), Bhopal organized "Hindi Workshop" on Thursday to promote the use of Hindi (official) Language in official works. Mahima Soni, Senior Superintendent (Rajbhasha) from Raja Bhoj Airport, Airport Authority of India, Bhopal was the speaker of the workshop. The topic of the workshop was "Policy, Rules of Official Language and Scientificity of Hindi Language". In the beginning of the programme, Head of Office & Scientist-D Dr. Beenish Rafat welcomed the Speaker of the workshop, Ms. Mahima Soni, museum staff and Ms. Harpreet Kaur Kalra, Hindi Officer & Ms. Monika, Multi Tasking Staff from National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi who attended the workshop in online mode. During the workshop, Ms. Mahima Soni informed that the alphabet of Devnagri Script is more scientific than other scripts of the world. She detailed about the article 343 to 351 and part-17 of the constitution which is related

to official language. She also informed about the sections under Official Language Act-1963 and Rules under Official Language Rule-1976. In the continuation, Regional Museum of Natural History (RMNH), Bhopal inaugurated a Temporary Exhibition on the theme "Aquatic Plants of Bhoj Wetland". Chief Guest of the programme, Dr. Sudesh Waghmare, Former Deputy Conservator of Forest, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal inaugurated this exhibition. During the inauguration, Dr. Beenish Rafat, Scientist-D & Head of Office of museum; Manik Lal Gupta, Scientist-C of RMNH; Shri Mohd Khaliq from Bhopal Birds Conservation Society; students from various school, teachers & Staff members of museum were present during the inauguration of this exhibition. Brief information along with photographs of 11 submerged plants, 18 floating plants, 20 emergent plants, 58 Semi-aquatic plants, Wetlands and Reason for Declaration of Bhoj Wetland as Ramsar Site are displayed in this exhibition.



Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar with Congress party MLAs stage a protest against the state government's alleged failure and corruption in the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme, during the winter session of the MP State Assembly in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

PhD students of AIIMS excel at APPICON 2024

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

AIIMS Bhopal has once again demonstrated its commitment to excellence in medical research and innovation. PhD students from the institution showcased pioneering research at APPICON 2024, (Association of Physiologists and Pharmacologists of India) held in

Chennai. One of the highlights of the conference was the presentation by Dr. Rahul Gour, whose research on Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) showcased a novel, non-invasive therapeutic approach for managing Chronic Low Back Pain (CLBP). Guided by Dr. Santosh Wakode, Dr. Varun Malhotra, and Dr. Sofia Mudda, this case

study demonstrated significant pain relief, improved heart rate variability, and enhanced cognitive performance in CLBP patients. The research was further bolstered by the establishment of an advanced rTMS lab under the mentorship of Dr. Wakode, reflecting the institution's commitment to cutting-edge therapeutic technologies.

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Patriotism is inherent in student power: Chief Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that patriotism is inherent in student power. Students should advance in their lives by acquiring practical knowledge alongside their education and proceed thoughtfully along the path of their duty. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said this on Thursday at the inauguration of the 57th State Convention of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad Madhya Bharat organised at the local Krantiveer Taty Tope Nagar Guna. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that it has been a great pleasure to attend today's programme. Student life plays a crucial role in shaping one's future. He encouraged students to acquire practical

knowledge in addition to their academic studies. Everyone should take on the responsibility of guiding society towards a new direction grounded in nationalist ideals. Chief Minister Yadav said that considering Lord Krishna as an ideal, we should move forward on the path shown by him and achieve our goals. The foundation of democracy in India has been strengthened by the power of students. Youths of 18 years have got the right to vote. Commercialization of the education system has been eliminated. Along with this, efforts are underway to identify necessary improvements in education. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the Prime Minister of the country, Narendra Modi, has made commendable efforts to pre-



serve our ancient ideals and maintain the culture. He has established the importance of education in the country. Along with this, necessary steps have been taken regarding new education policy and to preserve the ancient culture. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the gift of Taty Tope University to Guna district will pave the way for enhanced educational oppor-

tunities for students, making their journey towards learning more accessible. He said that 55 excellence colleges have been started in the state. Along with this, studies of agriculture faculty have been started. He said that the government is committed to open employment-providing courses in colleges. 30 medical colleges were opened in the state within 15 years. Seats for 5 thousand students were kept reserved in these colleges. In the coming time, the government is working on a plan to provide benefits to 10 thousand youth in 52 medical colleges. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the government is working to provide irrigation on every inch of land in the state. Water will be made available for irrigation through Parvati-

Kalisindh-Chambal and Ken-Betwa river linking project. Prime Minister Modi will soon perform the Bhoomi Pujan of these projects. To provide employment to the youth, ongoing discussions are being held with industrialists through the organization of industries conferences at the divisional level. The government will provide all possible help for the establishment of industries. He said that the government will establish a dialogue with the youth and work to take the state forward on the path of development. Ashish Chauhan, Dharmendra Rajput, Sandeep Vaishnav, Monika Sharma, Rajesh Agarwal, Yashvardhan Bhargava, Varun Singh, Shivraj Chandel were present in the programme.



Mahila Congress workers stage a protest against the Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar in the Parliament, at PCC headquarters in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo



A scene from the play 'Arandya Rudani' staged at Shaheed Bhawan in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Collector for development of Bhopal as Unique City by 2047

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A host of district officials met under the chairmanship of Collector Kaushalendra Vikram Singh to discuss a vision document to guide development in the state capital on Thursday. The meeting—Vision Development 2047 Bhopal—took place at the Bhouri campus of the prestigious School of Planning and Architecture (SPA). SPA Director Kailasa Rao M, ADM Prakash Nayak, SPA Associate Professor Mayank Dubey, and Brijesh Sharma from the PWD, Municipal Corporation, and Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board officials attended the meeting. During the meeting, Collector Singh emphasized the need for a

cohesive and effective long-term plan for Bhopal's development up to 2047. Advocating the formation of a joint team comprising the district administration, SPA, and other civic agencies, Collector Singh said that a comprehensive plan should be prepared to guide Bhopal's emergence as a unique city on the national map by 2047. He further directed that the development plan should prioritize structured infrastructure, a pollution-free city, improved transport systems, sustainable development, and environmental protection. The Collector also said a comprehensive report should be prepared in consultation with the relevant agencies to guide the all-around development of the city.

Swiggy launches Bolt service in Bhopal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Swiggy Ltd on Thursday announced the expansion of its 10-minute food delivery service Bolt to the city of Bhopal. Bolt is redefining delivery of fresh and quick-to-prepare food from popular restaurants and QSRs in just 10 minutes. Swiggy has expanded Bolt to 400+ cities across the country and is delivering over 10 lakh items from more than 40,000 participating restaurants. Customers in Bhopal will have the option to choose from 9.8k dishes from 13 cuisines across 568 restaurants in the city. Bolt features a selection of highly popular cuisine types like burgers, snacks, bakery items, beverages, sweets, ice creams, breakfast items, and biryani that require minimum preparation time or are ready to pack. Customers can choose from a mix of well-known national brands like KFC, Subway, Faasos, Curefoods and Burger King, along with regional favourites like Indian Coffee House, Rolls Mania - Rolls, Wraps & More.

BMC anti-encroachment drive clears Raisen road

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Persisting with the ongoing anti-encroachment campaign, Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) workers confiscated goods worth 20 truckloads, freeing pavements, roads, and corridors from the clutches of squatters on Thursday. BMC workers removed the encroachers on Raisen Road — from Ratnagiri to Anand Nagar, Anand Nagar to Patel Nagar, Patel Nagar to Kokta Bypass, and areas around Oriental College. During the operation, 20 truckloads of various items were seized, including carts, kiosks, iron sheets, tables, and chairs. The anti-encroachment team also demolished 40 sheds on Patel Nagar and Kokta

Bypass roads using JCB machines. Municipal officials advised the encroachers to refrain from staking a claim to public spaces in the future. The team demolished 40 sheds around the Patel Nagar and Kokta Bypass junctions using JCB machines and workers and seized 6 truckloads of various items. At Anand Nagar to Ratnagiri Chauraha, encroachments on the roads and footpaths were removed, and 6 truckloads of goods were seized. Before the operation, the anti-encroachment team requested encroachers to voluntarily remove the encroachments through public announcements and personal contact. They also advised the encroachers not to encroach again and warned of strict action if the encroachments returned.

CP meets officials on traffic management

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Police Commissioner Hari Narayanachari Mishra on Thursday convened traffic officials and urged them to identify hotspots and formulate strategies for better flow of vehicular traffic in the state capital. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Sanjay Singh, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic), Assistant Commissioners, Inspectors, and Sub-Inspectors. During the meeting, Commissioner Mishra underlined the importance of maintaining order on public roads, at intersections, and at duty points. He noted that the public perception of the police force is often shaped by the performance of traffic personnel, as they are the first point of contact for citizens navigating the city.

WCR swoops on ticketless travelers, recovers over Rs 8.6L in penalties

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In a concerted checking campaign spanning nine railway stations in the division, West Central Railway officials on Thursday caught 1,549 passengers traveling without valid tickets and recovered nearly Rs 8.67 lakh in penalties. The campaign, conducted at Bhopal, Rani Kamalapati, Sant Hirdaram Nagar, Guna, Bina, Itarsi, Harda, Vidisha, and Narmadapuram stations, resulted in the discovery of 1,549 passengers traveling without or with irregular tickets, leading to a recovery of Rs 866,985. Launched under the guidance of Divisional Railway Manager Debashish Tripathi and supervised by Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Saurabh Kataria, the com-

prehensive checking campaign started at 6 AM and continued until 2 PM. WCR states that checking campaigns are crucial for providing better services to legitimate passengers and enhancing railway revenues. Ten supervisors and 104 ticket-checking staff conducted the checks by sealing all exits at these railway stations to prevent passengers from leaving without proper ticket verification. Passengers on a total of 153 trains were checked. At Bhopal Station, 21 trains were checked, resulting in 203 passengers being caught without tickets, leading to a fine collection of Rs 1,37,470, while 161 passengers with irregular tickets paid fines totaling Rs 81,150, contributing to a total revenue of Rs 2,18,620.

Be mindful of drains, Bhopal Mayor tells PWD at Hamidia road

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Calling for greater coordination between various agencies entrusted with the development of the state capital, Mayor Malti Rai, on Thursday, told the Public Works Department (PWD) to ensure that road rebuilding does not obstruct drainage systems. Conducting an inspection of Hamidia Road, the Mayor told PWD officials to ensure the uninterrupted flow of water in the drains while also ensuring the timely completion of the project. Rai's observations aim to alleviate concerns about the elevated cement concrete road in the busy area, which could result in the disarray of the

drainage system, leading to massive waterlogging in low-lying areas during the monsoons. Rai inspected the drains in the areas of Sangam Talkies, Alpana Tiraha, and Bhopal Talks on Hamidia Road, which are being constructed by the Public Works Department. She told officials from the PWD, Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC), and the Metro Rail Corporation to work with greater coordination to ensure that projects do not interfere with or cause bottlenecks in the drains in the area. She drew attention to the plight of the citizens and sought a speedy completion of the road-building activity.

Medi-Caps varsity gears up for Mathematics Week

Indore: Medi-Caps University, Indore, is set to host the much-anticipated National Mathematics Week 2024 from December 23 to December 27 to celebrate the timeless significance of mathematics in everyday life. This annual event, sponsored by the Madhya Pradesh Council of Science and Technology (MPCST), Bhopal, and the National Council of Institutes of Science and Technology (NCTC), New Delhi, aims to inspire students to embrace the wonders of mathematics. This year's program features a dynamic lineup of activities designed to engage and educate participants. On December 23, 26, and 27, expert talks will delve into various branches of mathematics, delivered by eminent scholars.

Panel to soon discuss new drone policy of Madhya Pradesh govt

Bhopal: A panel of experts will soon meet in the state capital to discuss the new drone policy of the Madhya Pradesh government. A drone-focused information portal will also be launched on the occasion. The workshop, organised by the Madhya Pradesh State Electronics Development Corporation Limited, Department of Science and Technology will feature discussions on drone technology with representatives from DGCA (Directorate General of Civil Aviation), Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, Survey of India, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Indra Gandhi National Flight Academy, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, IIT Indore, police, startups, Drone Federation of India, NABARD, and heads of all Madhya Pradesh government departments.

resolved to move forward with this vision," he said. Sources say that Chief Secretary Jain will deliver a special address at the workshop. The workshop, organised by the Madhya Pradesh State Electronics Development Corporation Limited, Department of Science and Technology will feature discussions on drone technology with representatives from DGCA (Directorate General of Civil Aviation), Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, Survey of India, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Indra Gandhi National Flight Academy, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, IIT Indore, police, startups, Drone Federation of India, NABARD, and heads of all Madhya Pradesh government departments.

POS agent arrested from Surat on fraud charges

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Bhopal cyber crime branch has arrested a Point of Sale (POS) agent from Surat (Gujarat) who used to sell mobile SIMs to fraudsters who admitted selling about 250 mobile SIMs to cyber criminals. 10 SIM cards have also been seized from the accused. With this arrest the tally of accused reached 6 as the Crime Branch has already arrested 5 other accused. Additional DCP Shaileendra Singh Chauhan said that an elderly woman from Bhopal had complained that unknown peo-

ple called her grandson and defrauded him of Rs 9 lakh in the name of giving shares of MRTEE Marketing Private Limited Company. Police have registered a case against unknown fraudsters under various sections of fraud and IT Act. In this case, the Crime Branch has arrested POS agent Ashutosh Kumar (22) resident of Sai Residency, Karsanpada Surat (Gujarat) who hails from Durgapur Kushwaha Tola Bihar and used to sell mobile SIM cards to the fraudsters. Police said that the POS agent used to activate SIM cards in the name of customers in the name

of giving new mobile SIM cards or porting. He used to tell the customers that the SIM is not getting activated due to technical problems. After that, he used to deliver the already activated SIM card to the cyber criminals and get a hefty commission. Earlier in the case the cyber crime branch had arrested the accused Ramnath Lodhi resident of Shivpuri, Dhaniram Jatav alias Shaileendra alias Mintu resident of Shivpuri, Bambhaniya Shanti resident of Surat, Parmar Kamlesh Bhai resident of Surat and Prajapati Ashwin Bhai resident of Surat Gujarat.

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
Letter No. Jhansi/S/106/Press Release Date : 18.12.2024

Public Notice

Public notice related to third line and electrification of Antari (Excl.) - Sandalpur-Sitholi A Cabin (Incl.) section of Jhansi Division

It is notified for the information of general public that in connection with the commissioning of third line and electrification by 25000 Volt of Antari-gwalior section. Regular train operation will be start in Antari-Sandalpur section from 20.12.2024 and Sooner in rest of section. All the residents of the neighborhood are requested to stay away from OHE and electric pole, not to sit near the railway line or cross unauthorisedly and also keep their cattle away from the railway line. Doing so is a punishable offence under the Railways Act and may be punishable with fine and imprisonment or both.

Senior Divisional Safety Officer
North Central Railway, Jhansi
2151/24 (C)

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HDFC BANK Registered Office: HDFC Bank House, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai - 400 013 and having one of its office as Retail Portfolio Management at HDFC Bank Ltd, 1st Floor, I-Think Techno Campus, Kanjurmarg (East), Mumbai - 400042.

SALE INTIMATION AND PUBLIC NOTICE FOR SALE OF SECURITIES PLEDGED TO HDFC BANK LTD.

The below mentioned Borrowers of HDFC Bank Ltd. (the "Bank") are hereby notified regarding the sale of securities pledged to the Bank, for availing credit facilities in the nature of Loan/Overdraft Against Securities.

