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INSIDE

WORLD 8

'WE SHOULD TRY AGAIN': PUNJAB ASSEMBLY SPEAKER ON FAILED INDIA-PAK PEACE INITIATIVE

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Light rainfall lashed several parts of Delhi on Tuesday evening, temperatures are expected to drop further in the next two days. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

AQI under 400, Grap-III invoked in Delhi NCR

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

WEATHER

AQI	369
MAX	20.8°C
MIN	9.9°C

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Tuesday assessed the situation and lifted the restrictions of Stage-IV under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in Delhi and the neighbouring region, following a decline in pollution levels. However, the restrictions under GRAP Stage I, II and III will continue including curbs on construction and industrial activities remain in place to control pollution levels. The Stage-IV was enforced on December 16 in Delhi and NCR when it breached the 400 mark.

The decision comes after Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) improved to 369 ('Very

impact of air pollution on health and daily life. Under Stage-III, classes up to five are required to shift to hybrid mode. Parents and students have the option to choose online education, wherever available. Stage III bans on non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards within Delhi. The restrictions also include on plying of BS-III petrol and BS IV diesel LMVs (4 wheelers) in Delhi and in the districts of Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Budh Nagar. Persons with Disabilities shall be permitted to ply BS-III Petrol / BS-IV Diesel LMVs, provided that these are specifically adopted for them and are run only for their personal use.

Dalit boy dies by suicide after being forced to drink urine

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a horrifying incident from Uttar Pradesh's Basti district, a 17-year-old Dalit boy died by suicide after being subjected to brutal assault and humiliation during a birthday party. The boy was allegedly forced to strip, beaten, made to drink urine, and further humiliated by being forced to lick spit. The perpetrators also recorded the abuse. Traumatized by the ordeal, the boy hanged himself at his maternal uncle's house on Monday.

The victim, a Class 10 student living with his maternal uncle in Kaptanganj, was invited to a birthday party on December 20 by a local youth. According to the complaint filed by his uncle, the boy was ambushed at the gathering, where four to five individuals forced him to strip and assaulted him. They urinated in his mouth and recorded the incident. When the boy later demanded the deletion of the video, the accused humiliated him further by forcing him to lick their spit. Unable to bear the trauma and humiliation, the boy returned home, narrated the incident to his family, and later took his life by hanging. The family approached the police soon after the incident, but the initial response was reportedly lackluster. Two suspects were detained briefly but were released the same evening. This inaction prompted the grieving family to take the boy's body to the Superintendent of Police (SP) office, demanding justice. Amid public outrage, a case was registered against four individuals under charges of assault, criminal intimidation, and abetment of suicide. Three accused—Vinay Kumar, Akash, and Kaju Prasad—have been arrested, while efforts are ongoing to nab the fourth suspect, Sonal. The boy's family revealed that he had been facing harassment from the accused for some time.

Delhi Police bust gang settling illegal migrants, 11 arrested



SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Even as a high voltage political drama has been underway over the issue of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi immigrants staying illegally in the National Capital, the murder of a man, who used to push women in prostitution, led to the Delhi Police in busting a gang involved in settling these immigrants in Delhi. Police have arrested 11 people including four Bangladeshi nationals.

The accused involve seven people who were allegedly involved in making forged documents including Aadhaar card, birth certificates, caste certificates, matriculation certificates, COVID certificates, and income certificates, at nominal prices starting from

Rs 7, Aadhaar operators and tech experts. A woman in the intervening night of October 20 and 21 came to Sangam Vihar police station to report that her husband, Santu Sheikh alias Raja, has been murdered which led to the police tracking down four people involved in his murder and subsequently busting the gang. The Bangladeshi nationals, 26 years old Midul Miyan alias Akash Ahmed and 24 years old Fardeen Ahmed alias Abhi Ahmed along with their wives, were arrested and interrogated in connection with the murder of Santu Sheikh alias Raja. Among the motives behind the murder, Raja used to push the wives of the accused into prostitution and also tried to make physical relations with

them while also bullying them for minor issues. They all lived in close proximity. "However, the police learnt during interrogation that these accused had entered India illegally and had been residing in Sangam Vihar for several years," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Ankit Chauhan said. They were found in possession of Bangladeshi ID cards (chip-based NID cards) and birth certificates. Around 21 Aadhaar cards, four voter ID cards, and eight PAN cards were also recovered from the victim's residence. Chauhan said, "Under the guidance of Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, we formed a team to unearth the entire matter and conduct a thorough probe into the illegal immigration issue." These immigrants came to India through the jungle route and then took bikes and taxis to reach the nearest town from where they took AC trains to travel to Delhi, he said. Further questioning of the accused led to the arrest of 26 year old Sahil Sehgal who ran a 'Poonam Online Computer Centre' in Rohini Sector 5.

Rupee at fresh record low of 85.20 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee extended the slide for the second straight session and depreciated 9 paise to settle at a fresh all-time low of 85.20 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, dragged by a strong greenback against major crosses overseas and subdued domestic equities. According to analysts, increased demand of the dollar due to month-end payment obligations and the fear of an aggressive import tariff by the Donald Trump administration in the US strengthened the greenback. Besides, surging crude oil prices pushed the rupee down further, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.10 and touched

the lowest ever level of 85.21 against the greenback during intra-day. The unit finally ended the session at a fresh all-time low of 85.20 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 9 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee settled 7 paise lower at 85.11 against the US dollar. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee fell to a fresh all-time low on weak domestic markets and a strong US dollar due to increased demand from importers and surging crude oil prices. He said a hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve and an improved US economy may further support the dollar. "FII outflows may also weigh on the rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI may support



the rupee at lower levels. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 85 to Rs 85.40," Choudhary said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.11 per cent at 107.93, amid soaring US Treasury yields and the fear of delayed interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.69 per cent to USD 73.13 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed lower by 67.30 points, or 0.09 per cent, at 78,472.87 points, while Nifty fell 25.80 points, or 0.11 per cent to close at 23,727.65 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 168.71 crore, according to exchange data.

Former Home Secy Bhalla is new Manipur Gov

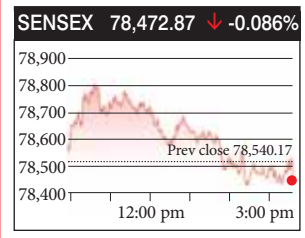
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major reshuffle, former Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla has been appointed as Manipur Governor amid ongoing trouble in the north eastern State. Some of the other States where change was effected according to a Rashtrapati Bhawan communique includes former Union Minister and army chief Vijay Kumar Singh was appointed as Mizoram Governor, while Arif Mohammed Khan was moved to Bihar as Governor. In a surprise move following the resignation of Raghuraj Das as Odisha governor, Hari Babu Kamshampati was appointed as the new man for the State's gubernatorial post. Das has served earlier as Chief Minister of Jharkhand and State Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President as well.



Park street, Kolkata all decked up for Christmas eve. PTI

MARKETS



LoPs record dissent over NHRC postings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leaders of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi had recorded their dissent over the selection of the Chairperson and Members of the National Human Rights Commission on the grounds that the process adopted was "fundamentally flawed" and a "predetermined" exercise that ignored mutual consultation and consensus. They had proposed the names of Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman and Justice KM Joseph for the position of chairperson. The Opposition leader's dissent note was released to the media a day after former Supreme Court judge V Ramasubramanian was appointed as the new Chairperson of the NHRC. The Opposition leaders also suggested retired High Court judges Muralidhar and Akil Abdulhamid Qureshi as NHRC Members. The meeting of the Selection Committee for picking the Chairperson and Members of the NHRC was held on December 18 at the Parliament House. The Selection Committee is headed by the Prime Minister and the panel comprises Lok Sabha Speaker, Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha, Home Minister and Leaders of Opposition from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Accident in Poonch: Five soldiers killed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

At least five Indian soldiers were killed and several others received injuries after the vehicle in which they were travelling rolled down in a deep gorge in the Balnoi sector of the frontier Poonch district on Tuesday. The soldiers were on operational duty at the time of the mishap. Initial reports suggested the army vehicle skidded off the road and rolled down a deep gorge after the driver lost control of the vehicle. Confirming the same Nagrota-based White Knight Corps in a post on X said, "All ranks of White Knight Corps extend their deepest condolences on the tragic loss of five brave soldiers in a vehicle accident during operational duty in the Poonch sector." According to statement the vehicle, part of an army convoy, veered off the road near the Line of Control (LoC). At the time of filing the report, the rescue operations were going on, and the injured personnel were receiving medical care in a nearby hospital.

Jump in Maharashtra voter turnout normal: EC issues FAQs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid concerns flagged by the Congress, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday clarified the misconception regarding the jump in voting percentage in Maharashtra that occurred on polling day saying the increase in voter turnout from 5 pm to 11.45 pm is normal and there were no arbitrary additions or deletions of voters in the state. In its 66-page response to the Congress, the Commission said it would not be correct to compare 5 pm voter turnout data with final polling data. The poll body asserted that it is impossible to change actual voter turnout as statutory Form 17C giving details of voter turnout is available with authorised agents of candidates at the time of close of poll at the polling station itself. The Congress had approached the poll panel in November flagging various concerns related to the Maharashtra assembly polls. In a letter to the EC, the Congress said that there was an "inexplicable increase" in voter turnout between 5pm and the final voter percentage announced by the EC at 11.30pm on the day of polling. Coming out with a detailed



note and frequently asked questions (FAQs), the EC told the Congress that increase in voter turnout from 5 PM to 11:45 PM was normal, being part of the process of aggregation of voter turnout. It said there can be bona fide but inconsequential differences in votes polled and votes counted. It said rule-based process was followed with transparency in Maharashtra electoral roll preparation and there was no irregular pattern in voter deletions in the state. It told the Congress that due process was followed, including participation of Congress representatives in preparation of electoral rolls. The poll body said that its complaint of an average addition of 50,000 electors between July and November in 47 assembly seats, out of which 47 have been won by the Mahayuti, is factually incorrect and misleading.

Cattle shelters along highways: Unique solution to a perennial problem

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In a step to enhance road safety and address the challenge of stray cattle and to avoid animal-related accidents on the National Highways (NH), the central road making agency National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has taken a pilot project to provide cattle shelters along the NHs. The initiative aims to create a safer travel experience for commuters while ensuring care and management of stray cattle, and animals found along the National Highways. With shelter areas ranging from 0.21 to 2.29 hectares, shelters under the pilot project will be strategically located to serve as safe spaces for stray cattle, reducing their presence on National Highways. The initiative will be implemented on various National Highway stretches, including the UP/Haryana Border to Rohna

section of NH-334B, where shelters will be set up along the Kharkhoda Bypass. Similarly, shelters will be constructed along Bhiwani - Hansi section of NH-148B at Hansi Bypass, Kiratpur-Nerchowk section of NH-21 and the Dangiawas to Jajiwala section of the Jodhpur Ring Road on NH-112. The NHAI has been facing challenges posted by stray cattle/animal movement on National Highway in several states across the country which is hazardous to road users' safety. Although several steps for removal of cattle from the National Highways were taken in the past but they could not get anticipated success due to several ancillary issues having social and sensitive angles, which included problems pertaining to unknown ownership/transportation of cattle/healthcare/ first aid treatment



during transportation of any injured animals, feeding the cattle till identification of owner or handing them over to the State Government agencies. Several Courts in various states were also very keen in holistic resolution of the changes posted by movement of stray cattle on National Highways. Although control for the root cause of this

NHAI. The concessionaire will also maintain these shelters by providing first aid, adequate fodder, water, and caretakers throughout the concession period, ensuring the well-being of the animals. To further support this initiative, the concessionaire under its CSR initiative will deploy cattle ambulances to transport and treat injured stray animals, set up first-aid centres and hospitals to cater 50 km on each side for timely medical care of these animals. Beyond the construction and maintenance of shelters, the concessionaire will ensure safe transportation of stray cattle to these facilities, provide feed and enforce the provisions of the Cattle Trespass Act, 1871. NHAI Chairman Santosh Kumar Yadav said by addressing the challenges posed by stray cattle/animals on the National

Highways, this unique initiative is another step that furthers NHAI's commitment to not only to create safer National Highways for commuters by enhancing road safety but also fulfils a humane requirement of taking care of stray cattle/animals. "I am sure that this initiative will set a new benchmark for a holistic National Highway infrastructure development in the country," Yadav said. Sharing his thoughts Dineshchandra Agrawal, President - National Highway Builders Federation said "We welcome this step from NHAI to develop shelters for stray cattle/animals along the National Highways and offer our support for this initiative. I would urge our members to come forward and partner in this path breaking initiative that will help spread this noble cause of rehabilitating stray animals and enhancing road safety."

Modi to lay foundation for Ken-Betwa river linking project

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation of the country's first ambitious and multipurpose Ken-Betwa National River Linking Project in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh on December 25 on the 100th anniversary of Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Prime Minister Modi will dedicate the country's first Omkareshwar floating solar project and perform the bhoomi puja of 1153 Atal Gram Sushasan buildings and distribute its first installment. Prime Minister Modi will also release a stamp and coin in memory of Vajpayee. This will be a big gift for Madhya Pradesh on the birth anniversary of Late Vajpayee, the visionary who gave the concept of river linking to the country. Prime Minister

Modi will arrive in Khajuraho on Wednesday at 12:10 pm and leave to Delhi at 2:20 pm. Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, and Union Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil will also be especially present in the programme. The foundation laying of this project will give final shape to the dream of Late Vajpayee in Madhya Pradesh. The Ken-Betwa Link National Project is the largest irrigation project in the country adopting an underground pressurized piped irrigation system. This project will provide irrigation facilities to 8 lakh 11 thousand hectare area in 10 districts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Tikamgarh, Niwari, Damoh, Shivpuri, Datia, Raisen, Vidisha, and Sagar. The project will benefit 44 lakh farmer fam-

ilies. An increase in crop production and farmers' income will strengthen the rural economy and construction of hydropower projects will generate new employment opportunities and 103 MW contribution in green energy as well. Better water management and adequate water supply to industrial units will lead to industrial development and will also boost employment. The Ken-Betwa project will provide 59 thousand hectares of annual irrigation facility in Uttar Pradesh and the existing irrigation in 1.92 lakh hectare area will be stabilized. The irrigation facilities will be provided in Mahoba, Jhansi, Lalitpur and Banda districts of Uttar Pradesh. The project will provide drinking water facility to 44 lakh population of Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh population of Uttar

Pradesh. Modi will dedicate the floating solar project established at Omkareshwar in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh. The first phase of the project has started Power generation at full capacity in October this year in . For the 240 MW capacity of the second phase, it is proposed to sign a contract with the selected developer "Sutlej Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited" after necessary consent from MPPACA. Dedicating the Omkareshwar Floating Solar Project on the sacred river Maa Narmada to the people of the state reflects the government's continuous efforts towards energy self-reliance and green energy of the state. Modi will also distribute the first installment after performing Bhoomi puja of 1153 Atal Gram Sushasan Bhawans in Madhya Pradesh. Out of 23

thousand Gram Panchayats of the state, 2500 Gram Panchayats without buildings, dilapidated buildings, and unusable buildings have been identified for approval of new buildings. In the initial phase, works worth Rs 437.62 crore have been approved for 1153 new Panchayat buildings. Former Prime Minister Late Vajpayee believed that the Panchayat building is the most basic and important infrastructure of Gram Panchayat. These buildings have an important role in the practical implementation and execution of the work and responsibilities of the Gram Panchayats. To strengthen the Panchayats, the Madhya Pradesh Government has decided to approve new Panchayat buildings in all Gram Panchayats and Cluster Panchayat buildings at the cluster level.



Priests offer prayers during a midnight mass on the eve of Christmas at St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral Church in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Sharp rise in Chikungunya cases, experts warn of health risks

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh is grappling with a rising number of Chikungunya cases, with the disease spreading rapidly despite crores of rupees spent annually to combat virus-borne illnesses. The alarming situation has been highlighted by the recent death of a doctor in Indore due to Chikungunya-related complications. Health experts are raising concerns over the mutation of the Chikungunya virus, which is now reported to affect vital organs like the heart and kidneys. In Bhopal, the number of Chikungunya cases has seen a sharp increase, causing significant health challenges. Patients report persistent joint pain, weakened immunity, and vulnerability to ill-

In Bhopal, the number of Chikungunya cases has seen a sharp increase, causing significant health challenges

nesses like arthritis. A unique symptom, black spots or "chick signs," has also been observed near the nose and cheeks, with 5-10 new cases reported daily in the city. So far, 593 cases have been reported in 2024, the highest in the last five years, surpassing the 756 cases reported in 2019. Experts note that testing and confirmation protocols at government hospitals have become more stringent, potentially under-reporting the true extent of the outbreak. Bhopal, Gwalior, and Indore have emerged as major hotspots. Health officials

attribute the surge to an increase in mosquito populations following the monsoon. The Aedes mosquito, which transmits the virus, is most active during the day. Insufficient fogging and anti-larval measures by local authorities have further worsened the situation. Dr Sumit Rawat, Virology Expert and Associate Professor of Microbiology, explained the symptoms: "Chikungunya causes high fever, joint swelling, heel and foot pain, and red rashes on the hands and feet. Patients often feel weak due to low platelet counts." The new strain of the

Chikungunya virus is presenting severe complications, including myositis (intense muscle pain), skin swelling, and itching. Dr. Preksha Dwivedi, Associate Professor and Rheumatologist at GMC Bhopal, reported cases of heart muscle swelling and even heart attacks in some patients. Experts are urging intensified efforts in mosquito control measures, including regular fogging and anti-larval spraying, to curb the spread of the disease. They stress the need for increased awareness and early detection to manage complications and reduce fatalities. As the state battles the growing menace, health officials and residents must work together to mitigate the impact of this evolving public health crisis.

Cyber gang busted for creating fake FB ID of Police Commissioner

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Cyber Crime Branch of Bhopal has arrested a gang of cyber criminals from Sironj, Vidisha, on the charge of their involvement in creating fake Facebook IDs in the name of Bhopal Police Commissioner and activating SIM cards for fraudsters and these SIM cards were used by cyber criminals to for frauds, accused had provided around 150 SIM cards to cyber criminals. The gang used these SIM cards to cheat people, promising them free SIM cards and defrauding them in the process. The accused would travel to different villages, promising villagers free SIM cards. They would take out two SIM cards at once using the documents of the villagers, give one to the

customer, and keep the second. The second SIM was provided to cyber criminals who used it to commit fraud. The investigation into the gang began after a complaint was filed by Mahesh Kumar, a Bhopal resident, on November 5, 2024. Kumar reported that he had received a fraudulent message from a fake Facebook ID "Hari Narayan," using the photo of IPS officer Hari Narayanchari Mishra. The message lured him into a scam involving the sale of old furniture at cheap prices. The fraudster sent a QR code to Kumar, and he transferred Rs 45,000, believing the offer to be legitimate. Based on this complaint, the Cyber Crime Branch registered a case and launched an investigation. The accused gang created a fake Facebook ID in the name

of "Hari Narayan," using the image of IPS officer Hari Narayanchari Mishra. They befriended people through the fake ID and posed as an officer involved in a transfer and communicated via messenger, offering furniture at discounted prices. The criminals sent images of expensive furniture and convinced victims to transfer money to fake bank accounts to receive a bill for the furniture, which was never delivered. The Cyber Crime team traced the actual user of the WhatsApp number and Facebook ID used in the fraud. The team identified the main accused and arrested four individuals from Sironj, Vidisha, who had activated SIM cards for the gang leader. The police seized four mobile phones, 36 SIM cards,

and other documents used in the crime. The arrested individuals are Akash (19) from Lateri, Vidisha, who activated SIM cards for the gang; Rahul Panthee (22), who sold SIM cards to other gang members; Vivek Raghuvanshi (22), used to sell SIM cards purchased from Rahul; and Sonu (22) from Garetha, Vidisha, who sold SIM cards to another gang member, Aslam. Previously, two key gang members Sunil Kumar Prajapati (24) from Rajasthan, who made calls and withdrew the stolen money, and Shakeel the main gang leader, who created the fake Facebook ID and managed the scam were arrested. A total of six gang members have now been arrested. The Cyber Crime team continues to investigate the case.