Due to persistent default by the Borrowers in making repayment of the outstanding dues as per agreed loan terms, the below loan accounts are in delinquent status. The Bank has issued multiple notices to these Borrowers, including the final sale notice on the below-mentioned date whereby, Bank had invoked the pledge and provided 7 days' time to the Borrower to repay the entire outstanding dues in the below accounts, failing which, Bank would be at liberty to sell the pledged securities without issuing further notice in this regard. The Borrowers have neglected and failed to make due repayments, therefore, Bank in exercise of its rights under the loan agreement as a pledgee has decided to sell / dispose off the Securities on or after **26th December 2024** for recovering the dues owed by the Borrowers to the Bank. The Borrowers are, also, notified that, if at any time, the value of the pledged securities falls further due to volatility in the stock market to create further deficiency in the margin requirement then Bank shall at its discretion sell the pledged security within one (1) calendar day, without any further notice in this regard. The Borrower(s) shall remain liable to the Bank for repayment of any remaining outstanding amount, post adjustment of the proceeds from sale of pledged securities.

Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 17 th Dec 2024 (In Indian Rupees)	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXX0121	PRABHUDAYAL BIYANI	3,90,478.25	18-Dec-24
2	XXXX7456	KRISHNA VERMA	77,588.49	18-Dec-24
3	XXXX7921	RAM SWAROOP CHOUHAN	2,09,697.82	18-Dec-24
4	XXXX0513	SUSHIL KUMAR CHOUKSEY	30,337.14	18-Dec-24
5	XXXX7311	BABULAL CHOYAL	3,13,276.74	18-Dec-24
6	XXXX7807	PRADEEP KUMAR GAUTAM	6,67,649.85	18-Dec-24
7	XXXX0104	INDRA TRIVEDI	77,126.23	18-Dec-24
8	XXXX5490	LAXMI PRASAD	2,28,629.08	18-Dec-24
9	XXXX1897	REETA PANTHI	3,01,991.00	18-Dec-24
10	XXXX8160	NAMRATA PATEL	1,00,549.20	18-Dec-24
11	XXXX1550	MOHAMMAD TARIQ PATHAN	18,434.82	18-Dec-24
12	XXXX7850	PRAVIN PRATAP SINGH	5,10,825.82	18-Dec-24
13	XXXX8118	SUBHA SHARMA	2,37,739.20	18-Dec-24
14	XXXX8670	DEEPAKSHI SHARMA	4,79,000.00	18-Dec-24
15	XXXX7512	PARIMAL CHATURVEDI	4,91,880.92	25-Nov-24
16	XXXX1951	DEVAJEET SAIKIA	2,05,815.00	18-Dec-24
17	XXXX1028	RAJENDRA SINGH	2,78,321.00	18-Dec-24
18	XXXX7917	KRATIKA KASLIWAL	1,016.96	18-Dec-24
19	XXXX1635	SHAILENDRA PARMAR	10,06,934.32	18-Dec-24
20	XXXX9497	SAPNA BHAIYA	7,062.00	18-Dec-24
21	XXXX1782	HIMANSHU KHANDEKAR	5,07,506.82	18-Dec-24
22	XXXX0431	PRATIK SONI	2,94,466.72	18-Dec-24
23	XXXX5902	ARUSHI JAIN	4,78,060.82	18-Dec-24
24	XXXX5675	SHRAADDHA NAGPURKAR	9,07,704.52	18-Dec-24
25	XXXX7841	SHRIKANT CHOUDHARY	3,61,672.82	18-Dec-24
26	XXXX4926	DEVNARAYAN GUPTA	3,85,190.42	18-Dec-24

Date : 20.12.2024
Place : MADHYA PRADESH
Sd/-
HDFC BANK LTD.

Office of the Executive Engineer P.W.D. (Maintenance) Division No. 2 Bhopal

Tender Notice

NIT 20 of 2024-25 Bhopal, Date 16/12/2024

Online Tender for mentioned below are being invited. The tender have been uploaded on the e-Procurement system of Public Works Department on the Portal www.mptenders.gov.in Tender details are as below:-

S. No.	Tender No.	Name of work	Call No.	Cost of Project (PAC) (Rs. In lakh)
1	2	3	4	5
1	2024_PWDRB_388506_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. DXA-1 to DXE-5 Bunglow at Char imli Section No. 01 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
2	2024_PWDRB_388510_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. D-11/1 to D-11/21 and EF, EG, EH, EK Type at Char imli Section No. 01 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
3	2024_PWDRB_388512_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. E-9/1 to E-9/9 and E-11/1 to E-11/12 at Char imli Section No. 01 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
4	2024_PWDRB_388513_1	White Washing, Colour Washing, Distemping and Painting Works in DX and DN Type Bunglow Inner and Outer side at Char Emli Section No. 01 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	25.00
5	2024_PWDRB_388519_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. D-2/1 to D-2/23 Bunglow at Char imli Section No. 02 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
6	2024_PWDRB_388523_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. D-3/1 to D-3/8, D-3/17 to D-3/23 and E-8/27 to E-8/31 at Char imli Section No. 02 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
7	2024_PWDRB_388527_1	White Washing, Colour Washing, Distemping and Painting Works in B Type Bunglow Inner and Outer side at Char Emli Section No.02 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	25.00
8	2024_PWDRB_388532_1	White Washing, Colour Washing, Distemping and Painting Works in D and E Type Bunglow Inner and Outer side at Char Emli Section No.02 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	25.00
9	2024_PWDRB_388535_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. B-19 to B-23 at Char imli Section No. 03 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
10	2024_PWDRB_388539_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. D-16 to D-30 and D-3/24 at Char imli Section No. 03 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
11	2024_PWDRB_388542_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. EN-2/1 to EN-2/30 at Char imli Section No. 03 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
12	2024_PWDRB_388546_1	White Washing, Colour Washing, Distemping and Painting Works in D Type Bunglow Inner and Outer side at Char Emli Section No.03 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	25.00
13	2024_PWDRB_388549_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. E-7/9 to E-7/28, E-6/1 to E-6/5 and E-6/5A to E-6/5C at Char imli Section No. 04 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
14	2024_PWDRB_388552_1	Various S/R, A/R, Anurakshan Works in Bunglow No. F-8/1 to F-8/48 at Char imli Section No. 04 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	50.00
15	2024_PWDRB_388554_1	White Washing, Colour Washing, Distemping and Painting Works in E Type Bunglow Inner and Outer side at Char Emli Section No.04 Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	25.00
16	2024_PWDRB_388560_1	Constn. Drain, Retaining Wall etc at Char Imli Road Section Under P.W.D. Survey Sub Division Bhopal	First	38.00
17	2024_PWDRB_388783_1	B.T. Renewal Work on Barkheda Pathani to Laharpur Bagroda Road Length 6.610 k.m., Semri Khurd Approach Road Length 1.20 k.m., Bikhniya to Maa Kankali Road Length 4.40 Km. and Barkheda Pathani -Laharpur -Bagroda k.m. 7/5 to 10/6 Road Length 3.10 k.m.	First	391.90

The document can only be purchased online from the above website after making online payment. The last date & time for Purchase and Submission of document on line is 08/01/2025 up to 17:30 PM. Detailed NIT and other details can be viewed on the above mentioned portal. Amendments to NIT, if any, would be published on website only, and not in news paper.

Executive Engineer
PWD (Maint.) Division No. 2 Bhopal

G-20474/24

SC questions WB on creating excess posts in teachers recruitment scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday questioned the West Bengal Government why it had created supernumerary posts of teachers and non-teaching staffs instead of weeding out persons who were allegedly appointed illegally. "Why did you create supernumerary posts? What was the purpose of creating that?" a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar asked the West Bengal counsel. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the West Bengal Government, informed the bench about a report by committee appointed for a thorough investigation into the selection process. The bench observed the committee's report and noted some irregularities. Dwivedi argued the committee found some irregularities but not as extensive as the CBI's report. "So, they found there were irregularities committed. So, in order to deal with that situation, instead of weeding out the persons who have been appointed illegally, you say,

okay create supernumerary posts?" asked the bench. "Mr Dwivedi, tell me one thing, if you find the irregularity committed, will you not throw them out first?" the CJI asked further. Dwivedi said the order had specifically mentioned it was for the appointment from the wait-listed candidates. "Correct. The reason is this, that you don't want to throw out the tainted candidates," the CJI said. The top court was hearing arguments on a batch of pleas challenging the Calcutta High Court's April 22 decision invalidating the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in state-run and state-aided schools of West Bengal. On May 7, the apex court stayed the high court's order over the appointments made by the state's School Service Commission (SSC). The top court, however, permitted the CBI to continue with its probe in the matter. In its May 7 order, the apex court noted that on May 19, 2022, the state government issued an order creating 6,861 supernumerary posts of teachers and non-teaching staff for



absorbing the wait-listed candidates. The top court further noted it was directed that appointment letters to such wait-listed candidates should be issued in terms of the recommendation of the SSC subject to the outcome of the pending litigation before the high court. During the hearing on Thursday, the bench asked, "Is the state of West Bengal supporting the proposition that it is not possible to segregate the tainted from the untainted?" Dwivedi however said the state was supporting the segregation. He argued the division bench of the high court "went too far ahead" and passed a "blanket

Supreme Court asked the CBI's counsel whether the probe agency was able to ascertain the date on which the OMR data was captured. "One thing is very strange that people who are not even recommended and who have not qualified... They were issued letters," the bench observed, "it was a very serious thing". During the day-long hearing, the bench heard submissions from senior advocates Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Shyam Divan, Jaideep Gupta, Sanjay Hegde and others. The hearing would continue in January, 2025. On May 7, the apex court had said the CBI's investigation, which was ordered by the High Court, would continue but no coercive steps would be taken. The top court, however, had made it clear that the teachers and non-teaching staff of the state, whose appointments were cancelled by the high court, will have to refund the salaries and other emoluments if their recruitment was found illegal. Over 23 lakh candidates had appeared for the state level selection test-2016 for 24,640 vacant posts. A total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued against 24,640 vacancies.

CBSE busts 29 dummy schools enrolling non-attending students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducted a series of surprise inspections at 29 schools in Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Bihar, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh to check enrolment of 'dummy' students, officials said on Thursday. According to CBSE Secretary Himanshu Gupta, a total of 29 teams, comprising a CBSE officer and a principal from an affiliated school, conducted the inspections. "Majority of the inspected schools were found to have violated the Board's Affiliation Bye-Laws by enrolling stu-

dents beyond their actual attendance records, effectively creating 'non-attending' enrolments. Additionally, schools were found to be flouting infrastructural norms of the board," Gupta said. "CBSE has taken these violations seriously and is in the process of issuing show-cause notices to the schools found in breach of regulations. The Board is also considering legal action against the defaulting institutions," he added. The inspections were conducted on Wednesday and Thursday. Eighteen of the violating schools are in the national capital, while there are three in Varanasi, two each in Bengaluru, Patna, Ahmedabad,

Bilaspur, and Chhattisgarh. Scores of students preparing for engineering and medical entrance exams prefer to take admission to dummy schools so that they can focus solely on their preparations for the competitive exams. They do not attend classes and straight-away appear in the board examinations. Aspirants also choose dummy schools keeping in mind the quota in medical and engineering institutes available for the students from certain states. For example, the candidates who have completed classes 11 and 12 in Delhi are considered for admission to the medical colleges of the national capital under the Delhi State Quota.



Kejriwal Questions Nitish, Naidu on Amit Shah's Ambedkar Remarks

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday wrote to key allies of the BJP, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, questioning their stance on home minister Amit Shah's recent remarks about architect of Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar. In a post on X in Hindi, Kejriwal said, "The people of the country want to ask Honorable Nitish Ji and Chandrababu Naidu Ji - "Do you support the insult of

Baba Saheb done by Amit Shah Ji?" In his letter to Naidu and Kumar, Kejriwal voiced his concern over Shah's statement in Parliament over Ambedkar. "Recently in Parliament, a statement made by the home minister of the country, Amit Shah Ji, regarding Babasaheb has left the entire nation stunned," he wrote. AAP supremo referred to Shah's remark, which claimed that "chanting Ambedkar-Ambedkar has become a fashion these days," as deeply disrespectful. He said that it is "not only disrespectful but also reveals the BJP's perspective towards Babasaheb and our Constitution."

He further added, "Babasaheb Ambedkar was honoured with a 'Doctor of Laws' degree by Columbia University, he authored the Indian Constitution, and he championed equal rights for the most marginalised sections of society—how did the BJP have the audacity to make such a comment about him?" "This has hurt the sentiments of millions of people across the country. Instead of apologising for his statement, Amit Shah Ji justified it. The Prime Minister publicly supported Amit Shah Ji's remark, which added insult to injury," former Delhi CM said in his letter.

MHA reimposed Protected Area Permit in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur in view of security concerns arising out of influx from neighbouring countries, a state government statement said. The statement issued late on Wednesday night said, "With this reimposition, the movement of foreigners visiting Manipur will be closely monitored, and they are required to obtain the necessary Protected Area Permit (PAP) in accordance with the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958. It said the Centre has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. The statement also said that the state government has taken notice of the warning issued by an organisation which asked Chief Minister N Biren Singh not to travel to Senapati district to attend a cultural programme by passing through Kangpokpi district by road. It stated "Upon investigation, it has been found that no such organization (Kuki Zo Council) exists in Manipur. The origin and authenticity of this group are highly questionable." The statement said that police are actively looking into this matter and an FIR will be lodged to ascertain the true nature and intent behind such misleading activities. The government also advised the people "to exercise caution and not to pay heed to statements or claims from organisations of dubious origins, which have been surfacing recently with the apparent intention of creating confusion and unrest."

Impeachment notice against Dhankhar rejected by RS deputy chair Harivansh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh on Thursday dismissed the impeachment notice given by the Opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar while ruling it as an act of impropriety, being severely flawed and drawn in haste to mar his reputation. In his ruling, which was tabled in the House by Rajya Sabha secretary general P C Mody, the deputy chairman said the impeachment notice is part of a design to denigrate the nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President, the sources said. Deputy chairman Harivansh was entrusted to deal with the notice after Chairman Dhankhar recused himself from it. At least 60 opposition members had signed the notice for removal of Dhankhar from his post on December 10, alleging that they did not have trust in him and that he was "biased". The notice was moved by the opposition members under Article 67(b) of the Constitution as intention of a no-confidence motion against the Vice President of India. The deputy chairman ruled that the gravity of this "personally targeted" notice which is bereft of facts and aimed at securing publicity. He also held that the notice was a "misadventure" in "deliberate trivialising and demeaning" of the high constitutional office of

the Vice President of the largest democracy. Worryingly for the prestige of Parliament and its members, the notice is replete with assertions only to malign the incumbent Vice President, the deputy chairman ruled, the sources added. The deputy chairman in his ruling said the notice invoked Article 67(b) peremptorily mandates at least 14 days' prior notice for any resolution contemplating the Vice President's removal. Thus the December 10, 2024 notice of intention could permit such a resolution only after December 24, 2024, he noted, adding that the current 266th session of the Council of States, as notified on November 6, 2024, commenced on November 25 and is scheduled to conclude on December 20, 2024, as known to all signatories. In full knowledge of the situation that the resolution cannot be brought during this session, this was initiated only to set a narrative against second highest constitutional office and the Vice President, the deputy chairman said in his ruling. Harivansh also said the notice's "lack of bona fides", and subsequent events unfolding revealed "it being a calculated unwholesome attempt to tarnish publicity; run down the constitutional institution; insinuate the personal image of the incumbent Vice President— notably, the first from the agricultural community to hold this office in the history of inde-

pendent India". Sources said the deputy chairman has also ruled that the prejudicial intent manifested through orchestration of a coordinated media campaign, including a televised press conference initiated by the LoP and Chief whip of the Indian National Congress, main opposition party, on December 12, 2024. They added that the impeachment notice was "an attempt to set afloat a narrative as if the authority was sitting over the notice of intention and thereby not discharging expectedly". The deputy chairman ruled that constitutionally after the intention of the notice to bring a resolution seeking removal of Vice President has been initiated, those taking such step had to move the resolution after 14 days, with no step called for from any quarter. Sources said Harivansh also ruled that this coupled with the Leader of Opposition's subsequent 10-point social media input on December 12, 2024, apart from being distanced from institutional decorum, "forces a conclusion to be part of a design to denigrate nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President". He also cited past precedent when on September 21, 2020, then then-Chairman Venkaiah Naidu rejected a similar removal notice against the Deputy Chairman, citing procedural impropriety under a provision pari materia to Article 67(b).