People under the banner of Virasat-e-Bhopal stage a protest demanding removal of administrative restrictions on historic Iqbal Maidan, at the district collector office in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

AIIMS pioneers haploidentical bone marrow transplant

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The AIIMS Bhopal has once again demonstrated its excellence in medical research, innovation and patient care. Recently, the institute achieved a historic milestone in the treatment of pediatric blood cancer by successfully performing a Haploidentical bone marrow transplant on a seven-year-old girl who was suffering from relapsed acute lymphoblastic leukemia (childhood blood cancer). This complex procedure was carried out a month ago under the leadership of Dr. Gaurav Dhingra and Dr. Sachin Bansal from the Department of Medical Oncology and Hematology. The child had been receiving treatment under the supervision of Dr. Narendra Choudhary in the Pediatric Oncology Department at AIIMS Bhopal. The patient's brother was selected as the donor, as he was a half-HLA (Human Leukocyte Antigen) match with her.



The patient received a myeloablative conditioning regimen with total body irradiation, which was successfully administered by Dr. Saikat Das, Dr. Vipin Kharade, and Physicist (RSO) Avaneesh Mishra from the Radiation Oncology Department. This procedure is a significant achievement for AIIMS Bhopal, as it has become the second AIIMS after AIIMS Delhi to provide such advanced bone marrow transplant services for blood cancer in children. AIIMS Bhopal ED Prof Ajai

Singh appreciated this achievement, saying, "This success is a testament to AIIMS Bhopal's dedication and advanced medical services. Successfully completing complex procedures like the Haplo-identical bone marrow transplant demonstrates the expertise and commitment of our institution's team. With this achievement, AIIMS Bhopal has set a new direction in the treatment of pediatric blood cancer." Prof. Singh wished the patient a speedy recovery and recommended regular follow-ups.

Cong takes out Ambedkar Samman march

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Party workers and leaders led by its Rajya Sabha member and former chief minister Digvijaya Singh and state unit president Jitu Patwari took out "Ambedkar Samman March" from Lily Talkies Square to Jinsi on Tuesday. The protesters raised slogans against the BJP and accused Shah of insulting Dr Ambedkar during the debate on the Constitution in the Rajya Sabha last week. The protesters held placards carrying pictures of Dr Ambedkar and raised slogans demanding Shah's resignation. Talking to reporters, state Congress chief Jitu Patwari accused the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and BJP leaders of opposing the ideology of Dr Ambedkar and the Constitution.

Twelve shops gutted, firefighting vehicles vandalized at Amarkantak

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

At least 12 tin-shed shops were destroyed in a fire at a local market in Amarkantak town, located in Madhya Pradesh's Anuppur district, on Tuesday. The incident escalated when angry shop owners allegedly vandalized a firefighting vehicle, accusing the team of delayed response. The fire, which reportedly began due to a short circuit in one shop, quickly spread to adjacent eateries. Shop owners, workers, and locals attempted to douse the flames with water before the Fire Department arrived. Although firefighters managed to control the blaze, shop owners expressed their frustration, alleging negligence and delayed arrival. The situation turned chaotic, forcing the firefighting team to retreat for safety. A video circulating on social media shows the vandalized firefighting vehicle. Local police later arrived to restore order and began identifying individuals involved in the violence. "No casualties were reported in the incident," police said,

Although firefighters managed to control the blaze, shop owners expressed their frustration, alleging negligence and delayed arrival

adding that a complaint has been filed by the Fire Department. "Preliminary investigations suggest the fire originated from a short circuit. Further details will emerge as the inquiry progresses." Authorities also stated that action would be taken against individuals running shops without mandatory approvals. Officials from the district administration inspected the scene to assess damages and legal compliance. This incident follows another major fire earlier this month on December 5, which broke out in the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary. Investigations into both incidents are ongoing.

Governor Patel administers oath of good governance

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Governor Mangubhai Patel administered the oath of good governance to the officers and employees of Raj Bhavan on the occasion of Good Governance Day. He also instructed everyone to follow the good governance oath with devotion. Good Governance Day was celebrated at Raj Bhavan in the context of the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee on December 25. Governor Patel administered the oath to the attending officers and employees to always remain committed to uphold high standards of good governance in the state. He administered them pledge to pledge to make every possible effort to make the governance more transparent, participatory, public welfare-oriented and accountable and to always be ready to achieve the goal of enhancing the standard of living of the citizens of the state.

Caught using phone during exam, class 10 student commits suicide

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A Class 10 student in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district allegedly died by suicide after being caught using a mobile phone during a pre-board examination. The incident occurred on Monday night in Utawad village, about 10 kilometers from the district headquarters. Nagaon Police Station in-charge Sunil Sharma stated that the student's family revealed during questioning that he had been caught using a mobile phone during an examination at a private school earlier that day. According to the family, the school management took disciplinary action against him, which they believe may have led him to take the extreme step. The boy was rushed to a hospital by his family that night, but doctors declared him dead. Preliminary investigations suggest the cause of death was hanging. A case has been registered, Sharma said. Rakesh Yadav, the principal of Dhar Public School, confirmed the student was caught using a mobile phone during the pre-board mathematics exam. The invigilating teacher confiscated

The incident occurred on Monday night in Utawad village, about 10 kilometers from the district headquarters

the phone and issued the student a new answer sheet to continue his exam. Yadav added that after completing the exam, the student informed the school office he would bring his elder brother the following day to retrieve the confiscated phone. However, the school learned later that night about the student's tragic death. Gaurav Raghuvanshi, a relative of the deceased, stated that the school had informed the family about the phone incident. After returning home, the student reportedly did not speak to anyone and isolated himself in a room where he allegedly took his life. Authorities are investigating the matter to establish the sequence of events and any contributing factors.

AIIMS Bhopal doctors team honoured in Gwalior

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the leadership of Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, a three-day Mega Medical Camp is being organized in Gwalior from December 25 to 27, in commemoration of the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. For this purpose, a team of 160 doctors and paramedics from AIIMS Bhopal set off in four buses on Tuesday. This medical camp is being organized to provide free, high-quality medical services to the people of Gwalior and surrounding areas. During the journey to Gwalior, philanthropist of Guna, Manish Krishnani made special arrangements for refreshments and snacks in Biaoara and Guna for the team. Honoring the doctors, he said, "Doctors are the true heroes of society, saving lives through their hard work and continuous service. Their dedication and sacrifice cannot be expressed in words, but respecting them is our greatest responsibility." The three-day camp will offer 25 different specialties and super-specialty OPDs. These



will include expert doctors from departments such as cardiology, cardiothoracic and vascular surgery, nephrology, neurology, orthopedics, pediatrics, oncology, general medicine, and more, who will provide consultation, diagnosis, and treatment guidance to the patients. Prof. Ajai Singh emphasized the importance of the camp, stating, "This Mega Medical Camp is an effort to honor the legacy of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his deep connection with Gwalior. Our goal is to make high-quality medical services accessible to the general public. AIIMS Bhopal will ensure

that patients receiving treatment at the camp are provided with continuous medical care at the institute if needed."

Change of Name
In My previous passport. My name was written as SULEM ULLAH KHAN. While in my 10th & 12th class Marksheets. My name wrongly entered as SULEM ULLAH. I have been known by both name. Now, all my present documents. My full & correct name known as SULEM ULLAH KHAN S/O IMRAN ULLAH KHAN. Resident D-1, Karbala Road, Mansab Manzil, Junagad Kohefiza Bhopal (M.P.) 462001

Kathas illuminate the path to life's philosophy: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that Sanatan culture has its own special importance. Man has received life to do good deeds. By listening to kathas, we get the path of philosophy of life, which always inspires us to progress towards the right path. Gauseva is equal to service to God. Sant Kamal Kishore Nagar Maharaj is moving forward with a huge resolution of gauseva. Due to the efforts of Sant Shri, the responsibility of rearing gamata is being carried out selflessly in the entire state including Malwa, Nimar and tribal areas which is commendable. The Bhagwad Gita inspires us to follow the law of Karma, hence it is necessary that every person

should do such good deeds, so that their future generations follow the path of virtue and make their lives meaningful. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav was addressing the devotees present in the Bhagwad Katha organized at Shrimad Bhagwad Gausala in Chhittauda, ??Sanver in Indore district on Tuesday. Chief Minister Yadav announced to dedicate the land of Shrimad Bhagwad Gausala Chittoda to establish and expand the cowshed. He said that by organizing Gita Jayanti, the state government has done the work of spreading the message of Lord Krishna's deeds in the entire state. The sacred work started by Sant Shri Kamal Kishore Ji Nagar selflessly of running the cowshed is praiseworthy. Sant Shri has



created many ideals along with running the Gausala, which is working to give a new direction to the society. He also appreciated the efforts of State Water Resources Minister Shri Tulsiram Silavat. Chief Minister Yadav said that the river linking campaign in the state will work to give a new direction to development. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will give a

new direction to development through the Ken-Betwa river linking campaign on December 25. He said that the linking of two rivers campaign in the state will increase the area under irrigation in large areas of about 25 districts, which will change the picture and fate of Malwa and Bundelkhand regions. A large area of ??the state will benefit from the river linking campaign. Chief Minister Yadav said that the state government has made special efforts to encourage cattle rearing. Each village of 313 blocks of the state, where there are more than 500 cattle, will be developed ideally by making them Vrindavan villages. At the same time, cattle rearers rearing more than 10 cows will be encouraged through grants.

He said that in the coming time, bonuses will also be given on purchase of milk. Our aim is to increase milk production in every household and make the state self-reliant. The Chief Minister said that special efforts are being made to promote cow rearing in the state. He praised the efforts being made by Sant Kamal Kishore Ji Nagar for cow protection and cow shelter. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav offered prayers to Vyas Peeth and felicitated Sant Shri Nagar by presenting him a shawl. Chief Minister Yadav was honoured with a safa. On this occasion, MLA Ramesh Mendola, Chindu Verma along with officials of Shrimad Bhagwad Gau-Shala Chittoda and a large number of devotees were present.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav goes through an exhibition on former Prime Minister Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the eve of his birth anniversary, at BJP state headquarters in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo



Police personnel patrol after group clash between two communities near Laxmiganj old grain market in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Dispute over motorcycle escalates to violent fight

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A violent dispute erupted between two neighbours in the old Galla Mandi area of Jehangirabad, on Tuesday, leading to heavy stone-pelting and clashes and armed attacks by the two groups. The dispute escalated with people waving swords, and both sides armed themselves with sticks. In the fight a woman was reportedly beaten by a group of youths in the middle of the road. Over six individuals, including women, sustained injuries in the incident. Upon receiving the news, the

police arrived at the scene and took control of the situation, deploying a heavy police presence to restore order. Police Station In-Charge Ashish Upadhyay stated that this dispute was a continuation of a previous altercation between the two parties that occurred two days ago. Following that incident, tensions flared, leading to stone-pelting on houses early in the morning, which caused panic in the area. DCP Zone 1 Priyanka Shukla clarified that the earlier dispute had been triggered by a conflict over a speeding motorcycle, which resulted in a case being

filed against five individuals at the Jahangirabad police station. While three of the accused were arrested, two others remain at large. Today, tensions reignited due to the absconding suspects. Despite the growing crowd, the police were already stationed at the site and quickly escalated their response by notifying the control room. Authorities have vowed to take strict action against those seen carrying weapons in the videos circulating online. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured, and the situation is now under control.

Liquor worth Rs 18 crore seized in Dhar

Dhar: Under the leadership of Superintendent of Police (SP) Manoj Kumar Singh, Dhar Police has achieved significant success in combating interstate liquor smuggling over the last two years (2023-2024). Through consistent and stringent action, illegal liquor worth approximately ?18 crore has been seized, delivering a major blow to the liquor mafia operating in the region. Upon his posting in Dhar district, SP Manoj Kumar Singh launched a district-wide anti-liquor smuggling campaign aimed at curbing illegal transportation and promoting de-addiction. The campaign included public awareness initiatives, such as "Khatla Meetings," where youth were counselled on the dangers of substance abuse. All station in-charges were instructed to take firm action against gangs involved in the purchase,

sale, and transportation of illegal liquor, leading to a significant crackdown across the district. In 2023 and 2024, Dhar Police registered 4,929 excise cases, arresting 5,023 accused and seizing illegal liquor worth ?10.06 crore. Additionally, 63 two-wheelers and 96 four-wheelers, valued at approximately ?8 crore, used for transporting illegal liquor, were confiscated. Liquor smugglers attempted to evade detection by using innovative methods, such as hiding liquor in milk containers, luxury bus trunks, and vehicles transporting straw and vegetables. However, due to the vigilance and strategic operations of Dhar Police, these efforts were thwarted, resulting in the seizure of large quantities of illicit liquor. SP Manoj Kumar Singh emphasized the commitment of Dhar Police to eradicate illegal liquor operations in the district.

Madhya Pradesh on alert: Abrupt weather conditions predicted for next four days

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Abrupt weather with hail, rain and fog would be witnessed in the state for the next four days. At the same time, there will be chilly cold winds at night. Clouds cover were witnessed in many districts on Tuesday for the second consecutive day. The drizzle was observed in many areas of Bhind and Sehore since night continued this morning as well. Earlier on Monday also the weather remained changed. Clouds remained in many districts including Bhopal. Due to this, an increase in the day temperature has also been recorded. The Meteorological Department has predicted the system to be the strongest on December 27. On this day, there is an alert of hail and rain in 21 districts including Bhopal, Gwalior. At the same time, light rain, thunder and lightning will remain in other districts.

The day temperature has dropped by 3 degrees. At the same time, the night temperature has increased by 1 degree. There may be light rain at some places in Gwalior, Morena, Bhind, Datia, Niwari, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Sagar, Khargone, Vidisha, Guna and Ashoknagar. Out of these, there will also be thunderstorms in Ashoknagar, Niwari and Chhatrapur. There will be fog in Gwalior, Bhind, Morena, Sheopur, Datia, Niwari, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Sagar, Ashoknagar and Guna. In the next 48 hours Indore, Ujjain, Neemuch, Mandasaur, Agar-Malwa, Ratlam, Jhabua, Alirajpur, Dhar, Barwani, Khargone, Dewas, Khandwa, Burhanpur, Pandhurna, Chhindwara, Narsinghpur, Sagar and Guna will experience light rain. Thunderstorms will also occur in most of these districts. 27 December: There is an orange alert for thunderstorms, rain and thunderstorms in Bhopal, Gwalior, Sheopur, Morena, Bhind, Alirajpur, Barwani, Khargone, Burhanpur, Khandwa, Harda, Dewas, Sehore, Shajapur, Betul, Narmadapuram, Raisen, Sagar, Narsinghpur, Chhindwara, Pandhurna. At the same time, thunderstorms will continue in Indore, Ujjain, Dhar, Jhabua, Ratlam, Mandasaur, Agar-Malwa, Neemuch, Rajgarh, Vidisha, Guna, Ashoknagar, Shivpuri, Datia, Niwari, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Damoh, Panna, Satna, Jabalpur, Katni and Umaria. According to the Meteorological

Department, there is a trend of rain in the state in the month of December. The weather has been the same for the last 10 years. This time also the weather has changed. There was also rain in Chhindwara on Saturday. At the same time, clouds covered the sky on Monday. This time the weather has changed. Usually there is severe cold in the second fortnight of December, but this time there was such cold in the first fortnight itself. There will be rain activity in the last days. After its passing, once again the period of severe cold will start, which will last till the entire month of January. The period of severe cold has ended in most of the cities of the state. This has happened due to the absence of northern winds and the activity of Western Disturbance. Due to which the night temperature has increased. Among the major cities Indore recorded the highest night temperature of 14.6 degrees, Ujjain 13.5 degrees, Jabalpur 10.4 degrees, Bhopal 10.2 degrees and Gwalior recorded 9.3 degrees. This time the cold broke records in December as cold waves continued for 9 days and night temperature broke the record of 58 years in the state capital. To provide relief to students school timings were changed in many districts including Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, while heaters were installed in Bhopal's Van Vihar National Park to protect animals from cold. Efforts are being made to protect even God from cold.

Patwari slams BJP for fomenting hatred, warns of rising instability

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the chairmanship of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Jitu Patwari and the presence of Media Department head Mukesh Nayak, a meeting of the party's spokespersons and media panelists was held at the PCC headquarters auditorium. The meeting focused on effectively raising public interest issues while maintaining a constructive and responsible opposition stance. Addressing the gathering, Jitu Patwari emphasized the importance of presenting Congress's viewpoint responsibly across TV channels and media platforms. He criticized the BJP for spreading hatred, claiming it is pushing the country toward unrest. "In line with the party leadership's directives, we must raise public issues with full logic and expose the BJP's flawed policies. Simultaneously, we should convey the Congress Party's stance, policies, and vision to the public," he stated. Patwari urged the team to use platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and other digital channels to widely disseminate their messages. "It is crucial to explain to the public that the BJP is only focused on divisive politics and has no concern for public welfare," he said. Referring to the BJP's attitude toward Congress and Rahul

Gandhi, Patwari called for a strong response. He accused the BJP of attacking Dr. Ambedkar's Constitution and discriminating against Dalits, tribals, women, and backward classes. "Our media team has significant challenges ahead. We must not be fearful but face them head-on. Both traditional media and social media are equally important, and we must actively engage in spreading our positive messages widely," he added. Mukesh Nayak, PCC Media Department head, criticized the BJP's divisive politics, stating it has caused widespread discontent across the country. He urged Congress spokespersons to fearlessly present the party's viewpoint and rigorously challenge the BJP's policies. "The Constitution guarantees the rights of Dalits, tribals, and minorities, and the BJP cannot take these away," Nayak said. Highlighting the need for strategic training, Nayak announced plans for an upcoming spokesperson training program, as envisioned by the PCC president. He called for a strong focus on constitutional and public issues, ensuring the BJP's diversionary tactics are countered with determination. The meeting concluded with a unanimous commitment from Congress media representatives to responsibly represent the party's views and policies while countering misinformation effectively.

'Build Bharat Expo 2025' will be held from March 19 to 21

New Delhi: The Indian Industries Association (IIA), Delhi Chapter, hosted TARANG 2024, at the India Habitat Centre. The event brought together IIA members and their families for an evening of joy, unity, and reflection on the remarkable achievements of India's MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) sector. It was not just about welcoming the New Year but also honoring the spirit of innovation, collaboration, and growth that propels the nation forward. Dr. Mamtamayi Priyadarshini, State Chairperson of IIA-Delhi, delivered the welcome address, highlighting IIA's core mission of empowering MSMEs and fostering opportunities for business growth. Her speech underscored the importance of unity and collaboration in building a

brighter future for the sector. Dr. Sanjay Mayukh, National Media Co-head, Spokesperson, and Chief Whip of Vidhan Parishad (BJP), graced the event as the chief guest. In his address, Dr. Mayukh emphasized the need to move beyond traditional practices and align with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a progressive, strong, and prosperous India. "The era of traditional development is over. We are now in the era of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, where progress and dedication lead the way to a stronger, more prosperous India," said Dr. Mayukh, energizing the audience and setting an optimistic tone for 2025. Dinesh Goyal, National Senior Vice President of IIA, presented an ambitious

roadmap for MSMEs titled "Transforming MSMEs to 4.2 & 48," which aims to increase the sector's contribution to India's GDP from 33% to 48% by 2047, aligning with the vision of Amrit Kaal. He also unveiled plans to launch an IPO for MSMEs within the next two years—a significant step toward enhancing their visibility and fostering financial growth. Charanjeet Singh, Vice President of IIA-Delhi, reflected on the occasion: "As we step into 2025, we are reminded of the immense potential the MSME sector holds in shaping the future of India. The Build Bharat Expo is a testament to our commitment to empowering industries nationwide. We are focused on fostering innovation, sustainability, and growth to drive India's economic progress."

A gift to the 'Jan-Gan' from Atal Ji's dream of river linking

DR MOHAN YADAV

Today marks the 100th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji, who proclaimed 'Kadam Milakar Chalana Hoga'. Heartfelt tributes to the visionary of India's development, the revered Shri Atal Ji. The revered Atal Ji, from being an RSS volunteer to the editor of Rashtradhama, and from his responsibilities in the Jansangh to the Bharatiya Janata Party, nurtured generations of dedicated workers. His vision of individual development, societal progress, and nation-building provided a strong foundation for the country. To make the earth fertile and prosperous, and to establish new dimensions of development, the revered Atal Ji envisioned the River Linking Project nearly 20 years ago. He dreamed of connecting the rivers across the

country to manage the scattered water resources efficiently. His vision was to interlink the rivers of the nation so that every drop of water could be utilized for the welfare of society and the nation. On his 100th birth anniversary, a significant step is being taken in Madhya Pradesh with the Ken-Betwa project, the world's first river-linking initiative, to provide a sustainable solution for water security. I am delighted to share that today, our esteemed Prime Minister and the modern-day Bhagirathi, Shri Narendra Modi Ji, will lay the foundation stone of the nation's first and ambitious Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project in Khajuraho. With this, the revered Atal Ji's vision of interlinking rivers and achieving prosperity will take a concrete shape. Madhya Pradesh, the cradle of rivers, is blessed with abundant water resources from hundreds of rivers. With the blessings of these rivers, this multipurpose

project will become the lifeline of Bundelkhand. This project is being developed on the Ken River in Chhatrapur and Panna districts of Madhya Pradesh. It includes the construction of the Daudhan Dam on the Ken River within the Panna Tiger Reserve, with a height of 77 meters and a length of 2.13 kilometers, along with two tunnels. The dam will store 2,853 million cubic meters of water. Through a pressurized micro-irrigation system, the project will enable irrigation across 8.11 lakh hectares of land in approximately 2,000 villages of 10 districts in Madhya Pradesh, including Panna, Damoh, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Niwari, Sagar, Raisen, Vidisha, Shivpuri, and Datia. Nearly 7 lakh farming families will benefit from this initiative. Additionally, it will provide drinking water to a population of 44 lakh in Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh in Uttar Pradesh. The project will also generate 103

MW of hydroelectric power and 27 MW of solar energy, benefiting the entire state of Madhya Pradesh. The Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project will ensure that water reaches every field in Bundelkhand for irrigation. The state will have an abundant supply of water for electricity, agriculture, industry, and drinking needs. With water reaching the fields, crops will flourish, bringing prosperity to farmers' lives and transforming the future of Bundelkhand. This project will boost agriculture, industry, business, and tourism, halting migration and improving the lives of citizens. The abundance of water will address both flood and drought issues. Our commitment is to development along with heritage. Moving forward with this goal, the project will also work on preserving 42 historic Chandel period ponds. These ponds will fill with water during the monsoon,

raising the groundwater level and benefiting the people. Madhya Pradesh is an agriculture-based state. Our goal is to increase the area under irrigation from 5 million hectares to 10 million hectares. I am confident that the Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project will help us achieve this target, and it will open new doors for the progress of Bundelkhand. With this confidence, I had urged the farmers of Bundelkhand not to sell their land, as the solution to the region's drought would come. I am happy that my belief has proven to be correct. It is a matter of great joy for us that Madhya Pradesh is currently celebrating 'Jan-Kalyan Parv'. On the 100th birth anniversary of Atal Ji, the signing of the tripartite agreement for the Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project is a remarkable coincidence, bringing a great gift to the people of the state. (Author is the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh)



Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, Congress State President Jitu Patwari and party workers participate in Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Samman March in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Congress approaches Supreme Court against new Election Commission rules

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the recent amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and expressed hope that the apex court will help restore the "fast eroding" integrity of the electoral process. The Government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh, who filed the petition, said, "The integrity of the electoral process is fast



eroding. Hopefully the Supreme Court will help restore it." "A writ has just been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the recent amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961," he said in a post on X. Ramesh said the Election Commission, a Constitutional

body charged with the conduct of free and fair elections cannot be allowed to unilaterally, and without public consultation, amend such a vital law in such a brazen manner. "This is especially true when that amendment does away with public access to essential information that makes the electoral process more transparent and accountable," he said.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission of India, the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

Home Minister Shah stresses use of biometrics to identify unidentified bodies, persons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday stressed the need for using biometrics technology to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified "found persons".

Chairing a review meeting on the implementation of the three new criminal laws with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) here, Shah also emphasised the use of technology in all criminal investigation matters.

He said alerts should be generated for all the cases at predefined stages and timelines should be fixed - from the registration to disposal of the case - for the benefit of victims and complainants.

Biometrics technology should be adopted to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified found persons,

Shah asserted. According to an official statement, Shah said regular dispatch of alerts to investigating officers as well as senior officers as per predefined timelines will help expedite the process of investigation.

The meeting reviewed the implementation and integration of Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CTNS) 2.0 and Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), the New Criminal Laws and National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS), prisons, courts, prosecution and forensics with ICJS 2.0 at all India level.

During the discussion, the home minister asked the NCRB to facilitate the complete implementation of the new criminal laws in the ICJS 2.0, the statement said.

He emphasised the use of applications like eSakshya, Nyaya Shruti, eSign and eSummons in every state and Union Territory.

Shah said a team of officers of the Ministry of Home Affairs, NCRB should visit the states and Union Territories to increase the adoption of technical projects and assist them in all possible ways.

He emphasised regular interaction with senior police formations of states and Union Territories to monitor the progress of CTNS and ICJS regularly and provide impetus to the project.

The NCRB should create a data rich platform to benefit the investigation officers and other stakeholder of criminal justice system, he said.

Shah appreciated the efforts of the NCRB in the technical implementation of the three new criminal laws and the NAFIS.

Congress to commemorate 100th anniversary of Belgaum session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Belgaum session of the party that was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi with an extended session of the CWC which will decide on an action plan for the next year.

The opposition party asserted that the "insult" to B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah will be strongly taken up at Belagavi and deliberated upon.

Addressing a joint Press conference along with Congress general secretary organisation K C Venugopal and AICC media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on December 26 has been named 'Nav Satyagraha Baithak'.

He said two resolutions will be passed at the meeting. Congress has been marking Ambedkar Samman Saptah against the "insult" of B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah, Ramesh said.

He said there is only one solution that the home minister be sacked and must apologise for his remarks. Ramesh said on December 27, a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally will be held in Belagavi. Venugopal said the Congress has strongly taken up the issue of the "insult" of Ambedkar by the home minister and has been demanding the sacking of Shah as well as an apology from him. He said the issue would be strongly taken up in Belagavi and ways to take it forward in the future will also be deliberated upon, he said.

Tragedy repeats: despite SC Guidelines, abandoned borewell accidents continue to claim lives

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After over 14 years the Supreme Court framed guidelines to prevent accidents involving abandoned borewells, the frequent spate of such incidents highlight the gaps in enforcement and creating awareness of the top court's order.

The issue has come to the forefront again following the spate of such accidents leading to desperate and dramatic rescue operations. Most recently, a minor, Chetna, aged around three years fell into a borewell in the Kotputli-Behror district of Rajasthan, and the NDRF and SDRF were deployed to rescue her from the 150-foot-deep borewell with efforts still underway at the time of filing this report. On December 9, Aryan, 5, fell into a 150-foot-deep



borewell in Rajasthan's Dausa while playing and after a 55-hour rescue operation, he was pulled out unconscious and was declared dead on arrival in a hospital. These instances occurred despite the top court's comprehensive

guidelines issued on February 11, 2010, aimed to prevent such tragedies. The guidelines were issued after the bench led by former Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan, took a suo motu initiative and issued notice to the various states to take immediate measures

petition bringing to its notice a spate of such accidents in the country on February 13, 2009.

The guidelines included setting up barbed-wire fencing around the well during construction, using a steel plate cover fixed with bolts over the well assembly and filling up of borewells from the bottom to the ground level among others. The top court had also asked the authorities to give wide publicity to its order. "It has been brought to the notice of this court that in a number of cases, children had been trapped and fallen into borewells and tube wells or abandoned wells. These reports have been coming from various states. Accordingly, we took suo motu initiative and issued notice to the various states to take immediate measures

to prevent such kinds of incidents," the top court said in its order dated February 11, 2010.

Further, the owner of the land or the premises, before taking any steps to construct borewells or tube wells, was directed to intimate in writing to the authorities concerned - district collector or district magistrate or sarpanch - or department officials of ground water or public health or municipal corporations at least 15 days in advance. It was directed that registration of all drilling agencies, government, semi-government or private, should be mandatory. "Erection of a signboard at the time of construction near the well with the following details: (a) Complete address of the

drilling agency at the time of construction or rehabilitation of well, (b) Complete address of the user agency or owner of the well," the apex court had said. The top court also directed the barbed-wire fencing or any other suitable barrier be erected around the well during construction, a cement or concrete platform measuring 0.5x0.5x0.6 metre (0.30 metre above ground level and 0.30 metre below ground) built around the well casing and the well assembly capped using welded steel plates or a similar cover fixed with bolts. It had said in case of a pump repair, the tube well should not be left uncovered and mud pits and channels should be filled after completion of the work. "Fill up

abandoned borewells by clay/sand/boulders/pebbles /drill cuttings, etc., from bottom to ground level," said the top court, adding on completion of the drilling operations at a particular location, the ground conditions would be restored to its original form. "The guidelines above mentioned shall be given wide publicity through national television channels. A copy of this order be sent to the chief secretaries of all the states/union territories who shall forward the same to the district collectors of all districts of their respective state," the bench said. On August 6, 2010, a three-judge bench led by former CJI S H Kapadia slightly modified the February 11, 2010 order and disposed of the petition.

President Murmu to confer Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children on December 26



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu will on Thursday confer the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children from 14 states and Union territories.

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development said in a statement that it would celebrate Veer Bal Diwas and the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar with nationwide activities, highlighting the achievements and potential of India's youngsters. This year, 17 children from 14 states and Union territories will be conferred with the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar by President Droupadi Murmu, it added.

The award recognises exceptional achievements in seven categories - art and culture; bravery; innovation; science and technology; social service; sports; and environment.

The honourees - seven boys and 10 girls - will receive a medal, certificate and a citation booklet as part of the recognition. The centerpiece of the celebration, the national programme for Veer Bal Diwas, will take place at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be present on the occasion, inaugurating the Suposhit Panchayat scheme that aims to bolster nutritional security at the grassroots. The event will also feature a march-past led by children, representing diverse cultures. Union Minister of Women and

Child Development Annapurna Devi will deliver the opening address, setting the tone for a day dedicated to nurturing young minds and fostering creativity, the ministry said in its statement. Approximately 3,500 children, including the awardees, will participate in the event, which will feature cultural performances showcasing India's rich heritage. Educational and creative activities will engage children around the country. Schools, childcare institutions and Anganwadi centres will host storytelling sessions, creative writing competitions, poster-making events, essay writing, poetry recitals and quizzes. Online platforms such as MyGov and MYBharat will also facilitate participation. Veer Bal Diwas is dedicated to inspiring young Indians to contribute to the nation's progress by upholding the values of courage, innovation and service. Through programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar and Suposhit Panchayat, the government reaffirms its commitment to empowering the next generation and fostering a culture of excellence, the ministry said.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar calls removal notice a 'rusted tool'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday said one should not use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery and asserted that the notice for his removal from the post was actually a "rusted" tool.

In his first reaction on the notice submitted by the opposition INDIA bloc, Dhankhar said, "Just look at the notice against the vice president. Just look at the six links they have given. 'You'll be shocked. Chandra Shekhar ji once said, 'Never use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery.' The notice wasn't even a vegetable-cutting knife; it was rusted. There was haste." The notice was rejected by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chair Hariwansh. "When I read it, I was astonished. But what surprised me more was that none of you read it. If you had, you wouldn't have been able to sleep for days," he told a group of women journalists. Dhankhar said any constitutional position has to be vindicated by

commitment to sublimity, sterling qualities and constitutionalism.

"We are not in a position to settle scores. Because for the success of democracy, two things are inalienable: expression and dialogue," he said, according to an official statement.

Cautioning against orchestrated efforts to harm national interests, the vice president said these are fuelled in an orchestrated manner by forces that are determined to be inimical to the interest of the country.

"Their objective is to destroy, brick by brick, our constitutional institutions, slur the presidency, and mind you, who is the president? The first tribal woman to become president of this country," he remarked. Referring to parliamentary debates, Dhankhar said the two Houses are in the news for the wrong reasons. "Accountability must be enforced by media, the only conveyance to the people at large. Media can strike a chord with the people and generate pressure on public representatives," he said.

Hospitals must treat victims of sexual violence and acid attacks: Delhi HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant ruling, the Delhi High Court recently said state-run and private hospitals cannot turn away survivors of sexual crimes, among others, and should treat them for free or face criminal action. A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma said a medical establishment should not insist on identity proofs when such survivors are brought in an emergency and any medical professional refusing to provide necessary treatment would attract a complaint to be immediately registered by the police being a punishable offence.

The court passed the directions in relation to survivors of rape, gang rape, acid attack and minor survivors of sexual offences, among others, and said despite the legal mandate, they faced difficulties in availing free medical treatment. "Whenever any victim/survivor of any of the said offences approaches a medical facility, diagnostic facility, diagnostic lab, nursing home, hospital, health clinic, etc., whether private and public/government, such victim/survivor shall not be



turned away without providing free medical treatment," said the bench in its judgment made available on December 21.

The High Court said denying requisite treatment to survivors was a criminal offence and all doctors, administration, officers, nurses, paramedical personnel, etc., should be informed about the same.

The ruling allowed immediate examination of a survivor, who would be treated for sexually transmitted conditions such as HIV, if situation demands. The treatment would not only include first aid but also diagnosis, in-patient admission, continued out-patient assistance, diagnostic tests, lab tests, surgery,

physical and mental counselling, psychological help, family counselling, among other things.

The court clarified availing of free medical treatment by such victims/survivors from either government or private hospitals was not dependent upon a referral by the state or district legal services authority as it was a statutory right under Section 357C of CrPC, Section 397 of BNS and Rule 6 (4) of POCSO Rules, 2020. Notably, every medical facility was directed to put up a board at the entrance, reception, counters and all prominent places, in both English and vernacular, declaring the availability of free out-patient and in-patient medical treatment for such survivors.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's vision blooms: BJP's rise to power marks fruition of 1980 prediction

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delivering one of his more famous speeches at the BJP's inaugural convention at Shivaji Park in Mumbai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee predicted on December 30, 1980 with his signature flourish: 'Andhera chhatega, suraj niklega, kamal khilega' (darkness will end, the sun will rise, lotus will bloom).

As his birth centenary arrives, his words have aged well, with the BJP returning to power for a third straight term at the centre and lotus in full bloom.

If Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the BJP's cultural agenda the centre of national politics, Vajpayee helped the party occupy this centre when its cultural agenda was considered an anathema. A statesman politician and a peels orator, India's first non-Congress prime minister to have served a full term



commanded respect and affection from across the political aisle and stood tall with his innate democratic spirit, honed through decades in opposition, in a politics crowded with powerful satraps. The three-time prime minister was the original builder of coalition politics at the national level, successfully running an alliance government for a full term while navigating some of the biggest national crises,

including the plane hijack in 1999 and the terror attack on Parliament in 2001, both with direct links to Pakistan. His government's measured handling of the two incidents drew criticism from some quarters, including right wing organisations considered ideologically affiliated to the BJP but less than friendly to him for not pushing their cultural and economic agenda, but his standing ensured that he faced no political threat or

popular backlash. And even as he was still smarting from the fall of his government by one vote in the Lok Sabha in April 1999, his firm military and deft diplomatic response to Pakistan's intrusion into Kargil as the head of a caretaker government earned him plaudits and powered the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance to a more stable majority, ensuring him a full term at the helm.

Ashok Tandon, media adviser to Vajpayee during his six-year stint as PM, said besides being an outstanding parliamentarian who did his bit in "strengthening the roots of parliamentary democracy" after entering the Lok Sabha for the first time in 1957, he brought "good governance" at the centre of agenda as the head of government. "Good governance was his landmark contribution. He

headed a diverse coalition of parties and kept them together, while pursuing policies which helped the country in every field," he told PTI, citing the launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, PM Gramin Sadak Yojna and the Golden Quadrilateral highway project under his stewardship. It was his boost to reforms, disinvestment and infra projects that made the idea of seven to eight per cent growth rate possible and his government legislated fiscal prudence through the FRBM Act in 2003.

However, the fruits of reforms came a little too late and this coupled with the BJP's political missteps, especially in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, and the Congress-led UPA's harnessing of rural distress delivered a shock defeat to Vajpayee in 2004 amid a decline in his health. His public appearances were

limited, he campaigned last for his party in the 2007 assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh before slowly fading away from the public eye as dementia hit him. He died in 2018. The Modi government began observing his birth anniversary as "Good Governance Day" and bestowed Bharat Ratna on him in 2015.

An impressive mix of tradition and modernity in his world view, Vajpayee, a full-time RSS worker before being sent by the Hindutva organisation to the Jana Sangh in 1951 when the party was founded, maintained a lifelong adherence to the Sangh's values even though he at times resented its methods. Unlike his lifelong companion L K Advani, who despite being an ideological hardliner and more invested organisational leader fell from the RSS's grace due to his public airing of views,

including his ill-fated praise of M. A. Jinnah, that were bound to antagonise the Hindutva organisation, Vajpayee used his cultivated ambivalence and gifted articulation to shape his image of a moderate while never crossing swords with it. The only time he openly denounced a polarising Hindutva cause was when the Babri mosque was demolished in 1992, but his stand was considered an act of political pragmatism necessary for the BJP to realise its political ambitions after fetching merely two seats in the 1984 polls.