Plate cutting ceremony for new ICG vessels held in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Plate Cutting Ceremony for the first of the 14 Fast Patrol Vessels (FPV) and first of the six Next-Gen Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPV) being constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) took place in Mumbai on Thursday, defence ministry said here. Giving details, officials said MDL was awarded a Rs 2,684 crore contract under the 'Buy (Indian-IDDMM)' category to build these vessels which will feature advanced technologies like drones for surveillance, AI for decision-making, an Integrated Bridge System for maneuverability, and an Integrated Machinery Control System for efficient operations. These state-of-the-art vessels are being indigenously designed, developed and constructed and will be delivered over the next few years, reinforcing the Government's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and enhancing the nation's defence production capabilities.

Omar Abdullah meets Amit Shah, discusses restoration of Statehood, anti-terrorism efforts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah here and discussed various key issues, including an early restoration of statehood and involving the elected government in the fight against terrorism. Meeting Shah for the second time after taking over as the chief minister of the Union territory on October 16, Abdullah said the talks took place in a "cordial manner". "We hope to always work in a better environment so that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are benefited from this," he added. After the meeting that lasted 30 minutes, the chief minister told reporters that he briefed the Union home minister about the situation in the Union territory and the experience of his government in the last two months. "Yes, I raised the issue of early restoration of statehood with the home minister," Abdullah said, adding that "we hope that Jammu and Kashmir gets its statehood restored soon". On whether the talks included the militancy situation in the Union territory, he said secu-



J&K CM Omar Abdullah arrives to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah. PTI

urity and law and order are the responsibility of the lieutenant governor. "I have always said and I told the home minister that 'you cannot fight militancy and terrorism in a vacuum, you will have to take the public of Jammu and Kashmir in confidence...They will also have to be brought into this battle, and for that, you will have to take into confidence their elected representatives and their elected government,'" Abdullah said. The chief minister said the talks did not include the framing of business rules for the division of powers between the elected government and the lieutenant

Nadda drags ruckus over Ambedkar in Lok Sabha after Opposition corners Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday launched a fresh attack on the Congress over its treatment of Dr BR Ambedkar as the ruling party's president JP Nadda asked the opposition party to "stop lying". Nadda reiterated his party's accusations against the Congress for insulting and ignoring Ambedkar and his legacy, and cited the work undertaken by the Narendra Modi government to honour his legacy. His social media posts came amid the Opposition's attack on home minister Amit Shah for allegedly insulting Ambedkar during his Rajya Sabha speech. He told the Congress and its "rotten ecosystem" that they lost Lok Sabha polls for a third consecutive time in June and performed badly in a number of assembly polls. "In November, you lost badly in Maharashtra. At least now stop lying. Because your lies will not go unchecked. The truth will always win. Jai Bhim," he

said. Shah has in turn accused the Congress of distorting his remarks and has received strong support from the ruling party, including Prime Minister Modi. Nadda claimed the Congress and its rotten ecosystem have been exposed since Wednesday by all those who believe in truth, democracy and social justice. He said, "So, I thought of sharing some facts to illustrate the deep Congress hate towards Dr Ambedkar. Pandit Nehru hated Dr Ambedkar. Yes, it was unfiltered hate. That is why Pandit Nehru got Dr. Ambedkar defeated twice." Nehru, he alleged, was proudly writing to people overseas, expressing joy that Ambedkar was no longer in the Cabinet. Referring to the house in Alipur Road in the national capital where he breathed his last, Nadda said it should have been converted into a grand memorial that would inspire people long back. But "Ambedkar-hating Congress" did nothing and it was the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government which

developed it into an "iconic place". The "self-proclaimed custodians" of social justice in the Congress made empty promises of making a grand memorial at "Chaitiya Bhoomi", where he was cremated, in Mumbai, but it was the Modi government which ensured in 2015 that the land transfer was done. Modi prayed there twice in recent years, Nadda added. The BJP president also shared a post, now deleted, allegedly of Congress leader Sam Pitroda in which he had rated Nehru's contribution to the Constitution bigger than Ambedkar. Nadda said, "The most loyal courtier of the Dynasty spelt out what the Congress really thinks of Dr. Ambedkar - ?that he had no role in the making of our Constitution. Some screenshots indeed speak a thousand words." The post can be deleted but their real feelings will never go, he added. He also highlighted the Modi government's development of the Ambedkar International Centre against the Congress' alleged neglect to make his point.

India reiterates concerns over violence against minorities in Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it is concerned over incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh and asserted that the primary responsibility to protect their life and liberty rests with the interim government in Dhaka. These remarks by Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in Rajya Sabha came days after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri travelled to Dhaka and conveyed New Delhi's concerns on the matter to the top political brass of Bangladesh's interim government. India continues to monitor the situation related to the minorities in Bangladesh closely, he said, adding, the government in that country has reportedly arrested 70 people and filed 88 cases in connection with violence involving minorities. "India's concerns regarding the need to ensure safety and protection of Hindus and all other minority communities in Bangladesh have been conveyed and reiterated to the authorities of the Interim gov-

ernment of Bangladesh on various occasions, including at the highest level," Singh said. The minister made the remarks responding to separate questions on the situation in Bangladesh. "The high commission of India in Dhaka also continues to be in regular touch with the authorities of Bangladesh with regard to the welfare of minorities," he said. "The primary responsibility for the protection of life and liberty of all citizens of Bangladesh, including minorities, rests with the government of Bangladesh," he added. Singh also cited instances of attacks on Hindus and other minorities, and at their homes, businesses, and temples across Bangladesh. "Reports of attacks on temples and puja mandaps also came to light during the recent Durga Puja festival in Bangladesh," he said. "The government had expressed its serious concerns regarding the attack on a Puja mandap in Tantibazar, Dhaka and theft at

the Jeshoreshwari Kali temple at Satkhira during Durga Puja," Singh said. Following these attacks, the Bangladesh government issued instructions for providing special security, including deployment of army and Border Guards, to ensure peaceful celebrations of Durga Puja, he said. The minister said Bangladesh is expected to take all necessary measures to ensure safety and welfare of Hindus and other minorities. "The same has also been reiterated during the visit of the foreign secretary to Bangladesh on December 9," Singh said. Ties between India and Bangladesh came under strain after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina took shelter in India. The relations deteriorated further in recent weeks over attacks on the Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

Mahayuti pays tributes to Hegdewar amidst internal disquiet over RSS legacy



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde during a group photo session in Nagpur on Thursday.

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

BJP leader Chitra Wagh on Thursday said there should not be any objection if Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar visits the RSS founder's memorial as the Sangh had contributed to the victory of all Mahayuti allies. The Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP, secured a landslide victory in the Maharashtra assembly elections last month by securing 230 of the 288 seats. On Thursday, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM Shinde, several other BJP and Shiv Sena leaders as well as some NCP legislators visited the memorial of RSS founder Dr K B Hegdewar at Reshimbagh in Nagpur during the legislature session underway in the city. After visiting the memorial, Shinde said no one can ignore the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) contribution to nation-building and that the ideologies of the Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena are same. Ajit Pawar did not visit the memorial, though two legislators of his party went there. Speaking to reporters during her visit to Hegdewar's memorial, BJP MLC Chitra Wagh said there should not be any problem with NCP leaders, including Ajit Pawar, visiting Reshimbagh. "They (RSS) indeed have played a crucial role. Nobody can deny the contribution of the RSS in winning so many seats. The RSS not only helped the BJP candidates to win but even worked in support of its allies during the assembly polls," she said. Wagh also said it was important to embrace positive ideologies. "It is a good thing to embrace a good school of thought. Hence, I feel they (NCP leaders) will visit the RSS headquarters. The RSS worked for the

Mahayuti and made a significant contribution. Neither the NCP nor Shiv Sena can ever deny the contribution of the RSS," she added. When Shiv Sena leader Dada Bhuse was asked about Pawar skipping the visit, he said, "I am a junior party worker; I cannot comment on his decision." Everybody has the right to decide whether to visit such places or not, he said. "But it is true that the RSS definitely played a key role and helped the Mahayuti in the state polls," Bhuse added. NCP MLA Raju Karemore, who visited Hegdewar's memorial, said he went there on his own and not on the instruction of his party. "The chief whip of the BJP in the legislative assembly had circulated messages encouraging visits to the place, which prompted me to go there," he said.

Shinde claims RSS teaches selfless service and unity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde paid tributes at the memorial of RSS founder Dr KB Hegdewar here on Thursday and said no one can ignore the Sangh's contribution to nation-building. The ideologies of the Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena are same, Shinde told reporters after visiting the Dr Hegdewar Smruti Mandir at Reshimbagh in Nagpur, where Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and other leaders of the ruling allies BJP and Shiv Sena also paid respects. NCP leader and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, who outfit is also a constituent of the ruling Mahayuti, was not present, while two of his party legislators visited the memorial. The winter session of the state legislature is currently underway in Nagpur. As an organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) works selflessly, Shinde said. The Shiv Sena head further said that he earlier also visited Hegdewar's memorial and had a relation with the Sangh Parivar since childhood. "I started with a Sangh shakha and then with a Shiv Sena shakha, Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology and Anand Dighe sahab's teachings.

Police bust call center in Gurugram for cheating US nationals, 18 arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Cyber crime team of the Gurugram police busted an illegal call centre operating at Plot No 270 Udyog Vihar Phase-2 in Gurugram on Wednesday. The call centre mostly used to cheat US nationals on the pretext of technical support by creating a fake website of an accounting company, police said on Thursday. According to the police, a team of the cyber crime police station led by ACP (cybercrime) Priyanshu Diwan raided the call centre following a tip-off. During the raid, the police arrested 18 people, including 8 women and the call centre operator, in connection with the matter and seized 17 CPUs along with other electronic gadgets. The arrested accused have been identified as Gaurav Bakshi, Debashish Chatterjee, Anmol, Kanishk, Ajeesh Mathew, Kunal, Devender Dvgan, Hitesh Malik, Rohit Singh, Aryaman Thakur, Nidhi, Sita, Muskan Rajput, Bhavana, Shivani, Lahinganhath Haikip Sharon and Nagmathingcho. The police team registered a case against the accused under sections 318 (4), 319 BNS and IT Act in Police Station Cyber Crime South, Gurugram and arrested the accused as per the rules in the case. During interrogation, it was found that the accused, Gaurav Bakshi, is the operator of this call centre, and he runs this call centre along with his companions at the behest of his other partner. Bakshi used to get a salary of about Rs 1.5 lakh and his other employees used to get a salary of about Rs 30,000 per month.

"We received specific inputs that a fake call centre had cheated several US nationals on the pretext of technical support. The youths were employed at the call centre, which was being operated without a license issued by the Department of Telecommunications (DOT)," said Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (Cyber Crime). The accused was allegedly running this illegal call centre with his fellow accused since February 2024. The accused were cheating foreign nationals in the name of providing customer care service of Software Support/Accounting Support. The accused used to run ads on Google from the customer care helpline number of a famous company. When foreign nationals call on the toll-free number, the call comes to their call centre through VCL Dialer, 3CX Dialer. "The accused introduced themselves as representatives of a famous company and got remote access to the computer system of foreign nationals by getting them to download screen-sharing applications in their system. In the name of solving their problem, they used to get 200-1000 dollars from them through a payment gateway. The accused used to commit the fraud by creating a phishing website of an accounting company named Quick Books," Diwan added. "The matter is under investigation. How the accused was operating the fake call centre is part of an investigation. The involvement of other people cannot be ruled out. The culprits are on police remand for further questioning," the officer said. An FIR under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the IT Act has been registered at the Cyber Crime South police station..

CM Himanta calls for stronger ties with Bhutan during visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday reiterated the commitment of ensuring that the northeastern state plays a pivotal role in strengthening the bond between India and Bhutan. Sarma made the remarks as he concluded his four-day trip to the neighbouring country on Thursday. "As Riniki and I conclude our unforgettable visit to Bhutan, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the wonderful people of Bhutan for their warmth and generosity," Sarma wrote on X. "We return home with cherished memories, invaluable learnings and a renewed commitment to ensuring that Assam plays a pivotal role in strengthening the deep bond between Bharat and Bhutan," he added. Sarma, who was accompanied by his wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, was bid farewell at the airport by Bhutan's Foreign Minister DN Dhungyel.

Longest surviving Hizbul Mujahideen commander killed in Kashmir encounter

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A joint team of security forces Thursday killed one of the longest surviving terrorist commanders belonging to the Pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist outfit along with four others during a six-hour-long fierce gunfight in the Kadder village of Behibagh area in South Kashmir's Kulgam district. Two army jawans also received injuries during the successful operation as no other collateral damage was reported from the ground zero of the encounter site. To prevent any civilian from getting trapped during the gunfight the security forces had safely evacuated local villagers to safety before killing the group of terrorists holed up inside a safe hideout. Five AK-47 rifles, 20 magazines, two grenades and other arms and ammunition have been recovered from the encounter site. Confirming the killing of a top Hizbul Mujahideen Commander Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range, VK Birdi said Hizbul Commander Farooq Ahmed Bhat, also known as Farooq Nali, a resident of Yaripora in Kulgam, was among those killed in the encounter in the Kadder area of the district. According to police records, Farooq Nali had been active since 2015 and was one of the longest-surviving terrorists. He was categorised as "A++". He played a key role in radicalizing local youth and reviving terrorist activities in South Kashmir. Addressing a press briefing after the encounter was called off Brigadier Anirudh Chauhan, Commander of 2 Sector RR said, "Five top active terrorists



Different identity documents seized from terrorists killed during the encounter on Thursday.

of Hizbul Mujahideen were neutralized in the Kadder area of Kulgam. All five terrorists were involved in many criminal and terrorist activities. The Army officer claimed Hizbul Mujahideen commander Farooq Bhat played a big role in reviving terrorism in South Kashmir. With the neutralization of these 5 terrorists, we will gain speed in eliminating terrorism in J&K. The army officer said during this operation, our two security personnel suffered bullet injuries. They are being treated at 92 Base Hospital. The army officer also acknowledged the role of the

people of Kulgam for the success of this operation..." According to police records, Farooq Bhat took control of the HM outfit after the death of Hizbul Mujahideen operational commander Saifulah in a 2020 gunbattle in Srinagar. Four other slain terrorists have been identified as Mushtaq Itoo, active since March 2020, from Mohamad Pora, Kulgam, Adil Hussain, active since August 2023, from Khandipora, Mohd Irfan, active since June 2022 from Hawoorah and Yassir Javaid Bhat from Yaripora.



SP MLAs holding portraits of BR Ambedkar arrive to attend the Winter Session of UP Assembly on Thursday.

PTI

Opposition protests force abrupt end to UP Assembly Winter Session

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

For the first time since the formation of the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government, the winter session of the state assembly was adjourned without the Chief Minister's customary address. The abrupt conclusion came amid continuous disruptions led by Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress MLAs. The five-day session, which began with high expectations, was marked by persistent protests from the opposition. On the first two days, CM Yogi Adityanath addressed the House despite the commotion. However, on the third day, as he was scheduled to speak again, opposition legislators intensified their protests, forcing Assembly Speaker

Satish Mahana to adjourn proceedings till 11 a.m. on Thursday. The session resumed on Thursday morning but soon descended into chaos as SP MLAs staged a sit-in, raising slogans and holding placards. Despite the protests, Finance Minister Suresh Khanna presented the supplementary budget proposal. With the opposition refusing to engage in discussions, the budget was passed unanimously without debate. "The opposition came with the sole intention of disrupting the House," Khanna remarked, accusing the SP and Congress of stalling crucial discussions, including those on the upcoming Maha Kumbh. Adding fuel to the fire, opposition members protested against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks in the

Rajya Sabha, which they termed disrespectful toward Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Shah had stated, "It has become a fashion to repeatedly invoke Ambedkar's name... Had you taken God's name as often, you would have attained heaven for seven lives." This comment triggered demands from the opposition for Shah's resignation. During the protests, Speaker Mahana admonished SP legislators for holding an inverted portrait of Ambedkar, questioning their sincerity toward respecting the Dalit icon. "If you cannot even hold Baba Saheb's photo straight, what respect will you show him?" he asked. With no end to the disruptions in sight, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna urged the Speaker to adjourn the session indefinitely.