With the moderate, poet-at-heart and statesman-like Vajpayee as the BJP's prime ministerial face and the party agreeing to put a moratorium on its contentious ideological planks of the Rem temple construction, Article 370 repeal and the Uniform Civil Code, regional parties from

across the country were drawn as he led them to poll wins. His passionate moves to improve ties with Pakistan resulted in his spectacular journey to Lahore in a bus in February 1999 and then hosting the Agra Summit with Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf in 2001 but they met with little success. As the army chief before he deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Musharraf was behind his country's misadventure in Kargil, which followed months after Vajpayee's bus journey. However, Vajpayee's famous invocation of 'Insiyaniyat, Jamhuriyat, Kashmiriyat' to resolve the issues afflicting Jammu and Kashmir won him lifelong admirers in the Muslim-majority Valley. Prime Minister Narendra Modi too recalled the phrase in his Independence Day speech in 2018 to reach out to people there.

PM Modi to lay foundation stone for Ken-Betwa river-link project today

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Wednesday lay the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa river linking project, the first such initiative under the national river inter-linking policy, at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. Nearly 44 lakh people in 10 districts of Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh in Uttar Pradesh will get drinking water under the project, which is estimated to cost Rs 44,605 crore, MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Tuesday. Nearly 7.18 lakh farmer families of 2,000 villages will be

benefitted from the project, which will also generate 103 MW of hydropower and 27 MW of solar energy, he said. "Prime Minister Modi is coming to Khajuraho in Chhatarpur district on December 25 to lay the foundation of this project which will change the image and destiny of Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh," Yadav said. The Ken-Betwa Link Project is a unique example of cooperation and coordination between the central government, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, he said. Prime Minister Modi has

taken the initiative to realise the dream of former PM late Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the river linking campaign, Yadav added. Through this project, farmers will get ample water for irrigation and it will also provide sufficient water for drinking and industrial uses. Along with the economic and social development of the area, tourism will also be promoted and new employment opportunities will be created. The situation of groundwater in the drought-hit Bundelkhand region will also improve, the CM said. Yadav said Ken-Betwa is the



largest irrigation project in the country, adopting an underground pressurised pipe irrigation system. Under the project, a 77-metre high and 2.13 kilometres long Daudhan dam and two tunnels (upper level 1.9 km and lower level 1.1 km) will be constructed on the Ken river

in the Panna Tiger Reserve. The dam will store 2,853 million cubic metres of water, the chief minister said. The surplus Ken water will be transferred to the Betwa river through the 221-km-long link canal from Daudhan dam, providing irrigation and drinking water facilities in both the states, he said. With the project, 8.11 lakh hectare area can be irrigated in 2,000 villages of 10 districts - Panna, Damoh, Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh, Niwari, Sagar, Raisen, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Datia. Nearly seven lakh farmer families will be benefitted from this, the chief

minister said. The Ken-Betwa project will provide an annual irrigation facility in 59,000 hectare area in Uttar Pradesh and stabilisation of the existing irrigation in 1.92 lakh-hectare area, which will provide irrigation facilities in Mahoba, Jhansi, Lalitpur and Banda districts of UP, he said. The project also includes the work of saving the historical Chandela era heritage ponds in Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh and Niwari districts of MP, where water can be stored during the rainy season. The Daudhan reservoir will provide drinking water to

wild animals in the Panna Tiger Reserve throughout the year, improve the forest ecosystem and bring relief to UP's Banda district from the flood menace, Yadav said. The water crisis prevalent in the Bundelkhand region will end and migration for employment will also be checked, he said. A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on March 22, 2021 by the chief ministers of MP, UP and the Union Jai Shakti minister in the presence of PM Modi for the implementation of the project.

Two suspects killed in separate police encounters following bank heist in Lucknow

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Two suspects involved in the high-profile Indian Overseas Bank locker heist in Lucknow were killed in separate police encounters, one in Lucknow and the other in Ghazipur. The heist, which took place at the bank's Chinhath branch, saw 42 lockers looted, resulting in losses worth crores of rupees. The first encounter occurred late Monday night on Kisan Path in Lucknow, where the police confronted a suspect, Sobind Kumar. When intercepted, Sobind opened fire at the police. In the retaliatory firing, he was critically injured and later succumbed to his injuries during treatment at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. The second encounter happened at the Uttar Pradesh-Bihar border near Ghazipur. A team of Ghazipur police intercepted two suspects on a motorcycle during routine checks. When the suspects



tried to ram their motorcycle into the officers and escape, they opened fire at the police. One suspect, Sunny Dayal, a wanted criminal with a ₹25,000 bounty, was injured in the exchange of fire. He was taken to a local hospital but was declared dead on arrival. The other suspect managed to escape into the darkness. Superintendent of Police (SP) Ghazipur, Iraj Raja, confirmed the death of Sunny Dayal, a resident of Munger, Bihar. Police recovered a pistol, stolen jewelry, ₹35,500 in cash, and the suspects' motorcycle from the scene. So far, two suspects have been killed, and three others were arrested earlier in the week. Two members of the gang remain at large, and efforts are underway to track them down. The Indian Overseas Bank's Chinhath branch was targeted on Saturday night, where thieves broke into 42 lockers and made off with cash, gold, and silver worth several

crores. Early on Monday, three suspects were apprehended following an initial police encounter. Among them, Arvind Kumar, a resident of Munger, Bihar, sustained a gunshot injury during the operation. The arrested suspects confessed to orchestrating the heist with four other accomplices. Police have identified the mastermind as Vipin Kumar, a resident of Chinhath, who provided logistical support and insider information to the gang from Bihar. Police have so far recovered ₹3 lakh in cash, 1,889 grams of gold, 1,240 grams of silver jewelry, and firearms, including pistols and country-made weapons. Additional stolen items were seized during Monday night's encounters. Joint Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Amit Verma stated that the bank's inadequate security measures facilitated the heist. The police are also investigating lapses in the bank's compliance with safety protocols.

Congress has an anti-Ambedkar mindset, says CM Yogi Adityanath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath accused the Congress of harboring an anti-Ambedkar mindset and engaging in divisive politics. Speaking to journalists at his official residence, the Chief Minister launched a sharp critique against Congress and other political parties, particularly the Samajwadi Party (SP), for allegedly disrespecting Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy. "The Congress has a history of depriving Dalits of their rights. Jawaharlal Nehru opposed Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's inclusion in the Constituent Assembly and worked to defeat him in elections," CM Yogi alleged. He added that Congress not only sidelined Dr. Ambedkar during his lifetime but also refused to honor him with a memorial after his demise. Recalling incidents from the UPA era, CM Yogi highlighted the controversy surrounding a caricature of Nehru whipping Dr. Ambedkar's portrait, which



had prompted an apology from then HRD Minister Kapil Sibal. He also pointed to Dr. Ambedkar's resignation from the Nehru cabinet, accusing Congress of prioritizing Muslim appeasement over Dalit welfare. The Chief Minister praised Dr. Ambedkar as a visionary who overcame social barriers to make significant contributions to law, economics, and nation-building. "Dr. Ambedkar's work illuminated India's path forward, and his dedication remains an inspiration for generations," CM Yogi stated. Turning his attention to the Samajwadi Party, CM Yogi alleged that the SP's history mirrors that of Congress in neglecting Dr. Ambedkar. He claimed that SP leaders removed Dr. Ambedkar's name from institutions in Kannauj and Saharanpur, accusing them of using similar tactics to create confusion over BJP policies. "The Congress and SP have a history of misleading the public. Both parties need to apologize to the nation for their actions," CM Yogi demanded,

asserting that the public has consistently rejected their politics of appeasement and division. Highlighting BJP's initiatives, the Chief Minister said the party draws inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar's principles. He lauded the efforts of PM Narendra Modi's government to uplift marginalized communities through welfare schemes such as the Swachh Bharat Mission, PM Awas Yojana, and Ayushman Bharat. He also noted the establishment of "Panch Teerth" sites associated with Dr. Ambedkar to honor his legacy. "Unlike Congress, which denied Dalits their rightful opportunities, BJP has integrated the underprivileged into mainstream welfare initiatives. Our government is committed to Dr. Ambedkar's vision of equality and empowerment," CM Yogi emphasized. The Chief Minister concluded by reaffirming the BJP's dedication to preserving Dr. Ambedkar's ideals and working tirelessly to uplift all sections of society.

NC MP, Opp protest outside CM Omar's house against reservation policy

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A war of words broke out on Tuesday between National Conference leaders a day after one of its Members of Parliament led the protest march outside the official residence of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in Srinagar demanding rationalization of the existing Reservation Policy in Jammu and Kashmir. The protest led by Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, National Conference MP from Srinagar, is being viewed, by many, as growing discord within the National Conference, as it was seen as defying the party's norms and discipline. Meanwhile, opposition party leaders from the Peoples Democratic Party and Bharatiya Janta Party took a jibe at the National Conference government and demanded an early resolution of the issue. On the other hand, the Congress party decided to bail out Omar Abdullah and termed Aga Syed Ruhullah's protest march a 'camera show'. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had already set the record straight on Monday by ensuring the delegation of students that the channel of communication would remain open without any intermediaries or hangers-on. On Tuesday speaking to reporters at the National Conference headquarters in Srinagar party MLA from Hazratbal, Salman Sagar clarified the National Conference had nothing to do with the protest over the Reservation Policy. Referring to the presence of party MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, Salman Sagar made it clear if the MP believes that he can do it, then that's his prerogative, however, this was not the National Conference's initiative. Salman said the protest was a platform for the party's adversaries. "It was a gathering of our adversaries, of our enemies. Unfortunately, one of our MPs was present there, allowing them to exploit the situation," Salman said, adding that such actions inadvertently strengthen the position of political rivals like the Peoples



Democratic Party (PDP). Salman accused the organizers of failing to consider better ways to address grievances. "If grievances truly needed redressal, there were better ways to address them. What happened yesterday, in my personal opinion, was pure drama. It didn't benefit anyone," he said. He also took a dig at political opportunism, stating that the protest gave a platform to individuals who have no real stake in the issue. "People with no mandate, those who have been rejected by the public with barely 200 votes, were speaking on behalf of thousands or even millions. This kind of behavior undermines genuine efforts," Salman said. Reacting to the assurances given by the Chief Minister to the delegation of the Open Merit Students Association after holding the first round of talks, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) chief Mehbooba Mufti Tuesday asked Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to find a way to resolve the issue of reservation saying leaving the matter for the courts was "very unfortunate". Speaking to reporters Mehbooba Mufti said "We do not want any politics in it but we are pushing open merit students to the wall. The chief minister has sought six months' time. They (NC) have three MPs, including the Ladakh MP and 50 MLAs, why do they need six months? They think a court decision will come by and they will not have to do anything," Mufti said. The former chief minister of the erstwhile state of J-K said the NC government could have brought an SRO to settle the issue of reservation like what she did in 2018 when she brought SRO-49 for 75

per cent reservation for open merit category in post-graduation. In Jammu, BJP general secretary and in-charge of the party's Jammu and Kashmir affairs Tarun Chugh accused Chief Minister Omar Abdullah of trying to deprive the underprivileged classes of their rights in the name of rationalization of reservation policy. Speaking to media persons, Tarun Chugh said, "Omar Abdullah Ji the country is run according to the Constitution and nobody will be allowed to fiddle with the rights of the Dalits, Gujjars, Paharis and other underprivileged classes of the society. INDIA bloc and the National Conference (NC) have deprived the underprivileged classes of their rights and they are again working on conspiracies to do the same. In Srinagar, the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Dooru and senior Congress leader, Gulam Ahmad Mir said that the Member of Parliament (MP) from Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency, Aga Ruhullah Mehdi, could have met the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah directly instead of resorting to "camera show". Addressing a news conference at party headquarters here in Srinagar, Mir said that the MP Ruhullah was just a five minutes away from CM Omar Abdullah and instead of opting for "camera show", the demands could have been raised with the Chief Minister directly. "It has become a fashion now to get the camera attraction, otherwise the responsible MP from NC, could have behaved seriously," he said while responding to a query on Ruhullah's protest on Reservation policy outside CM's residence.

Christmas Carols go silent in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The month of December used to be a period of carols and cribs in Kerala way-back in the 1960s, 70s and 80s but not anymore. Carol singers visiting the houses of all communities in the State have become a thing of the past. There are no more drum beats or saxophone music. The small churches across the village squares too have fallen silent though they spot Christmas stars, trees and of course the cribs. "Nowadays we visit houses of community members only and the number of carol nights too have come down. Carol teams come alive only on 23rd and 24th December," said K T Paily of Karipra, a former Indian Railway official. This Christmas was marked by the demonstration staged by activists of Sangh Parivar in front of an Upper Primary School in Palakkad district questioning the propriety of holding a religious festival in a school with students dressed



up as Santas. "Will they allow Janmashtami festival with students dressed up as Lord Krishnas?" said R V Babu, leader, Hindu Aikyavedi. Babu said there was no untoward incident of any kind during the demonstration. He blamed the Marxist-Mullah funded media for spreading fake narrative.

Stanly Sebastian, a former professor who does not hesitate to speak his mind out was blunt in his reply to the news that carol team was attacked and cribs were vandalized. "Do you think the Sangh Parivar will resort to such acts when the party leaders are trying to strengthen the ties between the two communities

in the State? The BJP has included many influential Christians in the party and talks are underway with the spiritual leaders of the church. Last day we saw Prime Minister Modi visiting a Church in the national capital and holding discussions with the cardinals," said Prof Sebastian.

He blamed a section in the Kerala BJP and the Marxist-Mullah axis for the fake news. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday condemned the attack in harshest of words and have ordered a high-level probe into the incident. "The Sangh Parivar elements are out to destroy the communal harmony and peaceful atmosphere prevailing in the State," said Vijayan while addressing a public meeting near the capital city. Aisha Foucik Kadukkappilly, a young poet and budding lawyer at Kaladi said that there is a strange fall in the number of carol singers. But Stanly Sebastian attributed it to the decrease in Christian population over the last two decades as many families have migrated to Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand. An eerie of silence marks the Christmas festival in the State which once reverberated with the cacophony of shopping, partying and fun-making. Peaceful Christmas all over the World!

Rajnath attends inaugural ceremony of 'Atal Yuva Mahakumbh'

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday attended the inaugural ceremony of the 'Atal Yuva Mahakumbh' here and said former prime minister and Bharat Ratna recipient Atal Bihari Vajpayee's enduring legacy is a guiding light for the country. Addressing the event organised to commemorate Vajpayee's birth centenary year, Singh reflected on the former prime minister's unique personality and shared personal memories of his association with him. "The sun that rose on the political horizon of India on 25th December 1924 has not set even today. I feel so. Not only India but the whole world is familiar with the personality and deeds of revered Atalji," he said. Sharing anecdotes from Vajpayee's life, Singh recalled an incident from the former prime minister's visit to Pakistan. "A female journalist told Atal ji she would marry him if he gave her Kashmir as dowry,



alongside him as a Cabinet colleague. When his government fell by a single vote, Atal ji's historic speech redefined patriotism and democracy. He famously stated, 'Governments will come and go, parties will form and disband, but this nation and its democracy must remain eternal.' His words were a testament to his vision and unwavering principles." The defence minister also appreciated the cultural programmes and tableaux presented by children during the event at the KD Singh Babu Stadium here highlighting Vajpayee's life.

Devichand Mehta. "Mehta was running the business of construction with his partner through his firm Darshan enterprises. The accused Iqbal Kaskar, Mumtaz Shaikh and Israr Ali Jamil Saiyad due to close proximity with underworld gangster Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar managed to extort one flat in Thane in the name of Mumtaz Ezzat Shaikh," the agency had said. Besides the flat, it had then said, four cheques totalling Rs 10 lakhs "as demanded by them" were issued by the builder which has been "encashed" by the accused through cash withdrawals. The money laundering stems from a Thane Police FIR of September, 2017. The police had pressed charges under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) against the accused. Kaskar is currently in jail under judicial custody. Dawood Ibrahim has been declared terrorist by India and is stated to be based in Pakistan.

ED attaches Dawood's brother related property in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has taken possession of a flat worth Rs 55 lakh in Maharashtra's Thane, held in the name of an associate of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim's brother Iqbal Kaskar, as part of a money laundering probe. ED Officials said Tuesday that the residential dwelling in Neopolis Building located in Thane West was attached as part of a provisional order issued under the PMLA in 2022 against its owner Mumtaz Ezzat Shaikh. The adjudicating authority of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) had approved this provisional attachment order paving way for the ED to take its possession. The procedure for taking possession of the flat was completed recently. The ED had earlier said in a statement that this flat was extorted by Kaskar and others from a Thane-based real estate developer Suresh



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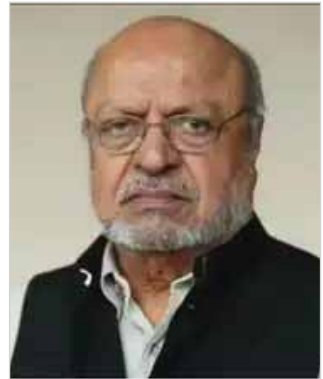
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Adieu Shyam Benegal

With passing of Shyam Benegal, Indian cinema has lost a luminary, but his films will continue to illuminate and educate

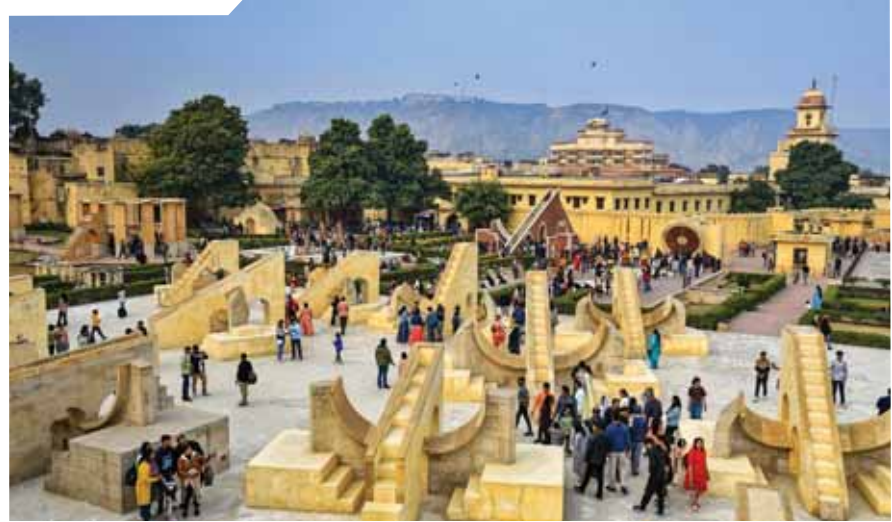
The curtains have fallen on one of the most illustrious chapters in Indian cinema. Shyam Benegal, the pioneering filmmaker who redefined storytelling in Indian cinema, passed away at the age of 90 on December 23, 2024. He succumbed to chronic kidney disease at Wockhardt Hospital in Bombay Central. Known as the father of Indian parallel cinema, Benegal's legacy remains etched in the heart of Indian filmmaking, his films celebrated for their realism, depth, and transformative impact on society. Born on December 14, 1934, Benegal celebrated his milestone 90th birthday just days ago, surrounded by close family and friends. Yet, even in his twilight years, the veteran filmmaker remained deeply connected to his art. Benegal's career was marked by his groundbreaking contribution to the Indian New Wave movement in the 1970s and 1980s. With films like 'Ankur' (1974), 'Nishant' (1975), 'Manthan' (1976), and 'Bhumika' (1977), he charted a new cinematic course that delved into realism and social commentary, a stark contrast to the formulaic escapism of mainstream Bollywood.