Navy and Coast Guard continue search and rescue efforts in Mumbai boat collision, two still missing

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after the boat disaster off the Gateway of India that claimed 13 lives, the ships and aircraft of the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard on Thursday continued their search for two persons - an adult male and a male child - who went missing after a Navy speed boat collided with a passenger ferry in the Arabian Sea. Within hours after the boat tragedy, the Indian Navy set up a Board of Inquiry into the mishap to establish the circumstances leading to the mid-sea collision and to fix the responsibility. Of the 113 persons on board both the vessels, 13 persons drowned while 98 others, including two injured, were rescued, after a Navy speed boat undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with a passenger ferry Neel Kamal off Karanja, Mumbai at 4 pm on Thursday. The ferry was carrying passengers from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island at the time of mishap.

The two missing passengers have been identified as 43-year-old Hansraj Bhati and seven-year-old Johan Mohammad Nisar Ahmed Pathan. A defence official said that Indian Navy and the Coast Guard deployed their vessels and their helicopters to search the two persons who were thrown into the waters after the mid-sea collision between a naval speed boat and a ferry in the water channel near the tiny Butcher Island oil terminal, 5 km from the Gateway of India. "Search and rescue efforts have continued throughout the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday in the vicinity of the accident. Search and rescue operations are in progress by eight Navy craft, a naval helicopter and a Coast Guard vessel to search for the two missing persons," a defence spokesperson said. The rescued persons are still in different hospitals of Mumbai and Raigad district. While the condition of 100 is now stable. Official sources said that 57 survivors are currently in JNPA Hospital, 24 in Naval

Dockyard medical facility, 13 in INHS Sanghani (Karanja), 10 in St. George Hospital, 12 in a hospital on the mainland at Karanja and one in INHS Ashvini Hospital. Eight survivors who recovered have been discharged from different hospitals. All the persons killed in the boat disaster have been identified. Of those 13 killed in the boat tragedy, there were two minors Nidhish Rakesh Ahire (8 year-old boy from Nashik), Mahi Sairam Pavra (3-year-old girl from Dhule), five women -- Harshada Rakesh Ahire (31 years, Nashik), Shafina Ashraf Pathan (34 years from Goa), Rama Ratidevi Gupta (50 years from Palghar) and Pragnya Vinod Kamble (39 years from Navi Mumbai). Meanwhile, acting on a complaint lodged by survivor Natharam Chaudhary, the Colaba police have registered an FIR under sections 106(1), 125 (a) (b), 282, 324 (3)(5) of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita has been registered in Colaba police station against people responsible for the tragedy.

Sawant defends self, government of graft charges in Goa Liberation Day address

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PANAJI

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant greeted people on Goa's Liberation Day on Thursday and said his government was progressing personal criticism, while overcoming personal criticism, prejudices and "tool kit of jealousy". Sawant's remarks come in the wake of a personal attack on him and his wife by the opposition leaders in connection with a cash-for-jobs scam in the state. Addressing the Goa Liberation Day function in Panaji, Sawant also said his government was working towards making the dream of the freedom fighters a reality through an all-inclusive growth. The Goa Liberation Day is celebrated on December 19

every year to mark the success of 'Operation Vijay' undertaken by the armed forces to liberate the state from the Portuguese in 1961. "We are providing a positive governance surpassing personal criticism, preconceived notions, and tool kit of jealousy," Sawant said. Notably, Pramod Sawant's wife Sulakshana Sawant filed a defamation suit against AAP leader Sanjay Singh on Tuesday in a court in North Goa. She has sought Rs 100 crore in damages from the AAP politician for allegedly naming her in the cash-for-jobs scam. The CM said, "Sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas" are the hallmark of the Bharatiya Janata Party's rule in the coastal state, as he addressed a gathering comprising state

ministers, people from various sections of the society and students. Sawant further said his government was working proactively so that the state gets justice on the issue of the Mhadei river diversion through the central government authority PRAWAH. The Centre constituted the Progressive River Authority for Water and Harmony (PRAWAH) last year to enable the compliance and implementation of the award and decisions of the Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal. The Mhadei River originates in Karnataka and runs through Maharashtra into Goa, meeting the Arabian Sea near Panaji. Goa and Karnataka are locked in a dispute over the diversion of the river water.

Sawant said steps have also been taken to ensure resumption of the iron ore mining in Goa through sustainable and environment-friendly way, which will provide employment opportunities to thousands of youth living in the mineral rich belt of the state, he said. "We have also focussed on the ease of doing business, encouraging the new businesses and existing industries," the chief minister said. He said the state government was working towards women empowerment by undertaking various initiatives under the Centre's Goa State Rural Livelihood Mission and Deen Dayal Antodaya Yojana, under which the self-help groups are provided assistance for self-employment.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Clamour for caste census

While the exercise is fraught with challenges, its potential to uplift marginalised communities cannot be ignored

The demand for a caste census in India has been a recurring topic of debate, reflecting the country's complex socio-political fabric. While proponents emphasise its importance for targeted development and policy-making, critics raise concerns about its potential to exacerbate social divisions. The nuanced arguments surrounding this issue highlight both its necessity and its challenges. The caste census refers to the systematic collection of data on the caste composition of the population. India has not conducted such a comprehensive exercise since 1931, even though caste remains a significant determinant of socio-economic status in the country. Proponents of the caste census argue that it is essential for ensuring equitable development, especially for historically marginalised communities. As Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan points out, specific data on caste populations is critical for designing and allocating funds for community-based development schemes. Paswan's endorsement of the caste census is pragmatic. However, he also issues a cautionary note: while the government should collect such data, making it public might deepen societal divisions by reinforcing caste identities.

A caste census would provide granular data on the socio-economic conditions of various communities. This information is crucial for crafting effective affirmative action policies and welfare programmes. Historical injustices and systemic exclusion of certain communities require targeted interventions. A caste census would help identify the actual beneficiaries of reservation policies and assess whether they are achieving the intended outcomes. The Opposition, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, has emphasised that a caste census is a step toward realising the promise of social justice. By understanding the precise demographic composition, governments can ensure proportional representation and resource allocation. But having said that, making caste census data public could lead to heightened caste consciousness and further fragment society. India's socio-political landscape is already fraught with identity-based divisions, and the misuse of such data could deepen these fault lines. There is a legitimate fear that caste census findings might be weaponised for political gain. Instead of addressing inequities, the data could fuel caste-based mobilisations, electoral strategies and even conflicts. This aspect must be looked into and safeguarded before taking up this mammoth exercise. Besides, conducting a caste census is a massive logistical challenge. The accuracy of data collection and classification would be critical, as any errors could lead to disputes and undermine the credibility of the exercise. The caste census is essential and must be conducted, but it requires careful attention to ensure its accuracy and to address potential repercussions.

PICTALK



A person dressed as Santa Claus rows a boat as seagulls fly past, near Causeway of Tapi River in Surat. PTI

Vipul Nautiyal: Chandan Mitra's calamity reporter

Whether it was crafting flawless editorial pages or recounting tales of his newsroom days, Vipul Nautiyal's legacy is one of dedication, warmth and passion for his craft

He flaunted the title "calamity reporter" with pride as he vividly narrated the story behind how Dr Chandan Mitra, editor-in-chief of The Pioneer, gave him the name. Known to friends as Nauty (that's how he spelled it) and to juniors as Vipul Sir, or Nauty Sir, I was introduced to him in August 2021, while writing a test for an editorial role at The Pioneer. I hadn't met him before, but had heard things about him — his co-workers respected him, but they feared him even more. It was my first stint in the media and I was nervous.

I was supposed to join his team and work on the Edit and Oped pages. By the time I was almost done with the test, I was looking around wondering who Mr Nautiyal could be. That was when an old-looking fellow, who was humbly dressed and had uncombed hair and a grey beard, looked at me and said: "Cheating kara du"? I laughed it off. This couldn't have been Vipul Nautiyal I had been told about. But then an HR executive arrived and my paper was handed over to him. I was interviewed and



more attention, they had to be perfectly symmetric — a habit that I picked involuntarily. This was the Vipul effect. He once recounted an incident from his days at The Times of India, when Dr Mitra had asked him to return to The Pioneer. Later, during the exit interview at TOI, when Mr Nautiyal was asked "TOI chhod kar Pioneer kaun jata hai?" (Who leaves TOI to join Pioneer) he replied with lit-up eyes: "Jisko Chandan Mitra bulata hai." He knew how to efficiently run a desk and bring the team up to speed with some flair. A senior editor at TOI says, "Vipul Sir could beat you in a game of table tennis single-handedly, with his favourite drink in his other hand." Mr Nautiyal often mentioned that he received job offers from almost all leading media houses, except for The Indian Express, for which, he said, he waited for quite some time. In my five months of working with him, I never saw him snap at anybody — unless somebody caught him on the phone during work hours. He was known to be unpredictable at times. But he was there for his colleagues —

those who worked with him will agree. His way of getting his point across was his own. When I had to negotiate my salary while joining TOI — where he had referred me — he told me to ask for a massive raise, saying: "Purse bhaley hi HR ke paas hai, but tu journalist hai, boli tu lagayega" (Even though the purse is with HR, you are a journalist, so you will call the shots). He had more confidence in me than I had in myself. Those who teamed up with him absorbed a great deal of wisdom in all walks of life.

That's how Vipul Nautiyal was. Besides being an exceptional storyteller, he had a song, a sher or an anecdote for almost every occasion. He was a fanboy when it came to Dev Anand. He often wrote an editorial piece on Dev Sahab's birth anniversary. He was proud of the fact that he had seen Guide several times. He would often play Mohammed Rafi songs or Mehdi Hassan ghazals, lower the volume, and write the edit columns.

(The writer is a former staffer of The Pioneer; views are personal)

Victory Day: Bangladesh's legacy of liberation

Victory Day serves as both a celebration of freedom and a reminder of the challenges ahead in safeguarding its democratic and inclusive aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Victory Day holds profound significance for Bangladesh, marking its liberation and the triumph over the Pakistan Armed Forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Celebrated annually on December 16, the day symbolises the birth of a sovereign state and the culmination of a long struggle for self-determination, where India played the pivotal role of midwife in the creation of the newest state in South Asia. The Bangladesh Liberation War was not merely a conflict confined to its borders but a defining moment in the geopolitics of the region. The roots of this war were entrenched in the systemic neglect and exploitation of East Pakistan by the ruling elite of West Pakistan.

Decades of economic disparity, cultural suppression, and political disenfranchisement laid the foundation for a movement demanding autonomy, which was catalyzed by the brutal military crackdown on March 25, 1971. Operation Searchlight unleashed a reign of terror that sought to silence the aspirations of millions but instead ignited a people's resistance. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the towering leader of the Awami League, became the symbol of this resistance. His leadership united the Bengali population, and his call for independence resonated with millions who yearned for freedom. As the conflict escalated, millions of refugees poured into India, creating a humanitarian crisis of unparalleled magnitude.

India's intervention under the leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was both a strategic and moral decision. The Indian Armed Forces, working in coordination with the Mukti Bahini, mounted a joint operation that decisively defeated the Pakistani forces within a mere 13 days. The surrender of the Pakistani military on December 16, 1971, in Dhaka is one of the most iconic moments in modern history. The image of General AAK Niazi signing the Instrument of Surrender in the presence of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora remains etched in the collective memory of both nations. This marked not



only the liberation of Bangladesh but also a significant blow to the two-nation theory that had led to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The emergence of Bangladesh was hailed globally, but it also underscored the complexities of international politics. The then-US President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who had been staunch supporters of Pakistan due to Cold War dynamics, were caught off guard. Nixon's infamous remark about South Asia becoming an "international basket case" was a harsh reflection of the scepticism with which the new nation was viewed.

Yet, Bangladesh defied the odds and began its journey toward self-reliance and growth. Over the past five decades, Bangladesh has transformed remarkably, earning the moniker "the garment factory of the world." Despite initial challenges, including political instability, natural disasters, and infrastructural deficits, Bangladesh has managed to sustain an impressive growth trajectory. Today, Bangladesh stands as a significant player in South Asia, with a GDP growth rate that often outpaces its neighbours. The country's success in achieving many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in areas such as gender



BANGLADESH DEFIED THE ODDS AND BEGAN ITS JOURNEY TOWARD SELF-RELIANCE AND GROWTH. OVER THE PAST FIVE DECADES, BANGLADESH HAS TRANSFORMED REMARKABLY, EARNING THE MONIKER "THE GARMENT FACTORY OF THE WORLD"

equality, education and healthcare, is commendable. It has become a model for other developing nations, showcasing how strategic planning and a focus on human development can lead to sustained progress. Victory Day is not just a celebration of past triumphs but also a moment to reflect on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The geopolitical landscape of South Asia has evolved significantly since 1971. While the ties with India remain strong, underpinned by historical bonds and mutual interests, Bangladesh has also embraced China's Belt and Road Initiative, balancing its foreign policy to maximise economic benefits. Victory Day also underscores the importance of remembering the sacrifices that led to Bangladesh's independence. The war claimed the lives of countless freedom fighters and civilians, whose bravery and resilience paved the way for a new nation. The liberation struggle also left deep scars, including the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military, which continue to evoke strong emotions. Efforts to bring justice through war crimes tribunals and to preserve the memory of the Liberation War are vital in honouring this legacy. As Bangladesh celebrates another Victory Day, it does so as a nation that has defied expectations and charted its path to

progress. The dreams of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Mukti Bahini have been realised in many ways, with a vibrant democracy, a thriving economy, and a resilient population. However, recent political instability has cast a shadow over Bangladesh's progress. The fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, after years of dominance, has left a power vacuum, fueling uncertainty and unrest. Political polarisation has deepened, and concerns over democratic backsliding have surfaced. The status of minorities, particularly Hindus and indigenous groups, remains precarious, with reports of rising communal tensions and targeted violence. Ensuring minority rights and fostering inclusivity will be critical for Bangladesh to maintain its social fabric and democratic principles. The anniversary of Victory Day is a reminder of the enduring spirit of a people who fought for their right to self-determination and emerged victorious against overwhelming odds. It is a celebration of freedom, a tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and a pledge to build a future worthy of their dreams. Bangladesh's story, from a war-torn newborn state to a thriving economy, stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration, not just for South Asia but for the world.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

G7 FACES CRISES

Madam — The 'Group of Seven' or G7 countries are considered to be the group of the richest countries in the world. But after the Covid pandemic, their economic condition also seems to be almost in shambles. Especially three of those countries can be named here, in which political turmoil has been seen within the last 10 days. Those countries are Germany, the biggest economic power in Europe, France, the third biggest economy there, and the North American country Canada. In France, four prime ministers have been sworn in within the last one year. Emmanuel Macron's government can fall at any time. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had announced the dismissal of Finance Minister Christian Lindner, citing breach of trust and economic policy differences. Now he himself has lost the vote of confidence.

Due to which elections will be held again there in the coming February. On the other hand, Canada's Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, has resigned from her post, citing disagreement with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. She has expressed disagreement on how to respond to the tariff threat of incoming President Donald Trump. Meaning, here too the main reason for instability is 'economic and financial' problems. France has been affected by Europe's energy crisis and high interest rates, which have weakened the country. In 2024, Europe's largest economy will be stuck in recession for the second consecutive year. More and more businesses are under pressure and are suffering from falling sales, high energy costs and taxes, and Germany's overly cumbersome bureaucracy. Starting from 2022, per capita production in Canada has declined in six of the last seven quarters. Unemployment has also increased by a full percentage point compared to last year.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

R Ashwin retires from international cricket



Ravichandran Ashwin, India's second-highest Test wicket-taker (only behind Anil Kumble's 619 wickets), announced his retirement from international cricket at the age of 38. He expressed gratitude to his teammates and the BCCI, highlighting his fulfilling career. While he feels he still has more to offer, he'll focus on club-level cricket. Ashwin concluded his international career with 537 Test wickets, 156 ODI wickets and 72 T20I wickets. His crick-

et journey, from a fringe player in the 2011 World Cup to one of India's greatest match-winners, has been marked by trials, triumphs, and unwavering dedication. Despite overseas challenges and controversies, his innovative approach and analytical mind have solidified his place in cricketing history.