His films gave voice to the marginalised and explored themes of gender, class struggles, and rural India, bringing to light the unseen facets of Indian society. 'Nishant', a harrowing tale of oppression and resistance, and 'Manthan', inspired by Dr. Verghese Kurien's milk cooperative movement, became cult classics. The latter, crowdfunded by 500,000 farmers, stands as a testament to Benegal's ability to connect with grassroots realities. The film, India's official entry for the 1976 Academy Awards, exemplified his commitment to blending art with advocacy. Benegal's films also became a platform for some of India's finest acting talents. Actors like Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, and Om Puri found their early footing in his films. Azmi, who debuted in Benegal's 'Ankur', recently shared a poignant moment from his 90th birthday celebrations, underscoring the indelible bond they shared. His collaboration with screenwriter Vijay Tendulkar produced narratives that were both poignant and thought-provoking, winning multiple National Awards. From 'Junoon' to 'Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero', Benegal's oeuvre showcased an unmatched versatility, spanning historical dramas, rural sagas, and contemporary commentaries. Earlier this year, 'Manthan' was restored and screened at the Cannes Film Festival under the Cannes Classics segment, reiterating the timeless relevance of Benegal's vision. Despite his declining health, the event underscored his enduring influence on global cinema. Benegal's storytelling was never confined to entertainment. His films were instruments of change, questioning societal norms and sparking dialogues. His pioneering approach laid the foundation for generations of filmmakers who sought to marry art with social responsibility. Rest in peace, Shyam Benegal, the maestro who showed us the soul of India through his lens.

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PICTALK



Tourists visit the historical Jantar Mantar, in Jaipur

India recalibrates Myanmar strategy

The stakes are high for India, balancing its Act East policy, border security and competition with China, all against the backdrop of a fractured Myanmar



ASHOK K MEHTA

After four years of civil war in Myanmar, India has quietly changed its policy towards the Junta from one of total and unflinching support following its coup against democracy to one of nuanced support. Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing has been advocating holding elections for the last four years but only now with China's assistance, they are slated for 2025. China is playing with both sides: supporting the Junta as well as some EAOs (Ethnic Armed Organisations) especially in the north contiguous with its Yunnan province. India too has shifted the goalposts but less perceptibly and engaging some EAOs and the National Unity Government (NUG) after the Junta lost its control in the Rakhine and Chin territories along India and Bangladesh borders.

Last week the Junta's control of the ground began crumbling further with the loss of Ann, Headquarters Western Military Command, the second military command to fall to resistance groups. Junta has lost two airports - Thandwe (Rakhine) and Lashio and 75 towns and cities out of some 340 of them. It has also lost control of six border trading posts. 40 of 70 towns in Rakhine have been captured by the Arakan Army which is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, the other two being MNDA and TNLA.

Two critical seaports on the west coast - India-operated Sittwe and Chinese-owned Kyaukphyu - are on AA's target list next year unless Beijing can dissuade it from attacking Kyaukphyu though the loss of Ann has opened the gates to it. Magaung is the other target in Rakhine.

On the Thailand border, the Karen National Union took Manerplaw, the Junta losing possession after 30 years. A humanitarian corridor with Thailand has existed with the help of the Junta. In the North, TBA has been persuaded by China to go slow against the Junta, and not support NUG and the People's Defence Force. The Kachin Independence Army has seized Bemo and Mansi, popular tourist areas in the



northeast. In the central Sagaing region, Mandalay, the second largest city after Yangon, came under rocket attack last month and National Highway 3 from Mandalay to China border, was under resistance control. In sum, the Junta controls less than 50 per cent of the land but has the majority of the population in it. These are Bamar-predominant areas in Sagaing, Irrawaddy Delta, the new capital Nyaung-U and Yangon. They are likely to lose more ground next year despite pressure from the Chinese on EAOs. Beijing is the key player in Myanmar's economy and is deeply invested in business and industry. Beijing is nursing the Junta and its leader, Hlaing.

He was invited to meet PM Li Qiang after attending the Greater Mekong Subregional Summit at Kunming last month. China is replenishing the Junta's military arsenal - so is Russia - including three fighter jets with assured ammunition supply. It wants to locate a private security company (like in Pakistan) for the protection of its strategic assets like China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) containing oil and gas pipelines along with a railway link from Kunming to Kyaukphyu. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is a frequent visitor to Myanmar though most people resent Chinese support for the Junta and its presence. The Chinese consulate in

LAST WEEK THE JUNTA'S CONTROL OF THE GROUND BEGAN CRUMBLING FURTHER WITH THE LOSS OF ANN, HEADQUARTERS WESTERN MILITARY COMMAND, THE SECOND MILITARY COMMAND TO FALL TO RESISTANCE GROUPS

Mandalay came under attack recently. Theoretically, an election could be held contingent upon the ground situation in November next year. Even with low turnout and rigging an election will be manipulated. ASEAN's problem is Myanmar after the failure of its five-point consensus peace formula. Many meetings have been held with and without Myanmar representation without any light at the end of the tunnel. During the 18 December talks in Bangkok, with Myanmar's neighbouring countries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, a former Ambassador in Myanmar, discussed prospects for elections with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Shwe.

There was a separate set of talks with stakeholders from non-neighbouring countries. India's stakes are high given competition with China, a disturbed situation in its northeast and a troubling relationship developing with Bangladesh. Myanmar is a pivotal land bridge for its Act East policy, the Asean Trilateral Highway and the security of its Eastern frontier.

The junta's loss of control in Rakhine and Chin states has created an adverse situation along the border with Mizoram and a broken Manipur. While India is not proactive like China, its new policy pronouncement - old wine in a new bottle - is "immediate cessation of violence, peaceful resolution of

the ethnic issue through a genuine federal democracy where the process should be Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-driven. While Delhi has taken its time to engage resistance groups, it did organise one-and-a-half track meetings with select EAOs and Junta separately. In November, it first engaged Junta officials followed by EAOs who met the Joint Secretary (Bangladesh- Sri Lanka- Myanmar) at the Indian Council for World Affairs. In September, it had met representatives from Chin, Rakhine, Sagaing and Magwe who are already in refugee camps in Mizoram.

While India has not opened humanitarian corridors to these areas it is providing food, fuel medicines across the border. But that is not enough as they also want weapons and cash. Delhi does not want to annoy the Junta with which it has little leverage, unlike China. NUG was not invited to Delhi though it is being engaged back channel. India has to get real; be proactive, take risks and support AA and Chin rebels as its Act East policy is pivoted in areas under their control. It can't dump the Junta as it will be a key constituent of any outcome.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STRENGTHENING INDIA-KUWAIT TIES

Madam —The two-day visit of PM Narendra Modi to Kuwait will further boost the bilateral ties between two historically friendly nations. This is the first visit by any Indian prime minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years. Though India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, which date back to the pre-oil era of Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy, India and most Arab countries, especially Kuwait, have enjoyed very cordial relations based on mutual trust and people-to-people contact, nurtured over several millennia. Till 1961, the Indian rupee was the legal currency tender of Kuwait till it introduced its currency, the Kuwaiti Dinar (KWD). This was a symbol of enduring economic and cultural centuries between two brother nations.

PM Modi was conferred with Kuwait's highest civilian honour, the prestigious "Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer". The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer is a knighthood order of Kuwait. It is awarded to heads of state and foreign sovereigns and members of foreign royal families in a sign of friendship and has been previously awarded to foreign leaders like Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, George Bush, King Salman Bin Saud, and King Hussein of Jordan. This visit of PM Modi holds great significance as current global volatility requires better cooperation and stability among nations, especially among regional players, for energy security, and India's desire for stability in the Gulf region, beside Kuwait, holds significant strategic importance. The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has the world's oldest and fifth largest sovereign wealth fund, valued around US \$1 trillion, which has US \$969 billion in assets under its management. This visit of PM Modi has heralded a new era of friendship, which will further boost trade, cooperation, and peace at a time when economic concerns and regional stability dictate are of the foremost importance in the formation of political alliances.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

PV Sindhu marries Venkata Datta Sai



Indian badminton star Pusarla Venkata Sindhu, a two-time Olympic (silver and bronze) medalist, is married to Venkata Datta Sai in Udaipur. Sindhu, a five-time World Championship medallist, a few days ago, clinched the Syed Modi India International title and announced her engagement via an Instagram post on December 14, 2024, that captured a memorable moment with the couple holding their rings and smiling from ear to ear. The wedding festivities began on December 20th

in the lake city of Rajasthan at the exclusive and majestic Raffles Udaipur Resort. Pre-wedding festivities included sangeet, haldi, and mehendi ceremonies. The families, long-time acquaintances, planned the wedding swiftly to accommodate Sindhu's training schedule. Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (shockingly, he was wearing a black kurta in an auspicious ceremony, even as a Hindu party leader) shared a captivating photo of the couple, offering his blessings. Now the reception is scheduled in Sindhu's native city, Hyderabad, on December 24. Congratulations to the darling daughter of Mother India, P. V. Sindhu, and her husband, Venkata Datta Sai. Best wishes to the newlyweds for a wonderful & eternal married life. Whatsoever, the first image of the wedding has already captivated hearts, setting the tone for the couple's happily ever after.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

POPCORN PRICING DEBATE

Madam—The recent decision by the GST Council has turned popcorn from a simple snack into a focal point of economic debate. Under the new rules, salted popcorn is taxed at 5 per cent, packaged popcorn at 12 per cent, and sugar-flavoured popcorn at 18 per cent. This decision raises questions about the priorities of the tax structure while adding complexity to people's daily lives. Will samosas, tea, and water also be classified into tax categories based on taste and packaging? The tax determination for popcorn signals that the government is exploring every possible avenue to increase revenue. The aroma of popcorn in cinemas might now bring concerns about tax slabs before the joy of taste. Popcorn, once a symbol of social equality, has now become a marker of class division due to the 5 per cent and 18 per cent tax differential. This decision could negatively impact the Rs 1,200 crore popcorn industry, pushing people toward cheaper alternatives. The government must recognise that such decisions add to the burden on citizens already grap-

pling with inflation. Popcorn is no longer just a snack but a representation of the complexities of policymaking.

RK Jain | Barwani

TRIBES PROTECT NATURE

Madam —It is a great irony that all the well-educated and better-placed-in-life populations are destroying nature and damaging the environment; it is the indigenous tribes across the world who are supposedly backward and primitive who are doing their best to protect it. The bond between nature and her people has all but broken down in all urban centres, and the city dwellers do not think twice about their lifestyles, which is slowly destroying the environment. After all, we, the human race, are not the sole inhabitants of the planet, and other living creatures are co-inheritors too. It is time for all the nations with tribal populations to learn from them on how to care for and protect the planet.

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Across cultures and ages: The beauty of unexpected friendships

The unexpected joy of forging meaningful friendships in middle age defies the common belief that the best opportunities for connection are behind us

Your hat is fantastic. It makes you look more Bavarian than any of us, the concierge quipped as I entered the venue for the coffee-and-cake event at a resort in southern Germany. Although he was stretching the truth — I have neither blonde hair nor blue eyes — I accepted the compliment with a coy smile. "Danke schön," I said, tipping my woolen hat. Just then, another guest remarked, "That's a pretty pin on your hat," pointing to the delicate hand-crafted Edelweiss flower. A cherished gift from my friends, Wolfgang and Amelie, the pin symbolised a friendship that began just a year ago, in this very Bavarian town of Schliersee.



The Wolfgang — a handsome, warm-hearted couple — are a testament to the unexpected joy of friendships made in middle age. Our bond didn't begin with shared childhoods or decades of history but with a simple "hello" and an open heart. The modest origins of our connection and the way it blossomed over the past year defy the notion that meaningful friendships are reserved

innocence of youthful camaraderie gives way to guarded interactions, and we convince ourselves that the window for profound friendship has closed. Yet, the Wolfgang remind me that this window is not sealed shut — it merely takes a little more effort to open.

Friendships formed in middle age are special not despite our life experiences, but because of them. We bring to these connections a deeper sense of self-awareness, empathy, and appreciation.

There's no rush to impress or to conform. The pressures of youthful identity-building are gone. In their place, we find sincerity, authenticity, and the willingness to value people for who they truly are. They remind us of the universality of human warmth and curiosity. Meeting someone from another country — someone whose life, traditions, and language are different — can feel like discovering an entirely new world. And when such encounters lead to genuine friendship, they break down the invisible walls that geography and culture often build around us. There is also a profound joy

in the intentionality of these connections. In our younger years, friendships are often born of proximity — classmates, neighbours, or college roommates. As adults, friendships require deliberate effort. This intentionality infuses middle-aged friendships with a depth and resilience that can be even more rewarding than the bonds of our youth. I think back to the pin on my hat — that delicate Edelweiss — and I see it as a metaphor for these kinds of friendships. The Edelweiss, a rare Alpine flower, thrives in challenging conditions.

It symbolises courage, devotion, and the willingness to climb new heights. Like the flower, friendships made in middle age might take more effort to cultivate, but they are hardy, resilient, and precious. A year after that first meeting, I found myself once again in Schliersee last month, sharing coffee and cake with the Wolfgang, laughing over our language blunders and cultural quirks. It is never too late to make friends.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



ASHA KUMAR IYER

FIRST COLUMN
THE ETERNAL WISDOM OF SUNDAR KAND

Sacred texts and mantras hold a timeless power to uplift the soul



RAVI VALLURI

The faithful recognise the profound benefits of chanting or reading sacred texts, mantras, and scriptures like the Hanuman Chalisa and Sundar Kand. These practices are especially embraced by large numbers on auspicious days such as Tuesdays and Saturdays. The vibrations generated by reading these sacred books and meditating on the mantras foster positive thoughts, beautify the mind, and empower us to overcome internal obstacles and dispel negativity clouding our perspective. Yet, many of us struggle to engage in these practices regularly, often citing demanding schedules and lack of time. As spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar observes, "The time given to the Divine is the least." Consequently, we neglect to devote quality time to the Lord, remembering Him only in moments of distress. Even when time is found, many face difficulties focusing, maintaining clarity, or chanting with proper intonation. The mind frequently drifts into worldly concerns.



To aid this practice, here is a simple version of Sundar Kand:
Ram Ram Jai Ram
Ram Jai Ram Ram
Peaceful, Compassionate, Sinless,
One served by Brahma and Shambhu,
One who appears in human form by Maya,
O Raghuvhar, I bow to you.
You are my innermost Self.
Liberate me, O Lord,
Instill devotion within me.

O Lord Hanuman, epitome of strength, knowledge, and wisdom, emboldened by Jambavanth's counsel, set out to cross the mighty ocean in search of Sita. He triumphed over the demoness Surasa and reached Lanka under the cover of night. Guided by divine intuition, he discovered Sita and presented her with Lord Ram's ring, bowing at her feet and seeking her blessings. Hanuman then wreaked havoc in Ashok Vatika—eating fruits, breaking branches, and shaking trees. Allowing himself to be captured by the asuras, he was taken to Ravana's court. There, he urged Ravana to repent and return Sita to Lord Ram. Ravana, consumed by ego, refused and instead set Hanuman's tail ablaze. In response, Hanuman used the fire to destroy Lanka's golden city. Before departing, Hanuman comforted Sita and took her Chudamani (jewel) as a token for Lord Ram. On returning, he presented it to Ram, who embraced him, deeply moved by his devotion and bravery. When asked how he accomplished the task, Hanuman humbly replied that nothing is impossible with the grace of Lord Ram. Lord Ram then instructed Sugreev to assemble the army and seek the ocean's permission to cross into Lanka. Meanwhile, Mandodari, Ravana's queen, warned him of the dire consequences of his actions and implored him to release Sita, but he refused. Ravana's virtuous brother Vibheeshan also advised him to repent, cautioning that even Lord Shiva would disapprove of his deeds. Ignoring all advice, Ravana's stubbornness led Vibheeshan to abandon Lanka and seek refuge at Lord Ram's feet. Recognising his righteousness, Lord Ram crowned Vibheeshan as the future king of Lanka. Ravana sent spies disguised as messengers to gather information on Lord Ram's plans. They returned with alarming news and urged Ravana to free Sita, but he remained defiant. With the help of Nal and Neel, Lord Ram constructed the Setu bridge to cross the ocean. Along the way, he released the river Sarayu from its curse and advanced toward Lanka. This timeless Sundar Kand, penned by Tulsidas, continues to inspire and guide devotees on their spiritual journey.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Atal ji: The statesman with vision and resolve



NARENDRA MODI

Today, as we mark the 100th Jayanti of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, we celebrate the life and legacy of a statesman whose vision and leadership continue to inspire generations



Today, 25th December is a very special day for all of us. Our nation marks the 100th Jayanti of our beloved former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji. He stands tall as a statesman who continues to inspire countless people. Our nation will always be grateful to Atal Ji for being the architect of India's transition into the 21st century. When he took oath as PM in 1998 our nation had passed through a period of political instability. In about 9 years we had seen 4 Lok Sabha elections. The people of India were getting impatient and also sceptical about governments being able to deliver. It was Atal Ji who turned this tide by providing stable and effective governance. Coming from humble roots, he realised the struggles of the common citizen and the transformative power of effective governance.

One can see the long-term impact of Atal Ji's leadership in so many sectors around us. His era marked a gigantic leap in the world of Information Technology, telecom and communications. This was particularly important for a nation like ours, which is also blessed with a very dynamic Yuva Shakti. The NDA Government under Atal Ji made the first serious attempt to make technology accessible to the common citizens. At the same time, there was foresight in connecting India. Even today, most people recall the Golden Quadrilateral Project, which connected the length and breadth of India. Equally notable were the Vajpayee Government's efforts to enhance local connectivity as well through initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Similarly, his Government gave a push to metro connectivity by doing extensive work for the Delhi Metro, which stands out as a world-class infrastructure project.

Thus, the Vajpayee Government not only boosted economic growth but also brought distant regions closer, fostering unity and integration. When it comes to



ATAL JI PRESIDED OVER THE CREATION OF THE NDA, WHICH REDEFINED COALITIONS IN INDIAN POLITICS. HE BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER AND MADE NDA A FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL PROGRESS AND REGIONAL AMBITIONS

the social sector, an initiative like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan highlights how Atal Ji dreamt of building an India where modern education is accessible to people across the nation, particularly for the poor and marginalised sections. At the same time, his government presided over many economic reforms which set the stage for India's economic surge after several decades of following an economic philosophy which encouraged cronyism and stagnation.

A wonderful example of Vajpayee Ji's leadership can be seen in the summer of 1998. His Government had just assumed office and on 11th May, India conducted the Pokhran tests, known as Operation Shakti. These tests exemplified the prowess of India's scientific community. The world was stunned that India had done the tests and expressed their anger in no uncertain terms. Any ordinary leader would have buckled, but Atal Ji was made differently. And what happened? India stood firm and resolute with the government calling for another set of tests two days later, on 13th May! If the tests of the 11th showed scientific skill, the ones on 13th showed true leadership. It was a message to the world that gone were the days when India would buckle under threats or pressure. Despite facing international sanctions, the then NDA government of Vajpayee Ji stood firm, articulating India's right to safeguard its sovereignty while simultaneously being the strongest proponent of world peace.