The 38-year-old Ashwin, with 537 Test wickets and six centuries, will continue playing franchise cricket, notably for Chennai Super Kings in the next edition of the IPL in 2025. We should not forget that Ashwin is the man who played his cricket all through with cleverness and dignity and decided to retire cleverly and in a dignified manner too. We should not be ungrateful and miss recognising and saluting him for his immense contribution to Indian cricket after Anil Kumble hung up his boots. Love you, champion! Cricket lovers will miss you for sure!

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

has proposed a "Reciprocal Tariff" policy, signalling a new direction in global trade. Criticising the high tariff policies of countries, including India, he highlighted them as a source of inequity. Trump stated that if any country imposes tariffs on American products, the US will respond with equivalent tariffs. He specifically pointed to developing countries like India, which levy high tariffs to protect domestic industries. Using bicycles as an example, he alleged that India imposes over 100 per cent duty on American bicycles, while the US does not charge such high tariffs on Indian products.

This policy, claimed to be based on reciprocity and fairness, is likely to promote protectionism, potentially destabilising the global trade system. It raises concerns about increasing trade tensions between India and the US. Higher product prices could add economic burdens on consumers and strain bilateral relations. For India, it is crucial to engage in dialogue with the US administration to maintain trade balance. This tariff

conflict will not be limited to economic impacts; it will also have far-reaching diplomatic and social consequences.

R K Jain | Barwani

TABLA MAESTRO'S LEGACY

Madam — Zakir Hussain's music was intertwined with his all-encompassing love for everyone without an iota of bias or prejudice. In fact, it reminds one of a popular Kishore Kumar number, "Pyaar Baantne Chaloo" (Keep spreading love), from the 1965 Hindi movie "Hum sab ustaad hain."

Apart from his divine renditions on the tabla, what endeared him most to his audiences was the halo of love and humility that surrounded him. In an interview with the BBC, he once said that all his shows were sold out well in advance, not because of him, but because of the power and attraction of music.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

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FIRST COLUMN

SRI LANKA-INDIA: ON THE SAME PAGE

Both nations reiterate commitment to defence collaboration and regional stability



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

India strengthened its ties with its closest maritime neighbor, Sri Lanka, this week, countering the growing influence of China in the island nation. Sri Lanka's President, H.E. Mr. Anura Kumara Disanayaka, made his first bilateral visit to New Delhi following the recent presidential and parliamentary elections. Earlier this year, President Disanayaka had also visited Delhi at a time when Sri Lanka's political future, including the timing of its elections, was still uncertain. The new President came to power riding on the left-leaning party, which is known to have harboured some Anti-Indian sentiments in the past. However, New Delhi chose to bet on the relatively young Marxist leader, hoping for a sense of prudence in future. Disanayaka in the past, has managed to maintain a fine balance in Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with India and China, not trying to get caught in any crossfire.

Meanwhile, while India's military tensions with China have de-escalated in the recent past, it still chooses to be cautious. Special Representatives from India and China also met this week in Beijing, to discuss their mutual bilateral relations. It seems that with the Trump administration back in the Oval Office in January, China wants to de-escalate military tensions with countries it considers as rivals. China is aware that Trump is likely to impose tariffs on many of its exports to the US, and perhaps further tighten the transfer of high-end technology from America. It is acutely aware that, India would not join an economic dialogue unless the overarching military issues are sorted. It is against this background, that Sri Lanka's President's visit to India assumes significance. It may be recalled that China had in the past, sent spy ships



(which it calls maritime research vehicles) to Sri Lankan waters, which have raised many red flags for the Indian security agencies. China also controls critical ports in Sri Lanka, which during any military conflict could be used for strategic purposes. Sri Lanka's President is aware of his country's dependence on China to keep its economy afloat, while, also not trying to disturb the deep bilateral partnership with India. It was heartening for policy watchers in India to note that the Sri Lankan President chose Delhi to be his port of call after getting elected and came out with some emphatic statements, regarding not allowing, their national territory to be used for any anti-India activities. The joint statement released after the President and Indian PM's meeting read "Recognising shared security interests of India and Sri Lanka, both leaders acknowledged the importance of regular dialogue based on mutual trust and transparency and giving primacy to each other's security concerns. India is Sri Lanka's closest maritime neighbour. President Disanayaka reiterated Sri Lanka's stated position of not permitting its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India and towards regional stability."

Taking cognisance of India's security concerns the two nations further reiterated to "Explore the possibility of concluding a framework Agreement on Defence Cooperation; Foster cooperation in hydrography; Provision of defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's defence capabilities; Intensify collaboration through joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence dialogue and exchanges; Extend assistance to strengthen capabilities of Sri Lanka on disaster mitigation, relief and rehabilitation, including through training, joint exercises and sharing of best practices; and Enhance capacity building and training for Sri Lankan defence forces and conduct tailor-made training programmes, wherever required." The bedrock of this relationship is India's generous economic support to Sri Lanka without putting it through non-transparent, self-serving infrastructure loans, which has led to the loss of strategic ports for the island nation.

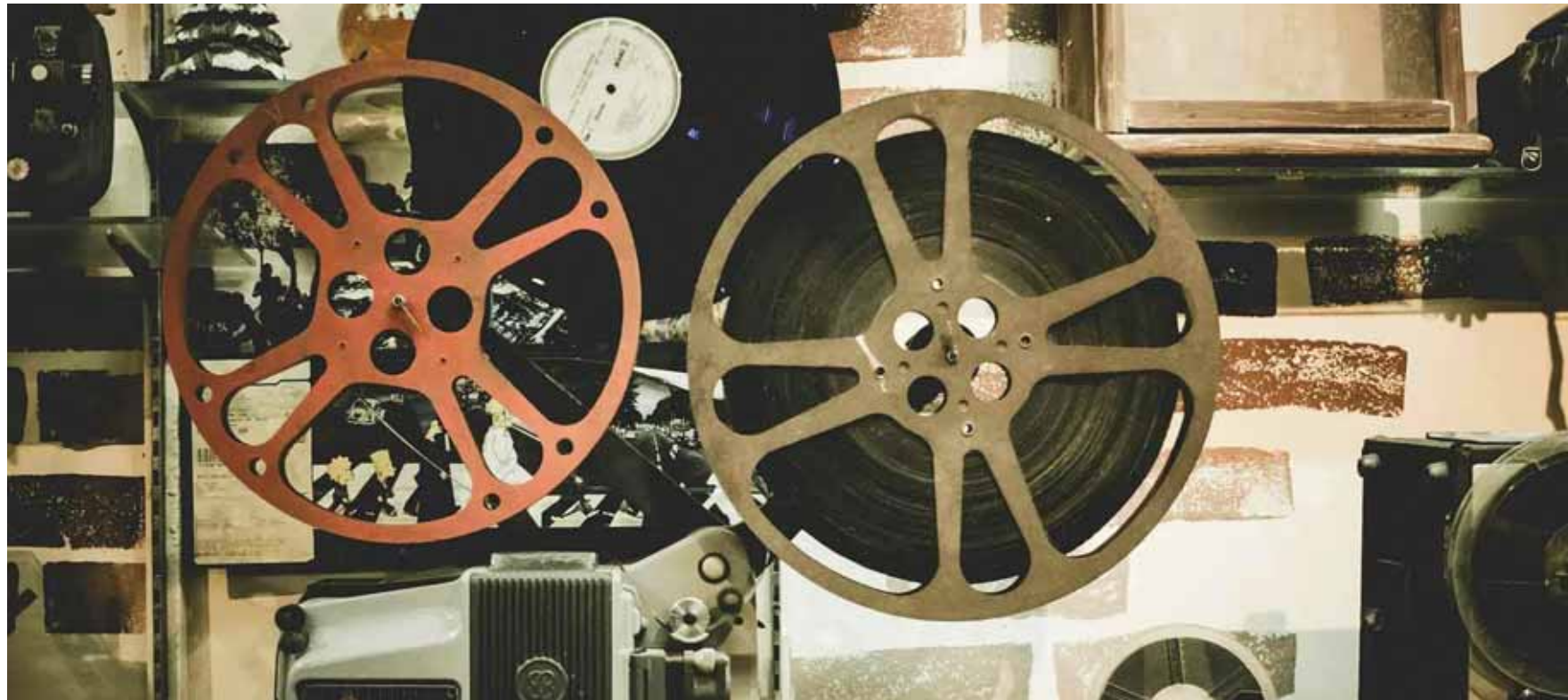
(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

The evolution of cinema through technology

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology, filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what is possible



CHAITANYA K PRASAD



Beneath the flickering lights of an old projector, cinema was born—a dance of shadows and light, whispering stories into the dark. From silent dreams projected on silver screens to the roaring worlds of colour and sound, cinema has always been a magician, conjuring entire universes with the stroke of a reel. As technology sprinkled its magic dust over time, the cinematic world transformed, evolving from simple moving pictures into immersive journeys that now wrap us in their digital embrace, where imagination knows no bounds. In the late 19th century, cinema was a purely visual experience. Films like Raja Harishchandra (1913), India's first feature film, relied entirely on visuals, as sound was not yet a part of cinematic storytelling. Globally, the Lumière brothers' early works, such as L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (1895), left audiences mesmerised.

The technology was simple—manual cameras, mechanical projectors, and natural light. But this early era laid the foundation for the visual storytelling techniques that filmmakers would continue to refine for decades to come. The advent of sound in cinema was a game-changer. Alam Ara (1931) became India's first talkie, marking the beginning of an era where dialogue and music played a crucial role in storytelling. Globally, The Jazz Singer (1927) made similar waves, showcasing the transformative power of synchronized sound. Colour, too, began to seep into cinema's world. While Kisan Kanya (1937) was India's first colour film, it wasn't until Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Hum Dono (1961) that colour became a truly artistic element, bringing emotional depth and grandeur to the screen.

The partially coloured Mughal-e-Azam in particular stunned audiences, giving the larger-than-life historical drama a visual vibrancy that was previously unimaginable. Ramesh Sippy's Sholay (1975) was a groundbreaking film, being the first Indian movie shot on a 70mm screen. Indian theatres were not initially equipped to accommodate this scale, but the format gave Sholay's action sequences a larger-than-life feel, adding to its epic narrative. The film also introduced enhanced stereophonic sound, a novelty in Indian cin-



THE TECHNOLOGY WAS SIMPLE—MANUAL CAMERAS, MECHANICAL PROJECTORS, AND NATURAL LIGHT. BUT THIS EARLY ERA LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES THAT FILMMAKERS WOULD CONTINUE TO REFINE FOR DECADES TO COME

ema. Shan (1980) followed, introducing impressive special effects such as explosions, action choreography, and stunt sequences, drawing comparisons to Western films like James Bond, with a blend of spectacle and style that had rarely been seen in India. The onset of digital technology and CGI changed the landscape of Indian cinema in the 2000s. Films like Krishna (2006) and Ra. One (2011) ushered in a new era of superhero films and futuristic themes, using advanced CGI and motion capture. Robot (2010), featuring a humanoid robot protagonist, combined impressive VFX with engaging storytelling, marking a turning point in Indian cinema's relationship with technology. As CGI became increasingly prevalent, Hollywood and Indian cinema both embraced digital effects as a core component of storytelling.

Hollywood's Jurassic Park (1993) and The Matrix (1999) showcased the immense potential of CGI. Indian films like Baahubali (2015-2017) set new standards with their breathtaking visual effects, making Indian cinema a global player in the visual effects arena. R (2022) followed suit, pushing the envelope with dynamic CGI-enhanced action scenes. Cinema is now becoming more immersive than ever. James Cameron's Avatar (2009) brought 3D to the forefront of mainstream cinema, while Indian cinema explored immersive experiences with films like Kaala (2018), which offered a 360-degree VR experience. Technologies like VR and AI are now beginning to merge with traditional filmmaking, pushing the boundaries of storytelling even further. Technological advancements have transformed both the creative and commercial aspects of cinema, allowing films to evolve into multifaceted brands. Innovations like high-definition cameras, VFX, and animation have significantly elevat-

ed the quality of filmmaking, enabling large-scale productions such as RRR and Baahubali to create immersive experiences that attract global audiences. These technological tools have expanded the branding potential of films, positioning them as not just stories, but as global entertainment products. Furthermore, the media and entertainment sector's growth, particularly in India, reflects this shift, with theatrical revenues reaching an all-time high of INR 120 billion in 2023? The business model of cinema has expanded beyond traditional box-office revenue, thanks to digital platforms like OTT services, which offer new avenues for distribution and monetisation. These platforms provide filmmakers with the opportunity to market their films globally, turning local content into international brands. Films now capitalise on multiple revenue streams, including merchandising, digital rights, and exclusive streaming deals. Additionally, high-end multiplexes have begun focusing on premium cinematic experiences, creating "experience zones" that cater to affluent audiences and further enhance the brand identity of films?

Cinema has also become a significant platform for advertising and brand collaborations. FMCG, e-commerce, and tech companies increasingly use films for product placements and promotions, contributing to the industry's revenue. Meanwhile, Indian films are reaching wider audiences across 160 countries, thanks to advancements in content production and global distribution. This expanded global reach is turning Indian cinema into a formidable international brand, with films frequently topping global streaming charts, further proving that technological advancements are integral to both the branding and business of cinema? Recently released films like

Kalki 2898 AD and Stree 2 have pushed the envelope for Indian cinema by leveraging advanced CGI and innovative storytelling techniques. Kalki 2898 AD embraced futuristic narratives, with its visually rich depiction of a dystopian future made possible through cutting-edge visual effects, similar to global sci-fi films. Stree 2 blended horror, comedy, and CGI to craft a unique, immersive experience, further proving that Indian filmmakers are increasingly adept at balancing narrative depth with technological prowess, placing them on the global stage. From the early days of silent films to today's CGI-driven spectacles, cinema has continuously evolved with technological advancements.

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology, filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what's possible. The future of cinema technology promises exciting advancements. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are set to provide even more immersive storytelling experiences, allowing audiences to interact with cinematic worlds in unprecedented ways. Artificial intelligence (AI) is also emerging in post-production, helping streamline visual effects and editing processes. Additionally, innovations in 3D and holographic projections could redefine how we experience films in theatres and at home. Advances in sound technology, like spatial audio, will make the viewing experience more immersive, ensuring cinema continues to evolve. The cinematic journey, it seems, is far from over—technology is pushing the boundaries further, transforming both the art of storytelling and the audience.

(The writer is a former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI; views are personal. Inputs by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

Rajasthan's Golden Horizon: From cultural marvel to investment powerhouse

With the success of 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024,' the state is poised for an economic transformation

Sone ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman translates to "Where the earth is made of gold and the sky is built with silver." This cherished folk song beautifully captures the essence of Rajasthan's Thar Desert. Today, these words remain as relevant as ever, reflecting the state's unique charm and its emergence as a hub of global investment opportunities. Rajasthan, India's largest state, is rich in minerals, endowed with vast solar and wind energy resources, and brimming with potential for investors worldwide. The Rajasthan Government has successfully hosted the 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024' in Jaipur this week. Throughout the event,



MOHIT TANTIA

memorandums of understanding (MOUs) totalling over Rs 35 lakh crore were signed, highlighting the immense investment potential of the state. Actually, very few places can match Rajasthan's allure. It boasts nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, iconic palaces and forts, 320 sunny days a year, powerful winds, and expansive land. Combined with excellent law

and order and robust rail connectivity, these factors place Rajasthan in a league of its own as a destination for investment. Currently, the state is undergoing an economic transformation. The government aims to propel Rajasthan's economy from \$180 billion to \$350 billion by enhancing the Ease of Doing Business and creating employment opportunities for the youth. Over the next five years, the administration seeks to generate one million jobs across private and public sectors, with a focus on attracting significant investments. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma envisions Rajasthan as a pivotal player in India's economic growth. His administration is fostering a



pro-business environment across industries, recognising that Rajasthan's development is integral to achieving the vision of a "Developed India" by 2047. Rajasthan's rich natural resources, skilled workforce, and outstanding connectivity make it a magnet for investments. Over 58 per cent of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and 39 per cent of the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) pass through the state. This infrastructure connects Rajasthan to domestic and export markets, while its proximity to northern states and western ports ensures seamless trade access. With the third-largest national highway network and second-largest rail network in India, along with

energy. Traditional industries like tourism, and emerging fields like startups, also offer immense potential. For instance, in agriculture and agro-processing, Rajasthan is a top producer of mustard, millet, guar gum, fenugreek, Isabgol, and medicinal crops. The sector contributed 29 per cent to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in 2022-23. The state also ranks second in livestock population and is a leader in spices, organic farming, and coarse wool. With these advantages, the agriculture sector presents vast opportunities in agri-food parks, warehousing, and cold chain facilities. Rajasthan's journey from a

cultural and historical treasure to a thriving investment hub reflects its unparalleled potential and forward-looking vision. The state's abundant natural resources, excellent infrastructure, and strategic location make it an ideal destination for investors across various sectors, from renewable energy and agriculture to manufacturing and technology. With an ambitious economic transformation underway, Rajasthan's government is committed to creating a pro-business environment that will not only attract global investments but also create employment opportunities for its youth. As the state continues to capitalise on its diverse strengths, the "Rising

Rajasthan" initiative stands as a testament to its growing prominence on the global stage. The government's efforts, backed by strategic partnerships and forward-thinking policies, position Rajasthan as a key player in India's economic future, driving growth, prosperity, and development. The initiative seeks to bolster Rajasthan's industries, create jobs, and amplify its economic potential, ensuring the timeless folk song "Sone ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman" resonates on a global stage.

(The writer is Executive Member, National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities, Kolkata. Views expressed are personal)

Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's capital and port city

AP ■ DUBAI

A series of intense Israeli airstrikes shook Yemen's rebel-held capital and a port city early Thursday and killed at least nine people, officials said, shortly after a Houthi missile targeted central Israel. Thursday's strikes risk further escalating conflict with the Iranian-backed Houthis, whose attacks on the Red Sea corridor have drastically impacted global shipping. The rebels have so far avoided the same level of intense military strikes that have targeted Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, fellow members of Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance." Israel's military said that it conducted two waves of strikes in a pre-planned operation that began early Thursday and involved 14 fighter jets. The military said the first wave of strikes targeted Houthi infra-

structure at the ports of Hodeida, Salif and the Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea. Then, in a second wave of strikes, the military said its fighter jets targeted Houthi energy infrastructure in Sanaa. The Houthi-controlled satellite channel al-Masirah said that some of the strikes targeted power stations in the capital, posting videos of flames engulfing one structure, as civil defense workers doused it in water, trying to extinguish the fire. The channel, citing its correspondent in the port city of Hodeida, said that at least seven people had been killed at Salif, while another two had been killed at the Ras Isa oil terminal. Others suffered wounds at the Hodeida port as well, it said. An Israeli military statement offered no damage assessment. Rear Adm Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said the strikes hit energy and port infrastructure, which he alleged

the rebels "have been using in ways that effectively contributed to their military action." "I suggest the leaders of the Houthis to see, to understand and remember: Whoever raises a hand against the state of Israel, his hand will be cut off, whoever harms us — will be harmed sevenfold," Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said. Rebel-held Hodeida, about 145 kilometres southwest of Sanaa, has been key for food shipments into Yemen as its decade-long war has gone on. There's also longstanding suspicion that weapons from Iran have been transferred through the port. The strikes happened just after Israel's military said that its air force intercepted a missile launched from Yemen before it entered the country's territory. The waves of strikes on Yemen early Thursday weren't a direct response to the missile hit, said a military official, but rather a preplanned response to

months of Houthi aggression. Israel's fighter jets were already in the air when the missile was launched. "Rocket and missile sirens were sounded following the possibility of falling debris from the interception," the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded near Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas, and a large explosion was heard overhead at the time. In Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv, a large piece of shrapnel from the missile collapsed a school building there, without causing any injuries. The military official said that the Houthis have fired more than 200 missiles and UAVs, or unmanned aerial vehicles, at Israel since October 7, 2023. Brig Gen Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, claimed the attack hours later in a pre-recorded video statement, saying the rebels fired two of its "Palestine" ballistic missiles at Israel.

'Israel's restriction of water supply in Gaza amounts to acts of genocide'

AP ■ NEW YORK

Human Rights Watch on Thursday accused Israel of causing the deaths of thousands of Palestinians by systematically restricting and targeting Gaza's water supply in a campaign that amounted to "acts of genocide." The rights group was the latest among a growing number of critics to accuse Israel of genocidal acts in its war in Gaza. Israel vehemently denies the allegations, saying its war is directed at Hamas militants, not Gaza's civilians. In Thursday's report, HRW alleged that countless infants, children and adults have died from malnutrition, dehydration and illness as a result of actions by Israeli authorities over more than a year of war to deliberately cut the flow of water and electricity to Gaza, destroy infrastructure and prevent the distribution of critical supplies. "As a state policy, these acts constitute a widespread or sys-

tematic attack directed against a civilian population. Israeli officials are therefore committing the crime against humanity of extermination," the New York-based group said. The rights group said that the "pattern of conduct" outlined in its report and statements from Israeli officials "may indicate" genocidal intent, but it did not come down definitively on one side. Under international law, proving intent is key in concluding whether the crime of genocide has been committed. Israel, founded as a refuge for Jews in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust, strenuously denies such allegations. It says Hamas is responsible for the destruction in Gaza because the group hides and operates in schools, hospitals and residential areas. It says the October 2023 Hamas attack that triggered the war — the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust — amounts to genocide. "Human Rights Watch is once more spreading

its blood libels in order to promote its anti-Israel propaganda," Israel's Foreign Ministry said. It claimed Israel has worked to facilitate the flow of water and humanitarian aid into Gaza throughout the war. "Israel will continue to ensure humanitarian aid enters Gaza, in full compliance with international law," the statement said. The new report by Human Rights Watch outlined what the organisation described as an extended, methodical campaign by Israeli officials to deprive Palestinians in Gaza of water. That has drastically reduced the water supply in Gaza, from about 83 litres per person each day before the war began to between two and nine litres in the months since, the human rights group says. The World Health Organisation says people require 50 to 100 litres per day to meet basic needs and keep sickness in check. Human Rights Watch said Israeli forces deliberately razed

the solar panels that powered four of Gaza's six wastewater treatment plants and destroyed a key reservoir. The group alleged Israel also cut off electricity required to run desalination plants and other infrastructure and restricted fuel for backup generators. When the International Court of Justice issued orders in January that Israel provide Palestinians with basic services and assistance, officials ignored them, the group alleged. Human Rights Watch said its findings were based on interviews with more than 60 Palestinians, accounts from utility employees, doctors and other healthcare workers and aid workers, and analysis of satellite images, photos and video. "Doctors and nurses told Human Rights Watch that they had seen numerous infants, children, and adults die from a combination of malnutrition, dehydration, and disease," the group said.

Wisconsin school shooter had two guns, got texts from attack plot suspect

Madison (AP): The shooter who killed a student and teacher at a religious school in Wisconsin brought two guns to the school and was in contact with a man in California who authorities say was planning to attack a government building, according to authorities and court documents that became public Wednesday. Police were still investigating why the 15-year-old student at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison shot and killed a fellow student and teacher on Monday before shooting herself, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Two other students who were shot remained in critical condition on Wednesday. "We may never know what she was thinking that day, but we'll do our best to try to add or give as much information to our public as possible," Barnes said. A California judge, meanwhile, issued a restraining order Tuesday under California's gun red flag law against a 20-year-old Carlsbad man. The order requires the man to turn his guns and ammunition into police within 48 hours unless an officer asks for them sooner because he poses an immediate danger to himself and others.

Gisele Pelicot speaks after ex-husband found guilty of rapes, sentenced to 20 yrs in France

AP ■ AVIGNON

Gisele Pelicot said after 51 men were all found guilty Thursday in the drugging-and-rape trial that turned her into a feminist hero that the ordeal had been "very difficult" and expressed support for other victims of sexual violence. "We share the same fight," Gisele Pelicot, 72, said in her first words after the court in the southern French city of Avignon handed down prison sentences ranging from three to 20 years in the shocking case that stunned France and spurred a national reckoning about the blight of rape culture. Gisele Pelicot — whose courage and stoicism have turned her into an internationally recognised figure and an icon for many women — said she was thinking of her grandchildren after enduring more than three months of court hearings that dealt with the nearly decade of rapes and

other abuse inflicted on her by her now ex-husband and his accomplices. "It's also for them that I led this fight," she said of her grandchildren. The court sentenced her ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, to 20 years in prison for drugging and raping her and allowing other men to rape her while she was unconscious. The sentence was the maximum possible under French law. He was declared guilty of all charges against him. At age 72, it could mean that he spends the rest of his life in prison. He won't be eligible to ask for early release until at least two-thirds of the sentence has been served. Roger Arata, the lead judge of the court in the southern French city Avignon, told Pelicot to stand for the sentencing. After it was delivered, he sat back down and cried. Arata read out verdicts one after the other against Pelicot

and the 50 other men tried in the case. "You are therefore declared guilty of aggravated rape on the person of Gisele Pelicot," the judge said as he worked his way through names on the long list of defendants. Gisele Pelicot was seated on one side of the courtroom, facing the defendants and sometimes nodding her head as verdicts were announced. Delivering the guilty verdicts and sentences took Arata just over an hour. Dominique Pelicot's lawyer, Beatrice Zavarro, said that she would weigh a possible appeal, but also expressed hope that Gisele Pelicot would find solace in the court's rulings. "I wanted Mrs Pelicot to be able to emerge from these hearings in peace, and I think that the verdicts will contribute to this relief for Mrs Pelicot," she said. Of the 50 accused of rape, just one was acquitted but was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault.

Another man was also found guilty on the sexual assault charge that he was tried for — meaning all 51 of the defendants were found guilty in one way or another. In a side room where defendants' family members watched the proceedings on television screens, some burst into tears and gasped as the sentences were revealed. Protesters gathered outside the courthouse followed the proceedings on their phones. Some read out the verdicts and applauded as they were announced inside. Some were carrying oranges as symbolic gifts for the defendants heading to prison. Prosecutors had asked that Dominique Pelicot get the maximum penalty of 20 years and for sentences of 10 to 18 years for the others tried for rape. But the court was more lenient than prosecutors had hoped, with many sentenced to less than a decade in prison.

Macron in Mayotte to survey Cyclone Chido damage

Mamoudzou (AP): France's President Emmanuel Macron arrived Thursday to the Indian Ocean archipelago of Mayotte to survey the devastation that Cyclone Chido wrought across the French territory as thousands of people tried cope without the bare essentials such as water or electricity. "Mayotte is demolished," an airport security agent told Macron as soon as he stepped of the plane. The security agent, Assane Halo, said small children are without water or electricity and have nowhere to go because "everything is demolished." "There's no roof, there's nothing. No water, no food, no electricity. We can't even shelter, we are all wet with our children covering ourselves with whatever we have so that we can sleep," she said, asking for emergency aid. Macron went on a helicopter for an aerial appraisal of the damage. He then headed to the hospital in Mamoudzou, Mayotte's



A boy stands amidst debris in the Kaweni slum on the outskirts of Mamoudzou in the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, Thursday, after Cyclone Chido. AP/PTI

capital, to meet with medical staff and patients. He will then visit a destroyed neighbourhood. French authorities said at least 31 people have died and more than 1,500 people were injured, more than 200 criti-

cally. But it's feared hundreds or even thousands of people have died after the strongest cyclone in nearly a century ripped through the French territory of Mayotte off the coast of Africa on Saturday.

Trump's demands derail govt funding plan ahead of shutdown

AP ■ WASHINGTON President-elect Donald Trump abruptly rejected a bipartisan plan on Wednesday to prevent a Christmastime government shutdown, instead telling House Speaker Mike Johnson and Republicans to essentially renegotiate — days before a deadline when federal funding runs out. Trump's sudden entrance into the debate and new demands sent Congress spiralling as lawmakers are trying to wrap up work and head home for the holidays. It leaves Johnson scrambling to engineer a new plan before Friday's deadline to keep government open. "Republicans must GET SMART and TOUGH," Trump and Vice President-elect JD Vance said in a statement. The president-elect made an almost unrealistic proposal that combined some continuation of government funds along with a much more controversial provision to raise

the nation's debt limit — something his own party routinely rejects. "Anything else is a betrayal of our country," they wrote. Democrats decried the GOP revolt over the stopgap measure, which would have also provided some USD 100.4 billion in disaster aid to states hammered by Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters. "House Republicans have been ordered to shut down the government and hurt everyday Americans all across this country," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries. Jeffries said "an agreement is an agreement," and by backing out of it, "the House Republicans "will now own any harm that is visited upon the American people". Already, the massive 1,500-page bill was on the verge of collapse, as hard right conservatives rejected the increased spending, egged on by Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk who



rejected the plan almost as soon as it was released late on Tuesday night. Rank-and-file lawmakers complained about the extras, which included their first pay-raises in more than a decade — a shock after one of the most unproductive chaotic sessions in modern times. Even the addition of much-needed disaster aid, some USD

100.4 billion in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural calamities that ravaged states this year, plus USD 10 billion in economic assistance for farmers failed to win over the budget-slashing GOP. A number of Republicans had been waiting for Trump to signal whether they should vote yes or no. "This should not pass," Musk posted on his social media site X in the wee hours of Wednesday. One lawmaker said office phone lines were flooded with calls from constituents. "My phone was ringing off the hook," said Rep. Andy Barr, R-Ky. "The people who elected us are listening to Elon Musk." The outcome comes as no surprise for Johnson, who like other Republican House speakers before him, has been unable to convince his majority to go along with the routine needs of federal government operations, which they would prefer to slash.

It all shows just how hard it will be for Republicans next year, as they seize control of the House, Senate and White House, to unify and lead the nation. And it underscores how much Johnson and the GOP leaders must depend on Trump's blessing to see any legislative package over the finish line. Musk, who is heading Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency, warned that "Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!" It is not an idle threat coming from Musk, the world's richest man, who helped bankroll Trump's victory and can easily use his America PAC to make or break political careers. Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland said this is the problem with "an oligarchy, a handful of wealthy people run everything and everyone is supposed to live in fear of them".

Senators from both parties were watching from across the Capitol with dismay. "Is this going to be the norm? Is this going to be how we operate?" said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., putting the blame on Johnson. Democrats, who negotiated the final product with Johnson and Senate GOP leadership, will be expected to provide enough support to help ensure passage, as is often the case on big, bipartisan bills. "Republicans need to stop playing politics," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. However, Trump's new demands on the debt limit pose a daunting test for Johnson, who has worked hard to stay close to the president-elect — even texting with Musk and DOGE co-chair Vivek Ramaswamy — only to have him turn against his hard-fought plan. Trump posted later that he was insisting on the debt ceiling: "I

will fight till the end." The nation's debt limit expires in 2025 and Trump appears to want the issue off the table before he returns to the White House, a reasonable idea but one that typically is tough to negotiate. The last House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, worked for months with President Joe Biden to raise the debt limit. Even though they struck a bipartisan deal that cut spending in exchange for additional borrowing capacity, House Republicans said it did not go far enough, and it ended up costing McCarthy his job. Now, Trump is looking for Johnson to pass a debt ceiling extension some 48 hours before a partial government shutdown. Meanwhile, the bipartisan package that Trump rejected extended existing government programmes and services at their current operating levels for a few more months, through March 14, 2025.