Atal Ji understood Indian democracy and also the need to make it stronger. Atal Ji presided over the creation of the NDA, which redefined coalitions in Indian politics. He brought people together and

made NDA a force for development, national progress and regional ambitions. His Parliamentary brilliance was seen throughout his political journey. He belonged to a party with a handful of MPs but his words were enough to rattle the might of the all-powerful Congress Party that time. As Prime Minister, he blunted the criticisms of the Opposition with style and substance. His was a career spent largely in the Opposition benches but never carried any trace of bitterness against anyone, even though the Congress stooped to new lows by going to the extent of calling him a traitor! He was also not one to cling on to power through opportunistic means. He preferred to resign in 1996 instead of following the path of horse-trading and dirty politics. In 1999, his Government was defeated by 1 vote.

A lot of people told him to challenge the immoral politics happening then but he preferred to go by the rules. Eventually, he came back with another resounding mandate from the people. When it comes to commitment to protecting our Constitution too, Atal Ji stands tall. He was deeply impacted by the martyrdom of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Years later, he was a pillar of the anti-Emergency movement. In the run-up to the 1977 elections after the Emergency, he agreed to merger of his own Party (Jan Sangh) into the Janata Party. I am sure it would have been a painful decision for him and the others, but safeguarding the Constitution was all that mattered to him.

It is also noteworthy how deeply rooted Atal Ji was in Indian culture. Upon becoming India's External Affairs Minister, he became the first Indian leader to speak in Hindi at

the United Nations. This one gesture showcased his immense pride in India's heritage and identity, leaving an indelible mark on the global stage.

Atal Ji's persona was magnetic and his life was enriched by his love for literature and expression. A prolific writer and poet, he used words to inspire, provoke thought, and even offer solace. His poetry, often reflective of his inner struggles and hopes for the nation, continues to resonate with people across age groups. For so many Bharatiya Janata Party Karyakartas like me, it is our privilege that we were able to learn and interact with a person like Atal Ji. His contribution to the BJP was foundational.

In those days to spear-head an alternative narrative to the dominant Congress showed his greatness. Alongside stalwarts like Shri L.K. Advani Ji and Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi Ji he nurtured the party from its formative years, guiding it through challenges, setbacks and triumphs. Whenever the choice came between ideology and power, he always chose the former. He was able to convince the nation that an alternative world view from the Congress was possible and such a world view could deliver.

On his 100th Jayanti, let us rededicate ourselves to realising his ideals and fulfilling his vision for India. Let us strive to build an India that embodies his principles of good governance, unity, and progress. Atal Ji's unwavering belief in the potential of our nation continues to inspire us to aim higher and work harder.

(This tribute to the visionary statesman late former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been penned by PM Narendra Modi)

Dreaming of a White Christmas in New York City

The first snowfall and the twinkle of lights on the Rockefeller tree—there's a certain magic that makes Christmas in New York unforgettable

The first time I saw New York City during the holidays, I was 19, a college freshman on a whirlwind trip with my friends. It was my first real taste of winter—snow, bitter cold, and the kind of brisk air that turns your cheeks red. Coming from a place where Christmas meant palm trees with twinkle lights, the sight of NYC blanketed in snow felt like stepping into a new world. I didn't know it then, but that trip would spark a love affair with the city that would eventually bring me back here five years later. My First Snow, My First NYC Christmas



SHREYA DAYAL

absolutely freezing. Walking through Times Square that Black Friday, bundled up in layers that still didn't feel like enough, I saw the city come alive in a way that felt electric. It wasn't just the towering billboards or the endless sales signs luring shoppers into stores at all hours of the night.

It was the energy—the palpable hum of people chasing holiday deals while dodging each other in the snow. It was chaotic, overwhelming, and unforgettable. Somewhere in the madness of flashing lights and icy sidewalks, I knew I wanted to come back someday—not as a visitor, but as someone who belonged here.

The Magic of NYC's Holiday Icons

During that trip, we did all the things you're supposed to do when you're experiencing Christmas in New York for the first time. We saw the Rockefeller Center tree, towering above the skating rink, every inch of it glowing like it had been plucked from a fairytale. The cold bit at my fingers as we stood there, taking it all in. For a moment, the crowds

and the cold faded away, leaving only the soft twinkle of the lights and the awe of standing in front of something so iconic.

The Met was another world entirely. As someone who'd only read about it in books, stepping into its grandeur felt surreal. Wandering through the exhibits, I found myself captivated by the way history and art came alive here. Outside, the snow was falling again, but I was too caught up in the beauty around me to notice the cold.

The Broadway Moment That Changed Everything

That trip wasn't just about the sights; it was about the moments that stayed with me long after I left. One of those moments was seeing Phantom of the Opera on Broadway.



Sitting in that theater, watching the chandelier crash and the Phantom's haunting story unfold, I felt a kind of magic I couldn't quite explain. It was more than just a show—it was a moment that made me feel alive in a way I hadn't before. Walking out of the theater into the snowy night, the sounds of

the orchestra still echoing in my mind, I felt a connection to the city that I couldn't shake. It was as if New York had opened its arms to me and whispered, "Come back."

Coming Full Circle

Five years later, I did come back. I'd dreamed of living in New York ever since that first

trip, and now here I was, not as a wide-eyed tourist, but as someone calling the city home. It's funny how those early memories still feel so vivid, like they're a part of me.

Walking through Times Square today, I still think about that freezing Black Friday night when I braved the snow for the first time. Seeing the Rockefeller tree now brings back flashes of that first tripping in awe of its beauty and dreaming about a future that somehow feels like the present now. Even when I catch a Broadway show, I can't help but remember how Phantom of the Opera made me fall in love with this city in the first place.

The Spirit of a NYC Christmas

There's something timeless

about Christmas in New York. No matter how many years pass or how many times you see it, the magic never fades. The snow still glistens, the lights still dazzle, and the city still hums with that unmistakable holiday energy.

For me, it's not just about the sights or the snow—it's about how this city makes you feel. It's about the way it wraps you up in its chaos, its beauty, and its magic, and leaves you with memories that last a lifetime. A White Christmas in New York City isn't just a holiday—it's a story. And for me, it's the story of a 19-year-old who fell in love with the snow, the lights, and the city that would one day become home!

(The writer is a researcher at Johns Hopkins University; views are personal)

No justification in US curbs on Pak firms, says Shehbaz

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday defended Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme, saying the recent US sanctions against the country's four entities have "no justification". His remarks came days after the US slapped sanctions on four Pakistani firms, including the state-owned flagship aerospace and defence agency — National Development Complex (NDC) — on charges of contributing to ballistic missile programme. In addition to the NDC, the three other entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise. All three are based in Karachi, while the NDC is in Islamabad. "The sanctions placed upon our National Development Complex and other entities have no justification," Prime Minister Shehbaz said while addressing a federal cabinet meeting.

"Pakistan has absolutely no intention for our nuclear system to be aggressive. It is 100 per cent for Pakistan's defence. It's just deterrence; nothing else," he added. The prime minister also said that Pakistan's ballistic missile programme was for defending itself "if God forbid there is aggression against Pakistan". Earlier, the Foreign Office termed the US decision to impose sanctions on NDC and three commercial entities as "unfortunate and biased". Shehbaz noted that the FO had given a "comprehensive response" and said that the missile programme belonged to the entire nation. "It's dearer to them (the public) than their hearts and there will be no compromise," he said, clarifying that the nation was united on the issue. Pakistan and the US have experienced an uneasy relationship in recent years due to issues related to human rights, terrorism, nuclear weapons and missile pro-

gramme. **US expresses concern over sentencing of 25 civilians by Pakistan military court:** Expressing concern over the sentencing of 25 civilians by a military court in Pakistan, the United States on Monday said that it lacked judicial independence, transparency and due process guarantees. "The United States is deeply concerned that Pakistani civilians have been sentenced by a military tribunal for their involvement in protests on May 9, 2023. These military courts lack judicial independence, transparency, and due process guarantees," said State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller. "The United States continues to call on Pakistani authorities to respect the right to a fair trial and due process, as enshrined in Pakistan's constitution," he added. However, a close aide of President-elect Donald Trump described it as too little and too weak. "You are late. And this is too little and too weak. Speak

normally. Free Imran Khan," said Richard Grenell, who served as acting director of national intelligence under President Trump in 2020 and was the US ambassador to Germany from 2018 to 2020. Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna joined Grenell in seeking freedom for Imran Khan. "I agree with Richard Grenell. It's time to free Imran Khan and allow the people of Pakistan to hold new democratic elections," Khanna said. "Free Imran Khan. This is bipartisan. We need to not recognize the rigged election in Pakistan and the new government. We need a new election in Pakistan and Imran Khan needs to be out of jail," Khanna said in a video posted on a social media platform. Former Trump envoy on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said it is time to put more pressure on Pakistan, especially the military, to facilitate reaching a balanced political agreement with PTI and the release of Imran Khan.

'We should try again': Punjab Assembly Speaker on Vajpayee's failed India-Pak peace initiative

PTI ■ LAHORE

"Even though the chance was missed, we should try again," says Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan when asked about Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 1999 'bus yatra', a bold attempt by the then Indian prime minister to put India-Pakistan relations on the peace track. Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore on February 19, 1999. He and Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif signed the Lahore Declaration after a historic summit here. The agreement signalled a breakthrough, but just months later a Pakistani intrusion led to the Kargil War. Wednesday is Vajpayee's 100th birth anniversary. "Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in 1999 was a defining moment. Even though the chance was missed, we should try again. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who follows Vajpayee's vision, leading India, and Shehbaz Sharif, Nawaz's brother, in charge in Pakistan, there is a real possibility of restarting the peace process," says Khan, who is a senior member of the Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz (PML-N). Khan says the future of the region depends on free trade and unrestricted movement between countries. "Peace in the region is not just a good idea — it is necessary for growth and prosperity," the Punjab Speaker adds. Another senior PML-N leader from Punjab, Mohammad Mehdi, describes Vajpayee's Lahore visit as historic. He believes the visit could have led to lasting peace if the Kargil conflict had not happened. "The Western media paid a lot of attention to Vajpayee's visit because it came just months after both countries became nuclear powers," Mehdi says, referring to nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998. "There was excitement, especially within PML-N ranks, when Vajpayee arrived in Lahore in February 1999. His speech, saying 'Pakistan is a reality, and both countries now need to move forward and leave the past behind,' gave hope to many," Mehdi recalls. Unfortunately, the Kargil conflict happened soon after, and the peace efforts were unsuccessful, he says.

Mehdi says Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) held protests during Vajpayee's visit, which many believe were organised by the military led by General Pervez Musharraf. "Jamaat-i-Islami workers even attacked the Turkish ambassador's car near Lahore Fort, mistaking it for an Indian delegation," he says. Mehdi believes back-channel talks between Pakistan and India are still happening. "Right now, relations between the two countries are at their lowest point. Neither country has an envoy in the other's capital. However, businessmen on both sides desperately want to restore ties to improve trade and use shorter routes through Pakistan to reach Central Asia and Europe," he says. Political expert Brig (ret.) Farooq Hameed says Nawaz Sharif should have involved the powerful Pakistan Army in the peace process. "The initiative failed because the military was not consulted, which led to the Kargil conflict and ended the peace process. If Nawaz Sharif had taken the military on board before Vajpayee's visit, the chances of the peace talks being success-

ful would have been higher." Hameed says Nawaz has repeatedly shown interest in improving ties with India, including his desire to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi after returning to Pakistan last year from a four-year self-imposed exile in London. However, he pointed out, that Nawaz's younger brother, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has not made any recent public statements indicating a similar desire. "Nawaz should first consult Shehbaz, who enjoys the military establishment's favour, to determine if he shares this vision for improved relations with India," he says. He also notes the lack of progress after Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar visited Pakistan recently. "Most Pakistanis are not anti-India. Unlike in India, politicians here do not need to criticise India to win elections," Hameed says. However, terrorism remains a major obstacle to reconciliation, he says. India has often accused Pakistan of supporting terrorism, while Pakistan now blames India for terror attacks in Balochistan.

Syria's new authorities 'very receptive' to probe of Assad war crimes

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The UN organization assisting in investigating the most serious crimes in Syria said Monday the country's new authorities were "very receptive" to its request for cooperation during a just-concluded visit to Damascus, and it is preparing to deploy. The visit led by Robert Petit, head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, was the first since the organization was established by the UN General Assembly in 2016. It was created to assist in evidence-gathering and prosecution of indi-

viduals responsible for possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide since Syria's civil war began in 2011. Petit highlighted the urgency of preserving documents and other evidence before it is lost. Since the rebel overthrow of Syria's President Bashar Assad and the rebel opening of prisons and detention facilities there have been rising demands from Syrians for the prosecution of those responsible for atrocities and killings while he was in power. "The fall of the Assad rule is a significant opportunity for us to fulfill our mandate on the ground," Petit said. "Time is

running out. There is a small window of opportunity to secure these sites and the material they hold." UN associate spokesperson Stephane Tremblay said Monday the investigative team "is preparing for an operational deployment as early as possible and as soon as it is authorized to conduct activities on Syrian soil." The spokesperson for the organization, known as the IIIM, who was on the trip with Petit, went further, telling The Associated Press: "We are preparing to deploy on the expectation that we will get authorization." "The representatives from the

caretaker authorities were very receptive to our request for cooperation and are aware of the scale of the task ahead," the spokesperson said, speaking on condition of not being named. "They emphasized that they will need expertise to help safeguard the newly accessible documentation." The IIIM did not disclose which officials in the new government it met with or the site that Petit visited afterward. "Even at one facility," Petit said, "the mountains of government documentation reveal the chilling efficiency of systematizing the regime's atrocity crimes."

Hong Kong police issue arrest warrants, bounties for six activists

AP ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong police on Tuesday announced a fresh round of arrest warrants for six activists based overseas, with bounties set at USD 1 million Hong Kong dollars for information leading to their arrests. According to the warrants, the six are wanted for national security offences such as secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces. They include Tony Chung, the former leader of now-defunct pro-independence group Studentlocalism. UK-based Carmen Lau, a former district councillor and current activist with the Hong Kong Democracy Council, as

well as Chloe Cheung, an activist with the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong, also had warrants issued against them. The latest round of warrants signals that the Hong Kong government is targeting vocal critics based abroad. The government had previously issued two rounds of arrest warrants and bounties for more prominent activists, including ex-lawmakers Ted Hui and Nathan Law. The increasing number of wanted individuals abroad come as Hong Kong continues to crack down on political dissent following massive anti-government protests in 2019 that resulted in a wave of pro-democracy move-

ments. Many outspoken pro-democracy activists have since been jailed, with others fleeing abroad. "The Hong Kong government's latest round of arrest warrants and bounties against six Hong Kong activists is a cowardly act of intimidation that aims to silence Hong Kong people," said Maya Wang, associate China director at Human Rights Watch. "The six — including two Canadian citizens — live in the UK and Canada. We call on the UK and Canadian governments to act immediately to push back against the Hong Kong government's attempts to threaten Hong Kongers living in their

countries." Tuesday's arrest warrants take the total number of wanted people to 19. Others on the list Tuesday are Chung Kim-wah, previously a senior member of independent polling organization Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute; Joseph Tay, co-founder of Canada-based NGO HongKonger Station; and YouTuber Victor Ho. Separately on Tuesday, the Hong Kong government issued orders for the cancellation of passports belonging to seven "absconders", including ex-lawmakers Hui and Dennis Kwok, who are wanted under the security law.

UK PM Keir Starmer hopes for peace in Middle East in Christmas message

PTI ■ LONDON

Keir Starmer has said he will be hoping for peace in the Middle East, the birthplace of the Christmas story, and a brighter future for all in his first festive message since being elected British Prime Minister. In a video message released by Downing Street ahead of Christmas Day on Wednesday, Starmer attempts to strike an optimistic tone and encourages people to "look after those around us". He extended his special gratitude to the armed forces and frontline workers who will be helping people up and down the country. "This Christmas, I will be hoping for peace, particularly in the Middle East as the birthplace of the Christmas story," said Starmer. "I'll be looking towards a better, brighter future for every person and celebrating the joy and



wonder that Christmas brings," he said. He said the festival was a reminder of what's really important, such as family, friendship and fellowship between all people. He added: "Being there for one another — in these celebrations, as well as the more difficult times. I'd like especially to thank those who will spend their

Christmas serving others this year. In our NHS [National Health Service] and emergency services, our Armed Forces and the churches and charities that will welcome every person this Christmas." "Because I know that this is not an easy time for everyone, and my thoughts are with all those who are lonely this Christmas. Having a tough time, missing a loved one. You are not alone, because as Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Christmas story reminds all of us to reach out to one another. To care for one another. And to look after those around us," he said. Earlier, Downing Street indicated that Starmer and his family would spend Christmas at the Prime Minister's country retreat of Chequers in Buckinghamshire. He is then set to travel abroad "for a few days" for his first family holiday since taking charge at 10 Downing

Street following the July general election. It comes as King Charles III set a new tradition for his customary Christmas Day message and chose Fitzrovia Chapel in London for its recording. It is understood that his speech will reflect on international, national and personal challenges and how they can be overcome by communities supporting one another. "The living Christmas tree shown in this year's broadcast was decorated with sustainable decorations including pinecones, metal bells, twisted glass and glass baubles," Buckingham Palace said. It added that 2024 marks the first time a British monarch's Christmas message has been filmed outside a royal residence since 2006 when the late Queen Elizabeth II filmed a message at Southwark Cathedral in London.



People celebrate with Christmas decorations in Haifa, Israel.

AP/PTI

Where does Santa live? It's a trickier question to answer than you may think

THE CONVERSATION ■ QUEENSLAND

Sending a letter to Santa can be difficult as no one can agree on where exactly Santa lives. Several countries are competing to claim Santa as one of their citizens. Finland's tourism industry suggests Korvatunturi in Lapland is where Santa keeps his workshop, and the link between Santa and Lapland brings in hundreds of millions of tourist dollars. Danes say Santa is in Greenland. Sweden suggests Mora is the place, and has built the theme park Santaworld. These places certainly look the part with white snow in winter and reindeer. They're also close to the North Pole. **Not so jolly traditions:** They also have old and often quite disturbing folklore about the man in red. Pagan Finns celebrated St Knut's Day in wintry January by having men in furry jackets, the nuuttipukki, go from house to house with a sack of presents. Except the nuuttipukki weren't giving gifts and would likely make children cry.