Indian, US officials meet to chart next steps in space collaboration

PTI ■ WASHINGTON Officials from India and the United States have charted next steps in space collaboration, including human spaceflight, joint space exploration and a commitment to facilitating commercial partnerships between space companies to advance the shared interests in the growing space economy, the White House said on Wednesday. A meeting in this regard was held in Houston on December 17. The participants in the meeting were US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer, Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Indian Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra. "Following President (Joe)

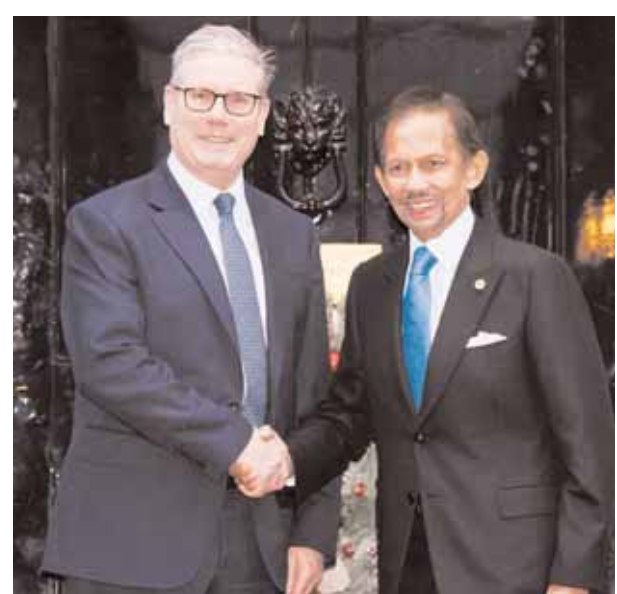
Biden and Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's June 2023 commitment to work together to 'reach new frontiers across all sectors of space cooperation' and India's signing of the Artemis Accords, our two nations reached an inflection point on collaboration across civil, security and commercial space sectors," the White House said in a fact-sheet. "This includes human spaceflight, joint space exploration and a commitment to facilitating commercial partnerships between US and Indian space companies to advance our shared interests in the growing space economy," it said. As part of their visit to Houston, Finer and Campbell met with representatives from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and space industry leaders to identify new opportunities to further strengthen the two countries' burgeoning space partnership. They also reflected on the accomplishments of the past few months and charted next steps to take the India-US partnership to the next level, including selecting two ISRO astronauts to train at the NASA's Johnson Space Centre for the first-ever joint effort between American and Indian astronauts at the International Space Station, with Axiom Space serving as the provider of the mission. The launch of the Axiom-4 mission as soon as spring 2025 will mark a significant milestone in the US-India space partnership and space exploration.

UK PM hosts Indian business chiefs to boost investments

PTI ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosted a delegation of 13 Indian companies at 10 Downing Street in London on what the British government described as a "curated visit" to enhance the bilateral partnership and boost investment flows. The visit on Wednesday follows Starmer's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit last month, when the leaders committed to take forward an "ambitious" UK-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with collaboration opportunities on economic growth, security and defence, technology, climate, health, and education. According to a readout from the British High Commission in New Delhi, the Indian investors and CEOs also met



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, left, shakes hands with the Sultan of Brunei Haji Hassanali Bolkhiah ahead of a meeting at 10 Downing Street, London, Thursday. AP/PTI

senior Cabinet ministers to discuss job creation and growth opportunities under a proposed India-UK trade deal after Starmer had confirmed the launch of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations early in the new year. "India is a vital partner for the UK and we have huge ambition to unlock more opportunities together, building on our already strong relationship," said Starmer, with reference to the business meeting. "I'm delighted to welcome some of India's most senior business leaders to Downing Street and to outline the UK's ambitious focus on economic growth and innovation," he said. The delegation, supported by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), discussed deepening ties with Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves and Foreign Secretary David Lammy. Meanwhile, Business

and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and minister for trade policy Douglas Alexander discussed bilateral trade, worth GBP 42 billion a year and supporting over 600,000 jobs across both economies as per UK government statistics. "As one of the most globally connected economies in the G20, the UK provides unmatched opportunities for Indian businesses to thrive. India already accounts for the second highest number of FDI projects into the UK, and this government is committed to deepening our trade and investment links with India even further," said Reynolds. "Boosting investment is a mission at the heart of this government. It was great to hear firsthand from Indian business leaders on why so many of them have given us a vote of confidence and chosen to invest here," he said.

India's EV market to reach ₹20 Lakh Crore, to create five Crore jobs by 2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said the Indian electric vehicle market potential is likely to touch Rs 20 lakh crore and will create around 5 crore jobs across the entire EV ecosystem by 2030. Addressing the 8th Catalyst Conference on Sustainability of E-Vehicle Industry - Evexpo 2024, Gadkari said estimated electric vehicles finance market size will be around Rs 4 lakh crore by 2030.



because of the transport sector. "We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, that is a big economic challenge. And this import of fossil fuels is creating a lot of problems in

our country," Gadkari said. According to Gadkari, the government is concentrating on green energy as 44 per cent of India's power basket is solar power. "We are giving highest priority for development of

our hydro power, then solar power, green power, particularly from biomass. And now solar power is one of the important sources for all of us," he said. The minister pointed out that

India is facing shortages of electric buses.

"Our country requires one lakh electric buses but our capacity is 50,000 buses. I request all of you that this is the appropriate time that you can expand your factory," he said. Gadkari asked electric vehicle manufacturers not to compromise with the quality. He said the size of India's automobile industry was Rs 7 lakh crore when he took charge as transport minister in 2014.

"Today it (the size of the automobile sector) is Rs 22 lakh crore. Our number is third in the world. We just surpassed Japan," he said. The size of the USA's automobile industry is Rs 78 lakh crore, followed by China (Rs 47 lakh crore) and India (Rs 22 lakh crore).

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari urges sugar industry to diversify into ethanol, green hydrogen

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Road, Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday called upon the sugar industry to explore multiple avenues for diversification, including ethanol-diesel blending and green hydrogen production.

Addressing the annual general meeting of the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) virtually, the minister emphasised the need for setting up ethanol and CNG pumps, including through private sector participation. There is a huge potential for flex engines, ethanol-based engines, and bioCNG as alternatives to fossil fuels.

Five automakers including Tata, Suzuki, and Toyota are set to launch flex engine fuel cars in the market, he said and urged the tractor makers to start manufacturing tractors on alternative fuels. The minister suggested



examining possibilities of exporting ethanol to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka to expand market opportunities. Bio-bitumen production using lignin and biomass sources, along with green hydrogen generation from sugar industry infrastructure, were highlighted as potential areas for expansion. He emphasised the potential of green hydrogen as an alternative fuel source and suggested using existing infrastructure in the sugar and ethanol industries to

produce green hydrogen. "I know that making sugar is not an attractive job, but at the same time, because of ethanol, CNG, hydrogen and other by-products, we can increase the productivity and profitability in the industry," he said. "The industry must focus on increasing sugarcane productivity through modern techniques like nano-fertilizers and drone spraying," the minister said. The government will also consider the industry's request for sugar exports and minimum selling price (MSP), the minister said.

Sebi introduces timelines for NFO fund deployment, eases AMC employee interest alignment rules

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to introduce timelines for deploying funds raised through New Fund Offers (NFOs) by asset management companies (AMCs) and relaxed regulatory framework regarding the alignment of AMC employees' interests with those of unitholders. Additionally, the regulator has mandated disclosure of stress testing for all mutual fund schemes to provide greater transparency to investors.



These proposals, approved Wednesday, aimed at enhancing operational

flexibility for mutual funds while ensuring greater accountability and trust among investors.

Regarding deployment timelines, Sebi said that fund managers must deploy funds collected during an NFO as per the specified asset allocation of the scheme, typically within 30 days.

If funds are not deployed within the specified timeline, investors will have the option to exit the scheme without paying an exit load, through regulator said in a statement. The framework discourages

AMCs from collecting excess funds during NFOs, as investors can invest in open-ended schemes later at the prevailing Net Asset Value (NAV).

"The new framework is aimed at encouraging AMCs to collect only as many funds in NFOs as can be deployed in a reasonable period of time (i.e. Ordinarily 30 days) since in the open-ended funds investors always have the option to enter the scheme at a later date at the prevailing NAV," Sebi said. "The framework provides an option to investors to

exit the scheme without exit load in case the fund manager is unable to deploy the fund within the specified timeline," it added.

To address the issue of possible mis-selling in NFOs, for switch transactions, the distributor shall be entitled to the lower of the two commissions offered under the two schemes of the switch transaction, Sebi said.

To facilitate ease of doing business for asset management companies' employees, Sebi has decided to relax the regulatory

framework pertaining to the 'Alignment of interest of AMC employees' with unitholders.

Under this, the regulator has decided to reduce the minimum investment amount required for designated employees, reduce the frequency of disclosures related to compliance relaxed requirements for employees managing liquid funds and simplified redemption norms.

Additionally, Sebi said that employees who resign will now have a reduced lock-in period for their

investments. The regulator has empowered the committee to oversee compliance by designated employees.

Sandeep Bagla, CEO, TRUST MF, said that Sebi having a relook at the 'Skin in the Game' regulation is a welcome step in the right direction.

The MF industry is expanding fast and needs to retain quality professionals to serve and safeguard the interests of unit holders. One needs to examine the relevance, context and effectiveness of regulations regularly," he added.

Flyzy partners with Adani Digital Labs to enhance dutyfree, Pranaam Service

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flyzy on Wednesday announced a partnership with Adani Digital Labs, a subsidiary of the Adani Group. This strategic collaboration will enable Flyzy customers to conveniently purchase duty-free items and avail Adani Pranaam services directly through the Flyzy's dashboard. The integration is now live, offering Flyzy users the ease of accessing these premium Adani services from their devices.

The signature Pranaam meet and greet services by Adani Digital Labs are designed to ensure a seamless experience, addressing key pain points for modern travellers.

"We at Flyzy are always thinking of solutions that will streamline travel experience for our users.

This partnership with Adani Digital Labs is also a step in that direction. Airport travel is all about convenience today and not many companies address the pain points of the travellers.

By integrating Adani services with Flyzy dashboard we aim to make airport travel smoother for millions of our users," said Deepak Meena, Co-founder & CEO, Flyzy. Flyzy has disrupted the traditional B2B travel industry by redefining travel operations for its clients by ensuring transparency, profitability, and scalability.

Rupee falls 14 paise to close at all-time low of 85.08 against US dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee dropped 14 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at an all-time low of 85.08 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as a hawkish stance from the US

Federal Reserve sparked a broad dollar rally.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee breached the 85-mark for the first time and fell to a new record low on Thursday, as the US Federal Reserve adjusted its projections for 2025, signalling a more cautious monetary policy stance, pressuring emerging market currencies, including the Indian rupee.

The US Federal Reserve cut interest rates by 25-bps to 4.5 per cent, in line with estimates. However, it signalled only two rate cuts in 2025 from its previous expectations of four rate cuts.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and breached the crucial 85.00 level against the greenback.

It fell further to an all-time low of 85.08 against the American currency, registering a fall of 14 paise over its previous close, as dollar demand from importers, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities further dented investor sentiments. On Wednesday, the rupee dropped 3 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.94 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on global equities following a

hawkish Fed and a strong dollar. Concerns over slowdown in the economy may further weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

Choudhary further noted that any intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may also support the rupee. "Traders may take cues from final GDP, weekly unemployment claims, and existing home sales data from the US, USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.9 to 85.25," he said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the

greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.13 per cent at 107.88.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.05 per cent to USD 73.35 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 964.15 points, or 1.20 per cent, down at 79,218.05 points, while Nifty settled down 247.15 points, or 1.02 per cent to 23,951.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 1,316.81 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Air India places order for 34 trainer aircraft

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India has placed an order for 34 trainer aircraft, including 31 single engine planes, for its flying training organisation in Maharashtra that is expected to come up by the second half of 2025.

The order includes 31 single-engine aircraft from piper aircraft in the US and three twin-engine planes from Austria-based Diamond Aircraft, the airline said in a release on Thursday.

The Flying Training Organisation (FTO) is being

set up at Belora airport in Amravati, Maharashtra. It is expected to be operational by the second half of next year post-regulatory approvals.

Sunil Bhaskaran, Director of Air India's Aviation Academy, said the FTO will help in building a self-reliant ecosystem of qualified pilots for both Air India and the country's aviation industry. The Tata Group-owned airline has opened its new Aviation Training Academy in Gurugram, Haryana. Air India group is expanding its fleet and network.

Indian Oil Corporation to invest over ₹21,000 Crore in Bihar refinery expansion

PTI ■ PATNA



Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) - the nation's top oil firm - will invest over Rs 21,000 crore to expand the Barauni refinery in Bihar as well as in setting up a city gas distribution network across the state, a senior executive said on Thursday.

IOC is expanding its Barauni refinery to 9 million tonnes per annum from current 6 million tonnes together with a petrochemical plant at a cost of about Rs 16,000 crore and invest another Rs 5,600 crore in setting up network to retail CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households and industries in 27 cities of Bihar, company Executive Director Suman Kumar said while

speaking at the Bihar Business Connect 2024 investor summit here.

"IOC is the oldest investor in Bihar, setting up the Barauni refinery in 1964. The initial capacity was 3 million tonnes per annum which was later

expanded to 6 million tonnes. Now we are expanding the capacity from 6 million tonnes to 9 million tonnes per annum. Alongside, a 200,000 tonnes polypropylene is also being set up," he said. Polypropylene will be the raw

material for the plastic industry.

The expansion and PP plant is scheduled to be commissioned by 2025-end.

Besides, IOC is also investing Rs 5,600 crore in setting up city gas distribution (CGD) network in 27 districts of Bihar, he said.

Previously, the company, along with partners, had spent Rs 9,512 crore in revival of the Barauni fertiliser plant, starting urea production in October 2022. The plant was part of a government initiative to revive closed urea units and increase the availability of domestically produced urea.

The investments are part of the IOC's aim to become a USD 1 trillion company by 2047, he said.

The USD 110 billion oil major has drawn up an aggressive capital expansion plan, proposing to invest more than Rs 2 lakh crore through the decade to expand refining capacity, petrochemical integration, allied infrastructure and renewable energy assets.

With India's economy on the rise, the energy needs of the country are growing exponentially. As 'The Energy of India', the firm aims to become the nation's lead energiser, fulfilling 12.5 per cent (1/8th) of India's energy needs by 2050, he said.

Besides Barauni, the state-run refinery is expanding the Panipat Refinery from 15 million tonnes to 25 million

tonnes a year and the Gujarat refinery from 13.7 million tonnes to 18 million tonnes, along with its integration to lube and petrochemical production units.

While the first phase of petchem expansions at Panipat in Haryana and Paradip in Odisha is complete, the one at Gujarat refinery is scheduled for commissioning in 2024-25. Alongside, it is pursuing green initiatives, including hydrogen mobility, hydrogen transportation, biofuels, electric mobility, solar cooktops, and minimising water footprint.

Oil demand in India, the world's third-largest energy consumer, is projected to rise from 5.4 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2023 to 9.3 million bpd by 2040. Fulfilling this rising demand will require augmenting the country's refining capacity progressively, from the current 256.8 million tonnes per annum to 450 million tonnes. In addition, the country is set to add 50 GW of renewable

energy capacity annually, aiming to achieve 500 gigawatts (GW) of installed renewable capacity by 2030.