They came demanding gifts and would curse bad luck to any household not handing over a present. Eventually the gift grabbing nuuttipukki became the gift giving Joulupukki. Like other northern traditions such as the Yule Lads of Iceland, this visitor gave gifts but only to well behaved children. By the 19th century, Santa Claus was settled in popular awareness more or less what we think of now: a jolly old man with a beard, a sleigh, reindeer and presents, living somewhere northern and cold. That image built on but sanitised the more grotesque European folklores of elves, gnomes and other supernatural creatures who either brought or demanded gifts. But standardising Santa's appearance did not settle where he actually lived and worked. In the mid-19th century the illustrator Thomas Nast portrayed Santa as a jolly old man in Harper's Weekly, and the illustration and the archetype took off. But Nast just showed Santa in a wintry landscape. It could have been the North Pole, and no one in 1866 had actually



been to the Pole. No explorer reached there until 1926, leaving Santa, if he did live there, undis-

turbed in his workshop. **Santa and territorial disputes:** The medieval and pagan mytholo-

gies in Finland and Scandinavia give some credibility to these countries' efforts to claim Santa as their

own. After all, these are old legends. Other countries take a more modern approach. The Canadian government makes sure Christmas happens each year by allowing Santa to travel through Canadian airspace. Taking that a step further, in 2013 the Conservative government of Stephen Harper issued Santa and his wife with Canadian passports. That action might seem twee or whimsical or simply some Christmas fun for children, but it may also have shown that some governments want to claim a lot more than Santa. Harper's gesture came at a time of an international political dispute about ownership of the North Pole and specifically Canadian claims to Arctic regions. **Somewhere hotter than the Pole:** But are all these countries wrong, or being opportunistic? Despite what we think, where Santa really comes from is a lot hotter and a lot further east — and those red robes would be uncomfortable to wear. Santa Claus is a name derived from Sinterklaas or Saint Nicholas. Along with pagan elves and gnomes,

another element in the long and very complex history of Santa is the Christian bishop St Nicholas of Smyrna. Or is that Nicholas of Myra? Myra, now called Izmir in Turkey, and Myra, now Demre in Turkey, are both associated with Nicholas. Just as in northern Europe, different places in Anatolia compete to be associated with Santa. Nicholas is patron saint of seemingly everything including archers and brewers but also children and sailors. The link with children explains the later association as Santa, especially as Saint Nicholas gave children gifts. The link with sailors is why his legend is known around the world. A 2017 archaeological dig under the Church of Saint Nicholas in Turkey was believed to have found the burial place and therefore the body of Saint Nicholas. A grave full of old bones is not very Christmas-like, but it may be an authentic link between a place and a person which no amount of snow or reindeer in northern Europe could match.

Bangladesh launches \$5 billion graft probe against Sheikh Hasina in nuclear power plant case

Plant project were brought to light by Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the National Democratic Movement (NDM). Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime.

Her sister Rehana accompanied her. Joy resides in the US, while her niece Tulip is a member of the British parliament. Bangladesh-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

US NSA Sullivan, Yunus discuss human rights' issue

Amid growing outrage here about the large-scale attack on minority Hindus and their places of worship in Bangladesh, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Monday spoke with the interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and both leaders expressed commitment to protect human rights in the troubled South Asian nation.

South Korea's opposition vows to impeach acting president

South Korea's main opposition party said Tuesday it will seek to impeach acting leader Han Duck-soo after he missed an opposition-set deadline to approve independent investigations into impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife.

reviewing Yoon's impeachment and will determine whether to dismiss or reinstate him. Filling the court's three empty posts could make conviction more likely, as it requires the support of six of the court's nine possible members.

of rebellion plot leader Yoon Suk Yeol or a public servant that has faithfully carried out the orders by the public," Park told a televised party meeting. Korean prosecutors and other officials are separately probing whether Yoon committed rebellion and abuse of power, but he's ignored requests by investigative agencies to appear for questioning and allow searches of his office.

exercise of authority." Floor leader Kwon Seong-dong, a Yoon loyalist, said the Democratic Party's "politics of intimidation have reached their peak."

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME I R Arkesh S/o S. Rama Swami R/o H.No. 353, Block-16, Kalyan Puri, Delhi-110091

PUBLIC NOTICE It is informed to the public at large that Jammu and Kashmir Bank Ltd., D-63, Basant Lok, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi, is desirous of sanctioning housing loan facility in favour of Mrs. Saroj Kujur W/o Sh. Asit Wilson Kujur, for purchase of Portion / Unit No. UGF-1, on Upper Ground Floor (Front RHS South Eastern), measuring approx. 750 sq. ft., forming part of properties bearing No. (S) 899-B, 892/A-6, and 892/A-3, situated at Ward No. 8, Village Mehrauli, Tehsil Hauz Khas, New Delhi. If anyone has any objection or claim, the title rights of the said property, please contact the undersigned, within 5 days from the date of publication hereof.

PUBLIC NOTICE To be known to all that my client WISHAL ARORA S/O SH. MANMOHAN ARORA, 110 HOUSE NO.614, SECTOR-11, PANCHKULA, HARYANA-134112. The Original Demand Letter/Allotment Cum Demand Letter of the DDA LG FLAT NO. 2, GROUND FLOOR, POKKET-1, BLOCK-45, SECTOR-34, ROHINI, DELHI premises has been issued to the said client. An FIR to this effect has been filed in the Police Station, Crime Branch Delhi. The FIR No. 2427812/2024, Dated 23/12/2024. Any person(s) found in possession of original documents, FILE NO. L353(216)2015/2014/RO, may please contact at above address/ Mobile No. 9815787756 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person(s) claiming any right/interest can personally inform or write to Dr. Director, (DDA 2014 Housing Scheme, (LIG), INA New Delhi-110023.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given that one Mr. Shanku Gupta & Ms. Priyanka Gupta (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagees/Purchasers) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of the Property more particularly described in the Schedule hereunder written in favour of my client PNB Housing Finance Ltd. (PNB Housing Finance Ltd. Sector-3, Noida-201301). The Seller Mr. Pushpak Gupta S/o Mr. Suresh Chandra Gupta has been issued the Original General Form of Attorney executed by Mr. Suresh Chandra Gupta registered at Sector-07, GWP, Swaraspur S/O Mr. Choudhary, registered on 28.04.2016 in the Office of the Registrar, Gurgaon, Haryana. The said Original Form No. 101/102 of Document No. 1536, in respect of the Leasehold Residential Plot, F83A, in Block 'F' situated at Sector-07, GWP, Patel Nagar Residential Colony, Gurgaon, Haryana. The said Original Form No. 101/102 of Document No. 1536, in respect of the Leasehold Residential Plot, F83A, in Block 'F' situated at Sector-07, GWP, Patel Nagar Residential Colony, Gurgaon, Haryana. The said Original Form No. 101/102 of Document No. 1536, in respect of the Leasehold Residential Plot, F83A, in Block 'F' situated at Sector-07, GWP, Patel Nagar Residential Colony, Gurgaon, Haryana. The said Original Form No. 101/102 of Document No. 1536, in respect of the Leasehold Residential Plot, F83A, in Block 'F' situated at Sector-07, GWP, Patel Nagar Residential Colony, Gurgaon, Haryana.

LOST & FOUND I, Ramesh Chander Sukha S/o Hans Raj Sukha, F-36/40 2nd floor Lajpat Nagar-II, South East Delhi-110024 My First & Second Year Marksheet for the passing year 1976 bearing roll number 27/DPH/74 College of Pharmacy Pusa Campus New Delhi-110012 have Lost. have Aread FIR that document SO No. 430/2014, LR No. 2432094/2024 On Dated 15/12/24.

LOST & FOUND I, Satish Kumar S/o Umed Singh VPO- Atali, Teh-Ballabgarh, Faridabad Haryana-12004, My Property document Lost on 5 Aug 2024 Where my builder buyer Agreement was lost. My flat No. 907, D10 Tower, KJ Platinum hight, Sector-77, Faridabad HR-121004, have Aread FIR that document SO No.430/2014 LR No. -2070127/2024 Dated 29/08/24.

PD(1137)C I, Reshma Devi, Mother of No.8432377H Hav/Clk Surendra Singh, R/o- Vill-Khemana, Post- Dokwa, Teh-Rajgarh, Dist- Churu, Rajasthan- 331023, have changed my name from Reshma Devi (Old Name) to Reshma (New Name) for all purposes, vide affidavit dated 24/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE Euro International School a unit of the Satya Educational Society Princess Park, Sec- 86, Faridabad, Haryana - 121002 Ph: 9811044317 www.euroschoolsec86fd.com

PUBLIC NOTICE DRM (S&T), KATHIAR NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "Serving Customers with a smile"

PUBLIC NOTICE ON AUCTION OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS The borrower/s in specific and interested bidders in general, are hereby informed that on account of non-repayment of the Banks due by the borrowers as under despite the payment notice and recall/auction notice issued by the Bank, the gold ornaments pledged with the bank security by the respective borrowers for the loan availed by them will be sold in public auction on "as is where is" and "non-recourse" basis through e-auction portal http://csbgold.auctiontiger.net on 05 January 2025 at 10.30 AM. The auction may be adjourned to any other later date at the discretion of the bank upon publication of the same in the Bank's notice board. The borrowers are hereby further inform that the gold ornaments will be disposed of by private sale if the public auction is not successful and if there is a further balance to be recovered thereafter, legal action will be initiated against the borrower/s for recovery of the balance amounts due to the bank. In case of diseased borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs

Can Fin Homes Ltd. a Housing Finance Company requires space of 800-1000 sq. ft. in Ground /First/ Second Floor in a good locality on lease for 5 to 10 years at the following location: S.No. Location Contact Person & Designation Contact No. 1. Bulandshahar, Mr. S.P. Srivastava Mob- 96060 84363 Uttar Pradesh (Deputy General Manager) Ph: 0129-4151209

Interested Premises Owner may send their offers in a closed envelope to Can Fin Homes Ltd. Zonal Office-North Zone, 112A, Part-B, Second Floor, NIT No.5, Nation Hut, Main Road (171 ft wide road), Faridabad, Haryana as per our format in our website www.canfinhomes.com on or before 06th January, 2025. Premises should be ready for occupation with all facilities/ amenities. Offers from the brokers / intermediaries will not be entertained. Can Fin Homes Ltd. reserves the right to reject any or all the offers without assigning any reason whatsoever. Canvassing in any form will disqualify the offer. No brokerage will be paid. Place: Haryana Sd/- Deputy General Manager Date: 24.12.2024

PD(1138)C I, Deepa Rajan S/o- JC-675012N Sub/MT K Thamilarasan, R/o- H.No. W1/237, West Street, Vill-D h a r m a p u r i , Kamatchipuram, Dist- Theni, Tamilnadu- 625520, have changed my name from Deepa Rajan to T Deepa Rajan, vide affidavit dated 24/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE The borrower/s in specific and interested bidders in general, are hereby informed that on account of non-repayment of the Banks due by the borrowers as under despite the payment notice and recall/auction notice issued by the Bank, the gold ornaments pledged with the bank security by the respective borrowers for the loan availed by them will be sold in public auction on "as is where is" and "non-recourse" basis through e-auction portal http://csbgold.auctiontiger.net on 05 January 2025 at 10.30 AM. The auction may be adjourned to any other later date at the discretion of the bank upon publication of the same in the Bank's notice board. The borrowers are hereby further inform that the gold ornaments will be disposed of by private sale if the public auction is not successful and if there is a further balance to be recovered thereafter, legal action will be initiated against the borrower/s for recovery of the balance amounts due to the bank. In case of diseased borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs

PUBLIC NOTICE ON AUCTION OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS The borrower/s in specific and interested bidders in general, are hereby informed that on account of non-repayment of the Banks due by the borrowers as under despite the payment notice and recall/auction notice issued by the Bank, the gold ornaments pledged with the bank security by the respective borrowers for the loan availed by them will be sold in public auction on "as is where is" and "non-recourse" basis through e-auction portal http://csbgold.auctiontiger.net on 05 January 2025 at 10.30 AM. The auction may be adjourned to any other later date at the discretion of the bank upon publication of the same in the Bank's notice board. The borrowers are hereby further inform that the gold ornaments will be disposed of by private sale if the public auction is not successful and if there is a further balance to be recovered thereafter, legal action will be initiated against the borrower/s for recovery of the balance amounts due to the bank. In case of diseased borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Rajiv Ranjan Paswan, Pooja, Sunil Sharma, Harsh Gil, Naryan, Ajit Kumar Sinha, Jaswinder Kaur, Khalid Parwez, Lakhvinder Singh Gill.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Mohd Kasim, Mahesh Singh, Naem Abbas, Himanshu Gupta.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Aashish Yadav, Ashish Yadav, Ankit, Vikas Sharma, Lokesh, Kamal Mehrotra, Divya Mehrotra.

PD(1139)C I, KM. RACHNA KUMARI W/o Rajesh Kumar R/o N-18/133, L-Block, T-Huts, J.J. Colony, Wazirpur, Ashok Vihar, North West Delhi, Delhi-110052 have changed my name to RACHNA for all future purposes.

PUBLIC NOTICE The borrower/s in specific and interested bidders in general, are hereby informed that on account of non-repayment of the Banks due by the borrowers as under despite the payment notice and recall/auction notice issued by the Bank, the gold ornaments pledged with the bank security by the respective borrowers for the loan availed by them will be sold in public auction on "as is where is" and "non-recourse" basis through e-auction portal http://csbgold.auctiontiger.net on 05 January 2025 at 10.30 AM. The auction may be adjourned to any other later date at the discretion of the bank upon publication of the same in the Bank's notice board. The borrowers are hereby further inform that the gold ornaments will be disposed of by private sale if the public auction is not successful and if there is a further balance to be recovered thereafter, legal action will be initiated against the borrower/s for recovery of the balance amounts due to the bank. In case of diseased borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Piyush Kumar Gupta, Ashok Vihar - Delhi, Greater Kailash - II, Gautam Nagar, Anita Verma, Arati, Ramesh Kumar, Balbir Kaur, Babita Gautam.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Tara Chand, Yash Kumar, Manoj Verma, Poja Verma, Kamal Verma, Mohd Salman, Mumtaz.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Man Mohan Singh Dua, Mahesh Kumar, Prabhath Singh Nagal, Sahib Singh, Sunil Arora, Kaushliya, Varun Chandok, Harish Mittal, Rehana Khan.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Man Mohan Singh Dua, Mahesh Kumar, Prabhath Singh Nagal, Sahib Singh, Sunil Arora, Kaushliya, Varun Chandok, Harish Mittal, Rehana Khan.

FEDDERS ELECTRIC AND ENGINEERING LIMITED CIN : L29299UP19577P021118 Notice is hereby given that 02nd Extra-Ordinary General Meeting of the Company is scheduled to be held on Thursday, January 18, 2025, at 03:00 P.M (IST) at the Registered office of the Company situated at 6 and 6/1 UPSIDC Industrial Area, Sikandrabad, District-Bulandshahr -203205 (U.P.) India

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Usha Devi, Shouk Shankar Gupta, Jyoti Jyoti, Anurag Gupta, Om Prakash Jai, Anil Kumar, Rani Sharma, Gaurav Mudgal, Sandeep Soni, Yogesh Kumar, Sonam, Harshit Kapoor, Amit, Amit Bhatia, Aniya Sharma, Ashish Kumar, Rohini Sector 7, Meenu Khara, Rahul Kumar, Firdaus, Lokesh, Simran Parashar, Navin Kumar, Nayan Jha, Amit, Sahini Saifi, Arvind Singh, Vishal Kumar, Rajender Kumar, Rajan Kumar, Lucky Sahni Sahni, Ankush.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Sangeeta Devi, Pammy, Poojan, Sunaina Devi, Manish Kumar, Sunil Kumar, Neha, Harsha, Mukul Gupta, Raju Poddar, Sneha Gautam, Sangeeta Devi, Pammy, Poojan, Sunaina Devi, Manish Kumar, Sunil Kumar, Neha, Harsha.

Table with 5 columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Acc., Bal. Outstanding as on 23/12/2024, Weight (grams). Rows include Sagna, Nitin Kumar, Kasim Ali, Suhail Ali, Gurbir Singh, Sandeep, Karan Lakra, Naveen Nagpal, Rajeev Chhabra, Sanjay Kumar.

NTPC Limited (A Govt. of India Enterprise) Registered Office Address : NTPC Bhawan, Core-7, SCOPE Complex, 7-Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003 Corporate Identification Number -L401101DL1975GOI007966 NOTICE The applicant above named has made an application before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), New Delhi for determination of tariff of Auraiya Gas Power Station (663.36 MW) from 01.04.2024 to 31.03.2029.

KSOLVES KSOVES INDIA LIMITED (CIN: L72900DL2014PLC269020) Regd. Office: 317/26, Second floor, Lane no.3, Mehrauli Road, Saldulajab, Saket, South Delhi, New Delhi, India, 110030 Website: www.ksolves.com; Email id: cs@ksolves.com; Phone No: 0120-4983851

UPI transactions jump 33 per cent at retail stores in India this year: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

UPI transactions at retail stores have increased by 33 per cent in semi-urban and rural areas this year, reflecting the growing adoption of digital payments, says a report.

Moreover, insurance policy purchases and premium collections saw a 127 per cent increase in transaction volume and a 96 per cent growth in new customer adoption during the year, the report by branchless banking and digital network PayNearby said.

"The data highlights the role digital retail stores play in overcoming the challenges of insurance penetration across Bharat," it stated.

The report is based on an analysis of real transaction data derived from over 10,00,000 small retailers (kirana stores, mobile recharge stores etc) offering financial and digital services spread across India in rural



and semi-urban regions. The findings compare business data from January to November 2024 with the same period in 2023. The report, Retail-O-Nomics, stated that there has been an impressive 297 per cent volume rise across credit

products, including business loans, gold loans, personal loans, and revolving credit in rural and semi-urban areas. This significant uptick reflects a growing awareness and demand for credit solutions at the grassroots level, it said.

However, micro ATM and Aadhaar Enabled Payment Systems (AePS) cash withdrawals saw a decline in 2024. Both transaction volumes and the average cash withdrawal per transaction saw a slight decline, with the latter dropping from Rs 2,624

in 2023 to Rs 2,482 in 2024, the report said. AePS withdrawals surged by 35-45 per cent during DBT releases, particularly under schemes like PM Kisan Yojana, compared to the rest of the year.

"Cash withdrawals in Jammu and Kashmir recorded an impressive growth of 58 per cent in value and 74 per cent in volume," the report said.

"By equipping local retailers with tools to offer diverse services like insurance, e-commerce, and lending, we are empowering them to become key enablers of financial access and economic progress at the grassroots," Anand Kumar Bajaj, Founder, MD & CEO, PayNearby, said.

PayNearby is a branchless banking and digital network that operates on a B2B2C model. It has more than 10 lakh retail touchpoints comprising kirana stores, medical shops, travel agents and others.

Govt launches AI-enabled consumer helpline, e-commerce giants pledge safety

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday launched several initiatives to strengthen consumer protection, including artificial intelligence-enabled helpline and tools to detect deceptive marketing practices, while major e-commerce players pledged to enhance online shopping safety.

Leading platforms, including Reliance Retail, Tata Sons and Zomato adopted a safety pledge as the government rolled out new consumer protection measures like the AI-enabled National Consumer Helpline, e-maap portal and Jago Grahak Jago mobile application.

"Significant progress has been made in expediting resolutions of consumer disputes," Joshi said at the National Consumer Day event.

The minister, who attended the event online, highlighted that out of 3,628 cases filed with the National Commission between January and November this year, 6,587 cases have been



disposed of through the country's three-tier consumer court system at district, state and national levels.