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY
OPEN TENDER
E-tender on behalf of the president of India acting through Chief Project Manager, Gati Shakti Unit, West Central Railway, Jabalpur division. The following works:- **NIT No.-CPM/GSU-JBP/05-2024 Dated 13.12.2024. Name of work with location-Provision of Goods Shed at Ghatpindral of Itarsi-Jabalpur section of Jabalpur division.**
Approx cost of the work (Rs.)- 4,11,52,699/-, Earnest Money (Rs.)- 3,55,800/-. Completion period-12 Months. Last date & Time for submission of tender (Up to 15.00 Hrs. On)-09.01.2025. Tender to be opened at 15:15 Hrs on-09.01.2025.
The complete information of the above e-tender is available on website <https://ireps.gov.in> and also placed on notice board of the Chief Project Manager, Gati Shakti Unit, West Central Railway, Jabalpur. Tenders other than in the form of e-bids shall not be accepted against above tenders.
Chief Project Manager Gati Shakti Unit, Jabalpur
वेस्ट सेंट्रल रेलवे, गति शक्ति इकाई, जयपुर

Nearly half of Indian international travellers made last-minute flight bookings in 2024: report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2024 witnessed a rise in spontaneous travel among Indian international travellers, with nearly half of them making last-minute plans, barely less than a week before their departure, reveals a new report.

The travel report, conducted by travel-banking fintech platform Niyoy, highlights the evolving mindset of Indian travellers, who are embracing flexibility, prioritising experiences, and benefiting from streamlined travel processes. "Forty eight percent of international flight



bookings by Indians this year were made just 0-7 days before travel. This trend was supported by easier travel access, with 58

countries offering visa-free or visa-on-arrival options to Indian passport holders," reads the report findings. While many travellers

booked international flights at short notice, the report said "30 per cent of visa applications" were submitted 16-30 days before travel, implying a certain degree of preparation. Dubai, which according to the report was by far the most preferred destination for Indian travellers, attracted "45 per cent" of holidaymakers with its luxurious shopping and entertainment.

The list was followed by Vietnam, known for its culture and natural beauty, which drew 15 per cent of travellers. Smaller number of travellers, accounting for one per cent each, chose Oman and Japan. Pop culture also played a

significant influence on the travel choices of Indians this year. For instance, web series like "Emily in Paris" inspired many Indian women to visit France, with 30 per cent of Indians choosing France as their destination, followed by the UK (29 per cent) and Singapore (26 per cent).

The preferred travel destinations for Indian males were different. "Male travellers leaned towards Thailand, with 80 per cent preferring its beaches and vibrant nightlife, followed by the UAE (77 per cent) and the USA (76 per cent)," it added. Additionally, short holidays were the most popular in 2024, with "66 per cent" of

trips lasting less than seven days.

The number of travellers choosing extended vacations lasting 15 days or more was recorded "17 per cent".

With the increase in travel, more people also focused on safety as the report witnessed a record sale of 7,395 travel insurance policies in 2024, worth a total of Rs 43.2 crore.

"Younger travellers especially prioritised protection, often choosing insurance plans ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000," it added. The findings were based on the sample size of 1 million Indian international travellers.

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Young Researcher Award is instituted by the Lady Tata Memorial Trust (LTMT) to annually recognize and reward Young Indian scientists with outstanding track record in biological sciences and potential for high quality research with a deep commitment to find innovative solutions to major problems related to human diseases, blood disorder with special references to leukaemia and for scientific research towards alleviation of human suffering from disease.
Applications are also invited for Junior Research Fellowship, LTMT Research Grant and Teacher's Training Program for the year 2025-2026. For Detailed Information and online application process, please access our website www.ladytatatrust.org
Program Officer

India to play its Champions Trophy matches at neutral venue

PTI ■ DUBAI

The deadlock over the hosting of next year's Champions Trophy finally ended on Thursday when the ICC announced that India will play their matches of the 50-over event at a neutral venue instead of host country Pakistan, which will get a similar arrangement for tournaments to be held in India till 2027. The agreement will also extend to the 2028 women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in Pakistan. Although no formal announcement has been made, but India's Champions Trophy matches are likely to be held in the UAE. "The ICC Board has approved that all matches between India and Pakistan played at ICC Events during the current rights cycle from 2024 to 2027 (which are to be hosted in India or Pakistan)

will be played at a neutral venue proposed by the tournament host," said the ICC in a statement, confirming what PTI reported on December 5. The arrangement will also cover next year's women's World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka. "India's Champions Trophy games will most likely be played in the UAE. As far as the Women's ODI World Cup in India is concerned, the India-Pakistan game could be held in Sri Lanka," said a source. India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event scheduled in February-March due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was



back in 2012. Travelling to Pakistan also requires Indian government's clearance which has remained firm on the status quo. "The schedule for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is set to be confirmed soon," the ICC added. The decision, that came after a series of back-channel talks, was on expected lines after the sport's governing body maintained prolonged silence on the contentious matter during the previous set-up led by chairman Greg Barclay. His successor Jay Shah took charge on December 1 and all stakeholders, including the Pakistan Cricket Board, the BCCI and the broadcasters, were running out of time to organise the 50-over event that was last played in the UK in 2017. Thursday's announcement meant it was the first major decision taken in Shah's tenure.

While BCCI's stance was always clear, the matter got stretched because of PCB's refusal to allow a "one-sided" arrangement of neutral venues. Led by Pakistan interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB was determined not to lose face in front of the local public. PCB, which had sent its team to India for the ODI World Cup last year, had categorically opposed the hybrid model but eventually agreed to it on reciprocal grounds. The PCB had earlier indicated that it wanted a greater share in the annual revenue cycle to accommodate the Indian demand for a hybrid model but there is no word yet on whether that has been discussed or accepted. The tournament will feature eight teams, divided into two groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.



Ashwin deserved a fitting farewell: Kapil Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unable to comprehend R Ashwin's sudden decision to retire from international cricket, a shocked World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev says the premier off-spinner deserved a fitting farewell, ideally on home soil. Ashwin stunned one and all by calling it quits on Wednesday, right after the Brisbane Test against Australia ended in a draw. Kapil felt Ashwin seemed unhappy with something. "I was shocked by how one of India's greatest cricketers chose to leave the game. The disappointment among the fans was widespread, but I also saw a tinge of hurt on his face. He looked unhappy, and that was sad. He deserved much better, a fitting farewell," Kapil said in a statement to PTI. As has been his wont, Ashwin chose to walk his own way while retiring in the middle of an important series. Kapil said he would like to hear the Tamil Nadu man's side of the story. "He could have waited and announced his retirement on Indian soil, but I don't know why Ashwin called it a day. I would want to hear his side of the story. Give him that respect. He has played 106 Tests for the country. I don't think anyone can match his

humongous contribution to Indian cricket." Kapil hoped that the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) would arrange a "grand farewell" to Ashwin. "I'm sure the parent body of cricket in India, BCCI, shall plan a grand farewell for this giant match-winner of Team India," he said. Kapil, 65, said Ashwin was a stalwart, a versatile and unorthodox bowler, who constantly hustled the batters with his change of pace and cleverly disguised line and length. "He was ready to experiment, and that is what set him apart. In a game where the batters get the most accolades, Ashwin stood out with his prowess. "Ashwin was brave. He could bowl at any stage of the contest. Do you find bowlers with such tremendous tactical sense who can adapt quickly? He was his captain's go-to man," he said. Praising both his cricketing brain and off-field character, Kapil said Ashwin was a match-winner with no parallel in modern cricket. "He has won India's highest number of Man of the Series awards. That is a tremendous compliment that puts his game and consistency in perspective. He was not a "yes" man and came across as a gritty fighter.

ISL: FC Goa aim to end Mohun Bagan's unbeaten streak

PTI ■ MARGAO

FC Goa will seek to snap a rampaging Mohun Bagan Super Giant's eight-match unbeaten streak in the Indian Super League (ISL) when the two sides square off in a 12th round match here on Friday. FC Goa, under India head coach Manolo Marquez, will also aim to improve their record against the Mariners, having lost five of their eight meetings in the ISL, including a narrow 0-1 defeat in their most recent fixture in February. Super Giant's unbeaten run has seen them win seven and draw one of their last eight ISL games, and that has put them on top of the league leaderboard with 26 points from 11 matches, winning eight, drawing twice and losing once. On the other hand, the Gaur



are placed fourth with 19 points from the same number of games. Both these teams have been in equally efficient form upfront, with the Kolkata-based side netting 22 times in the competition thus far, as compared to the 21 of the Goan club. However, the visitors have

FC Goa head coach Marquez admitted that the Mariners have a nice mix of international and domestic stars that make them a strong opponent. "I feel that we are playing one of the strongest teams in the competition. Mohun Bagan have most of the top national team players, and they've spent a lot on getting good foreigners too," Marquez said. "We need to keep fighting to win" Super Giant head coach Jose Molina lauded his team for not giving up under any circumstance. "The mentality of Mohun Bagan Super Giant is to fight every game till the end. We have to attack and defend well, communicate properly, but most importantly we need to keep fighting to get the win," Molina said.



Australian top-three seriously out of form, should go back to basics: Ian Healy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A head of the crucial Boxing Day Test against India from December 26, legendary wicketkeeper Ian Healy has pointed out the serious lack of form of the top-three Australian batters and advised them to go to the basics and perform if they want to continue in the team. Australia made 445 in the first innings of the rain truncated third Test at Brisbane with Travis Head and Steve Smith smashing centuries but the home team did miserably in the second innings before declaring at 89 for 7. The match ended in a draw with the five-match Test series level at 1-1. "I don't see them (Australia) regressing going into Melbourne, but they are out of form, they're seriously out of form," Healy told SEN Radio. Openers Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney and one-drop batter Marnus Labuschagne performed below expectations at the Gabba before Smith and Head halted the slide with centuries in the first innings.

The second innings was even worse with the top three managing just 13 runs. "Questions have got to be asked of George Bailey: 'Can we get this form back? Are you confident that form will reemerge in our top three?' "Otherwise changes have to be made, and what suggestions might you have for us, George? That type of thing." Healy opined that the Melbourne Test should be Klawaja, McSweeney and Labuschagne's best chance to redeem themselves and asked the trio to get back to the basics. "The Melbourne Test is probably the least volatile wicket they'll play on and that's their best chance. But form takes a little longer than a week to turn around, and it's just not coming for them. "They've got to get right back to basics and strip it right back. See the ball and hit it, don't care where your feet go. That's the first step, just get some clarity in your head," said Healy. Australia must avoid defeat in Melbourne to keep their hopes alive of taking back the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Hazlewood 'frustrated' at missing remainder of India series due to 'random' injury

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood is "frustrated" by the timing of his injury after he was ruled out of the remaining two Tests against India due to a right calf strain sustained during the drawn third match at the Gabba. Hazlewood, who had also missed the second Test (pink-ball) in Adelaide - which Australia won by 10 wickets - due to a side strain, described the latest injury as "random". "Just frustrating really. Ticked every box heading into the (third) Test, I could understand if it was my side again, but it was just a random calf strain," he told 7NEWS. "It's just the timing again, they are only little 2-3 week injuries, it's just the timing of



it and missing big games is the frustrating thing." The 33-year-old Hazlewood was sent for scans after just one over of bowling on the fourth day after hurting his right calf in the warm-up before play. The injury only

turned out to be a strain, but it's expected to be serious enough to end his home Test summer early. "Obviously, do a deep dive into it and see what we can come up with... Feels pretty random," he said. "I've had a history of sides and calves, they're probably the two things that have kept me out for the majority over the last four years. "But yeah I sort of just keep adding another layer to the defence hopefully, get back into the gym, I've ticked a lot of boxes over the last 12 months." Hazlewood said he does not want to rush back to action before regaining full fitness, which he is hoping to achieve by the two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka in late January and February. "That's probably the goal, just take it as it comes over the next few weeks," he said. "No rush to get anything in a hurry, it's just getting everything right. Probably take a few extra days here and there. Ticking things off and getting everything right."

IOC publishes manifestos of 7 candidates running to be president and lead Olympics

AP ■ GENEVA

The seven candidates running for International Olympic Committee president had their manifestos published on Thursday, and one is offering to take just half of the eight-year mandate on offer and stand again in 2029. Sebastian Coe, the World Athletics president who turned 68 this year, pledged to embed "transformative change over the next four years" then seek re-election ahead of schedule. Coe was among several candidates offering to give back to IOC members - who elect their president at a March 18-21 meeting near the site of Ancient Olympia in Greece - a decisive choice in picking future host cities. Under the hands-on presidency of Thomas Bach, who reaches his limit of 12 years in office next year, members now simply rubber-stamp a single host candidate

that has worked with the IOC administration. Two members of the Bach-chaired IOC executive board, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr. and Prince Feisal al Hussein, joined Coe in promising to empower members to have a bigger role in the Olympic body. They also promise to raise the retirement age for members from 70 to 75 years. Members must be invited to join the exclusive IOC club and the current 111 include European and Middle East royalty, leaders of international sports bodies, former and current Olympic athletes, politicians, diplomats, industrialists and an Oscar-winning actress. Only IOC members can be presidential candidates and the other contenders are board member Kirsty Coventry and three more presidents of sports governing bodies: Johan Eliasch from skiing, David Lappartient from cycling, and Morinari Watanabe from



gymnastics. The manifesto releases are one of just two set-piece events in a mostly opaque campaign with strict rules to limit self-promotion and

engagement with voters. Candidates will present themselves to voters, though not take questions, at a Jan. 30 meeting at IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The IOC has had no female president and just nine men leading it in a 130-year history. Eight of those presidents were from Europe and one from the United

States. Coventry, the 41-year-old sports minister of Zimbabwe, is just the second female candidate ever to run for the IOC leadership and is widely

seen as Bach's preferred choice to continue his policies. Coventry and Coe are two-time Olympic champions in swimming and track, respectively. Coe also led organising the 2012 London Olympics. Coe upset the IOC establishment - including some voters - this year by committing World Athletics to pay \$50,000 prize money to gold medalists in track and field at the Paris Olympics. The sport also will pay silver and bronze medalists at the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games. Though not specifying prize money, Prince Feisal called for Olympic athletes to be "properly valued" while Samaranch proposed letting athletes use footage of their performances on social media channels. That would relax strict IOC rules on Olympic athletes' ability to promote themselves. Challenges facing the IOC

include picking a host for the 2036 Olympics, with India and Qatar in the mix, and looking at moving the Summer Games from its established July-August place in the modern sports calendar. The next IOC president also must address the impact of climate change on the global sports calendar, gender issues in sports, when and how to bring Russia back fully into the Olympic Games and signing a new U.S. Broadcast deal. Long-time partner NBC's deal expires after the 2032 Brisbane Olympics and has been a foundation of Olympic revenue, which was \$7.6 billion in the 2021-24 Olympic cycle. The IOC presidency has been limited to 12 years in anti-corruption reforms passed after the Salt Lake City bidding scandal erupted in 1999. The first term is eight years and presidents can seek a second and final term of four years.



11 दिसम्बर - 26 दिसम्बर 2024

जनकल्याण
पर्व



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Convocation Ceremony

Chief Guest
Mangubhai Patel
Governor

Hon'ble Presence
Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister

12:00 PM | Dr. Ambedkar Nagar (Mhow), Indore

Inauguration
880 MW Agar & Neemuch
Solar Projects
Foundation Laying &
Inauguration of Various
Development Projects

2:00 PM | Susner, Agar-Malwa

Inauguration &
Foundation Laying
of Development
Projects

(Worth ₹1000 Crores)

4:00 PM
Atal Bihari Vajpayee College, Indore

By
Chief Minister
Dr. Mohan Yadav
20th December, 2024

D-11129/24

- Power generation from renewable energy sources increased 14 times in 12 years to 7,000 MW
- First project in India to get Solar Power at rates below coal-based power
- Development of 450 MW Capacity Solar Park at Shajapur
- 278 MW power generation started from Omkareshwar Floating Solar Power Project
- 2000 MW capacity solar park to be developed between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh
- Sanchi becomes first solar city, Har Ghar Solar Abhiyan to make Indore a solar city
- State's first Solar Power storage plant to be set up in Morena
- Target to solarize 2060 Villages under Pradhan Mantri Jan-Man Yojana

Madhya Pradesh Contributing Towards Greener Tomorrow

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