The government's e-Daakhil Portal, launched in 2020 and expanded nationwide in June 2023, has achieved 100 per cent adoption for online complaint filing in states like Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan, as well as several districts.

Addressing growing e-commerce concerns, Joshi said: "While this digital revolution offers incredible opportunities, the Indian government believes it is equally important for our

consumers to feel confident and make informed choices."

The Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) is drafting new guidelines to regulate surrogate advertising and has issued notices to 13 companies for non-compliance with existing rules, he added.

Minister of State for Consumer Affairs B L Verma, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti, All India Council for Technical Education T G Sitharam and Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare were present at the event.

Puri, Varanasi, Haridwar top spiritual destinations in 2024, Hyderabad most-booked city: Travelopedia 2024 annual report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Puri, Varanasi and Haridwar are the most travelled spiritual destinations while Hyderabad is India's top-booked city this year, according to OYO's 'Travelopedia 2024' annual report unveiled on Tuesday.

The report delves into travel patterns and trends, with its findings based on the booking data of the travel tech major for the entire year. "In India, religious tourism continued to be a key focus, with Puri, Varanasi, and Haridwar dominating the

pilgrimage sector. However, a significant trend emerged with Deoghar, Palani, and Govardhan experiencing substantial growth, indicating a shift towards less explored spiritual destinations..."

Following Hyderabad, cities like Bengaluru, Delhi, and Kolkata rounded out the top spots for bookings, with Uttar Pradesh maintaining its position as the most popular state for travel. High volume of bookings were reported from Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka, which continue to be dominant travel

contributors. Smaller towns like Patna, Rajahmundry, and Hubli have shown tremendous growth, with bookings increasing by as much as 48 per cent year-on-year.

"The year also saw a surge in leisure travel, with Jaipur continuing to be a top tourist magnet, followed by perennial favourites Goa, Pondicherry, and Mysore. Interestingly, Mumbai saw a drop in bookings, with travellers preferring nearby locations for leisure," OYO stated. Shreerang Godbole, Global Chief Service Officer, OYO said, "2024 has marked

a year of transformation in the global travel landscape. We've seen how travellers are embracing flexibility and adaptability, whether for business or leisure. As remote work trends continue to shape how people approach travel, the demand for both quick getaways and long stays has been a significant driver of bookings this year."

The fourth of July weekend saw the highest number of bookings, aligning with national celebrations, while the Christmas season was also notable for a sharp spike in travel.

Inflation continues to hit FMCG industry, urban growth expected to slow in H1/2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Heading towards a slowdown amid inflationary pressures, the FMCG industry's volume growth during August-October this year has dropped to 4.3 per cent from 6.4 per cent in the year-ago period, research and insight firm Kantar said in a report.

Moreover, the FMCG volume growth was lower sequentially also as in the May-July period, this was 4.5 per cent, according to Kantar's latest FMCG Pulse report.

"We are in that last quarter,

and the FMCG growth as of the quarter ending October is 4.3 per cent. This number is a far cry from the 6.4 per cent growth seen in Q/E Oct '23, but is also a tad lower than 4.5 per cent we saw in the last quarter, i.e. Q/E Jul '24," it said. Volume growth in the urban market was at 4.5 per cent in the August-October period, down from 6.9 per cent in the same period of 2023.

However, the report added: "It is also true that a 4.5 per cent growth following a near 7 per cent growth in the previous term is extremely rare. In fact, over the last five

years, this has only happened in the quarters of 2024." Therefore, technically urban is in a slowdown, though "it is far from a slump."

About the inflation, the report said that per-household average quarterly spending crossed Rs 6,000 for the first time in the August-October period of 2022, and two years since then, spending has seen a 13 per cent jump and is at Rs 6,761 during this quarter. In May-July 2024, shoppers were paying Rs 133 per KG of FMCG on average. Just one quarter since then, shoppers are paying Rs 137 per KG, a

jump of Rs 4 per KG in the latest August-October period. "In recent years, this kind of growth in a single consecutive quarter was only seen during the initial months of the 2022 inflation period," it said.

With no signs of food inflation relenting in the immediate future, where value growth rapidly draws away from volume growth for some more time, it's hard to see urban (market) growing more rapidly than the rural levels. "We are expecting similar levels of growth to continue into the first half of the next year," it said.

Domestic air passenger traffic rises 12 per cent in November, IndiGo leads market share



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian airlines carried 1.42 crore passengers on domestic routes in November, nearly 12 per cent more compared to the year-ago period, amid rising air traffic demand.

In terms of domestic market share, IndiGo topped the list with a 63.6 per cent pie, followed by Air India (24.4 per cent), Akasa Air (4.7 per cent)

and SpiceJet (3.1 per cent). While all these carriers saw their share rise, the share of Alliance Air was unchanged at 0.7 per cent in November, according to the latest data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

"Passengers carried by domestic airlines during January-November 2024 were 1,464.02 lakh as against 1,382.34 lakh during the corresponding period of the previous year thereby registering an annual growth of 5.91 per cent and monthly growth of 11.90 per cent," the watchdog said in its monthly report.

Domestic air passenger traffic was at 142.52 lakh in November compared to 127.36 lakh in the same period a year ago.

In October this year, domestic passenger stood at 1.36 crore. Air India completed the

merger of full service carrier Vistara with itself in November.

The On Time Performance (OTP) of scheduled domestic airlines - computed for the four metro airports at Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai - took a beating in November. IndiGo's OTP stood at 74.5 per cent while that of Akasa Air and SpiceJet touched 66.4 per cent and 62.5 per cent, respectively.

The OTP of Air India and Alliance Air were at 58.8 per cent and 58.9 per cent, respectively, the data showed. Further, the data revealed that 2,24,904 passengers were affected by delays in November. Carriers shelled out nearly Rs 2.90 crore towards facilitation.

Last month, a total of 624 passenger-related complaints were received by the scheduled domestic airlines.

Federation of retailer association of India urges government to empower kirana stores with enhanced tech platform

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Federation of Retailer Association of India on Tuesday asked the government to provide enhanced technology platform to Kirana stores to enable them to compete with quick commerce firms.

"Such support would enable the kirana stores to remain competitive amidst the increasing encroachment into their space by quick commerce companies like Swiggy Instamart, Blinkit or Zepto," said Federation of Retailer Association of India (FRAI), which says that it represents about 80 lakh micro, small and medium retailers from across the country with a membership of 42 retail associations. Providing local kirana stores with a technology platform

would allow them to compete on equal terms with quick commerce players, effectively creating a level-playing field, it added.

"With new technologies brought in by the government, like ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce), what is now required is a more focused approach in creating a specific solution for kirana stores that makes them as discoverable and accessible to customers, much like the way quick commerce companies are operating," FRAI Honorary Spokesperson Abhay Raj Mishra said.

Essentially, the kirana stores should remain competitive by being empowered to tap into the growing digital market and meet new customer needs," said Mishra, who is also Member

& National Coordinator, Indian Sellers Collective.

Kirana stores are facing steep challenges due to the rise of quick commerce players, Lok Sabha member Praveen Khandelwal said. "For shopkeepers, it is crucial to stay updated and embrace all channels to meet the evolving expectations of customers," he added.

FRAI said quick commerce platforms have "unfair advantage" over Kirana stores, which cannot match the heavy discounts offered by quick commerce giants who benefit from deep pockets, large warehouses and a huge customer base. The increased competition from quick commerce players has resulted in stagnant sales for kirana stores, particularly during high-demand periods such as the festive season, it added.

Sensex, Nifty settle almost flat in highly volatile trade; metal, power stocks drag

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note in a volatile trade on Tuesday, as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines awaiting further triggers amid persistent foreign fund outflows.

After gyrating between highs and lows, the 30-share index declined 67.30 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 78,472.87. During the day, it dropped 142.38 points or 0.18 per cent to 78,397.79.

The NSE Nifty dipped 25.80 points or 0.11 per cent to 23,727.65. As many as 2,019 stocks declined, while 1,977 advanced and 96 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"The domestic market concluded flat ahead of the holiday, with metal and power stocks dragging performance while FMCG and auto sectors gained from recent corrections.

"The near-term market trajectory hinges on the outcome of Q3 results and the Union budget, but caution prevails due to a strong dollar, high bond yields, and concerns over rate cuts. The rupee hitting an all-time low further evoked the caution," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30 blue-chip stocks,

Power Grid, State Bank of India, Titan, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports and Infosys were among the laggards.

In contrast, Tata Motors, ITC, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC and Zomato were among the gainers. The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.37 per cent, and the BSE midcap index rose 0.09 per cent.

"The Nifty index saw a lacklustre start to the much-anticipated 'Santa Claus Rally Period,' with the index closing at 23,728, down 26 points. The sluggish session was attributed to persistent selling by FIIs, concerns over India's slowing economic growth, and a weakening Indian rupee, which hit a record low of Rs. 85.13 against the dollar.

"These factors weighed on investor sentiment, keeping the market directionless and choppy throughout the day. Our earlier call suggested a low-volume trading session, and that prediction held true as Nifty traded in a volatile range," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Among sectoral indices, metal slumped 0.93 per cent, power declined 0.73 per cent, utilities (0.52 per cent), consumer durables (0.50 per cent) and commodities (0.33 per cent).

Indian IT hiring: 2025 promises rebound, AI/data science roles to dominate job market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian IT hiring landscape is at a pivotal juncture as it transitions from a year of decline towards a more hopeful future. The focus on specialised skills, particularly in AI and data science, combined with geographical shifts towards Tier 2 cities, indicates a transformation within the sector.

While the IT hiring landscape in India in 2024 was marked by delayed onboarding and a decline in overall hiring activity, the outlook for 2025 appears promising with expectations of recovery and growth fuelled by improvements in economic conditions and technological advancements.

In 2024, the Indian IT sector experienced approximately a 7 per cent decline in hiring compared to the previous year, largely due to broader macroeconomic challenges and global uncertainties. Sunil Chemmankotil, Country Manager of Adecco India, noted that while Global Capability Centres (GCCs) played a crucial role in boosting hiring -- accounting for 52.6 per cent of job openings for tech



professionals - they could not fully offset the significant downturn in the IT services sector.

Despite this overall contraction, certain areas showed resilience and growth. The demand for roles in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) surged by 39 per cent, reflecting a shift towards more specialised skill sets as organisations prioritised these technologies, according to Adecco research.

There was notable growth in IT hiring within Tier 2 cities, which saw an impressive 48

per cent increase during the third quarter of 2024, indicating a trend of geographic diversification of job opportunities beyond traditional tech hubs.

Hiring for professionals with mid- to senior-level experience increased by 35 per cent, suggesting that companies favour experienced candidates amid market fluctuations.

The hiring landscape for fresh graduates remained subdued, with growth rates ranging from 2-15 per cent across various tech sectors, data from TeamLease Edtech showed.

Companies often delayed onboarding campus hires due to uncertain deal flows, which industry leaders believe was particularly influenced by the global political climate surrounding major elections. As India moves into 2025, there are encouraging signs that the IT hiring landscape may rebound significantly.

According to the ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey (MEOS) for first quarter of 2025, 53 per cent of the 3,150 employers in India surveyed expect an increase in hiring, the highest among the 42 countries studied.

"In 2024, fresher hiring remained muted in general with several companies also choosing to delay the onboarding of their campus hires. This may change as the deal flow for large projects is expected to return in early 2025.

The first set of deal flow will benefit the large players and as the buyer sentiment improves, the tier 2 and 3 players can expect a rise in orders," Jaideep Kewalramani, COO and Head of Employability Business at TeamLease Edtech, said.

As the macro headwinds slow down and the results of elections of large economies, the US being the last one in 2024 to come in, he said organisations will be confident about the economic outlook and start to make some bets on the capital investments, which will help jump-start the deal flow in early 2025.

While fresh hiring may remain subdued initially, it is anticipated that as large projects commence in early 2025, there will be a notable increase in job opportunities for new graduates, Kewalramani said.

Companies are expected to invest heavily in upskilling their workforce to meet evolving demands, particularly in areas such as AI and cybersecurity. Wipro CTO Sandhya Arun believes enterprises are set to accelerate the integration of AI and other advanced technologies to unlock significant business value.

"Year 2025 promises to be a year of high-velocity technology disruptions, offering new opportunities and presenting unprecedented challenges. The future belongs

to enterprises that embrace technology and disruption..." Arun said.

The demand for specialised tech roles is anticipated to surge by 30-35 per cent, driven by an increasing reliance on emerging technologies.

"However, the shift towards AI and automation in India's IT sector has started and will continue to create increasing impact on recruitment through AI-driven tools machine learning, and redefined job roles by automating routine tasks while creating demand for highly specialised roles," said Sanju Ballurkar, President (Experis India), ManpowerGroup India.

The sector is expected to rebound with projections indicating a 15-20 per cent growth in job opportunities across various industries, according to Chemmankotil. "Looking ahead, the combined hiring intent from GCC and IT services will be a welcome relief to job seekers. Employers are optimistic about recovery and growth as companies adapt to new technological landscapes and market needs," he said.



People For Animals (PFA), Noida, an animal welfare organization received an animal ambulance with hydraulic jack and a ventilator by Can Fin Homes Limited CSR initiative. On this occasion, Marketing Head of Can Fin Homes Limited Himanshu, Senior Manager Sameer flagged off the ambulance. Shilpi, Naveen, Jagmohan and Ravi Dubey from People For Animals Trust were present.



Govt of India



Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister

On the occasion of 100th
birth anniversary of
former Prime Minister
Bharat Ratna
Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji



Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Foundation Stone Laying of the Country's First
Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project
worth ₹ 44,600 crore

Inauguration of Omkareshwar Floating Solar Project

Bhoomipujan of 1153 Atal Gram Sushasan Bhawan

Release of Commemorative Stamp and Coin in Memory of
Hon'ble Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji

By

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Benefits of the Projects

Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project

- 8.11 lakh hectares of land in 10 districts Chhatarpur, Panna, Tikamgarh, Niwari, Damoh, Shivpuri, Datia, Raisen, Vidisha and Sagar in Madhya Pradesh and 2.51 lakh hectares in Uttar Pradesh will get irrigation facility. Drinking water will be available to about 65 lakh families.
- Contribution of 130 MW to green energy from hydro power plant. Adequate water supply to industrial units will boost industrial development and employment.
- About 42 lakes of Chandel Era will be restored.
- Construction of Daudhan Dam will enable effective flood management.

Omkareshwar Floating Solar Project

- One of the world's largest floating projects with 518 MW capacity.
- The project will save land for the use of agriculture and industry.
- Water conservation and green energy production will help prevent the rising earth temperature.

Atal Gram Sushasan Bhawan

- The construction of Atal Gram Sushasan Bhawans will provide the Gram Panchayats the facility of permanent buildings.
- Gram Panchayats will be able to carry out administrative work, organizing meetings and record management effectively.

August Presence

Mangubhai Patel
Governor, Madhya Pradesh

Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh

C.R. Patil
Union Minister, Ministry of Jal Shakti

25 December, 2024 | 11:00 am | Khajuraho, District Chhatarpur

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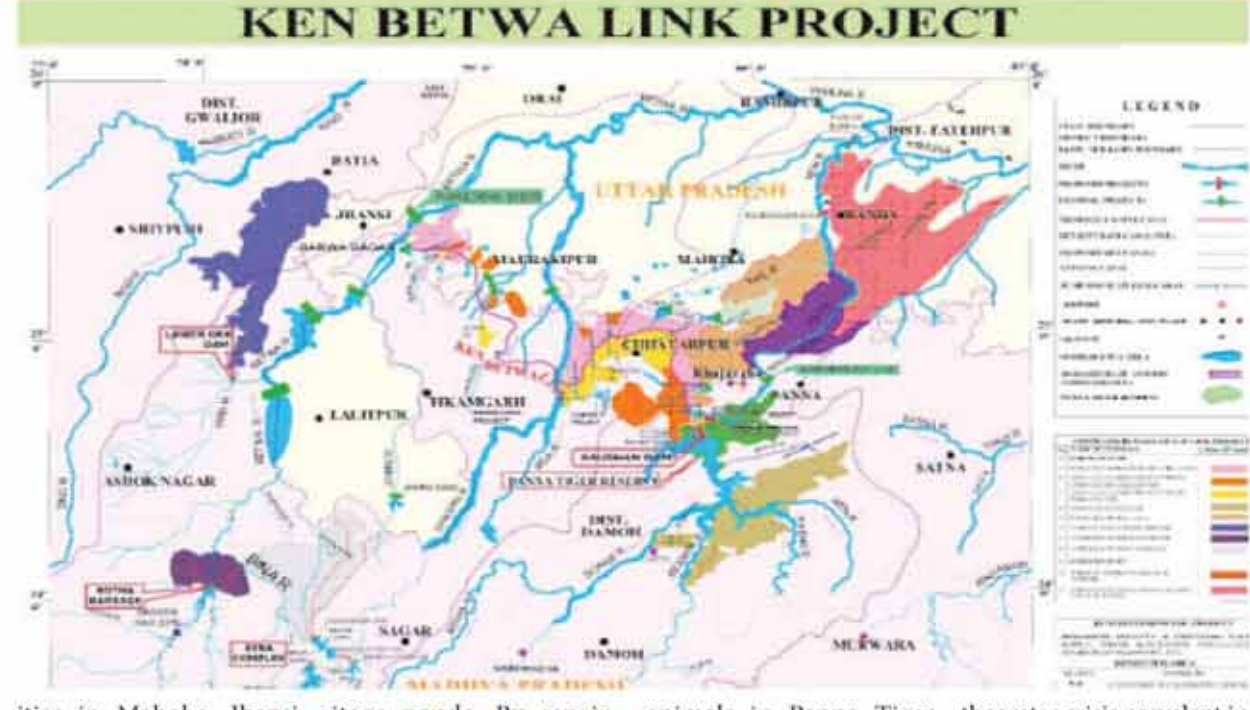


JansamparkMP

Atal ji's vision of river linking realized on MP Soil

Country's first Ken-Betwa Link National Project is a unique example of cooperation and coordination between the Central Government, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken the initiative to realize former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's dream of the river linking campaign. The multipurpose and ambitious Ken-Betwa Link Project will change the face and destiny of the entire Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Through this project, farmers will get ample water for irrigation and will also get sufficient water for drinking and industrial uses. Along with the economic and social development of the area, tourism will also be promoted and new employment opportunities will be created. The situation of groundwater in the drought-hit Bundelkhand region will also improve. Prime Minister Shri Modi is coming to Khajuraho in Chhatarpur district on 25th December to lay the foundation of this project which will change the image and destiny of Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The Ken-Betwa Link National Project is the

largest irrigation project in the country adopting an underground pressurized pipe irrigation system. This project is being constructed on the Ken River in the Chhatarpur and Panna districts of Madhya Pradesh. Under the project, a 77-meter high and 2.13-kilometer long Daudhan Dam and 2 tunnels (upper level 1.9 km and lower level 1.1 km) will be constructed on Ken River in Panna Tiger Reserve and 2,853 million cubic meters of water will be stored in the dam. The surplus water of Ken River will be transferred to Betwa River through the 221 km long link canal from Daudhan Dam on Ken River, providing irrigation and drinking water facilities in both states. Through a pressurized micro irrigation system from the project, 8.11 lakh hectare area can be irrigated in 2 thousand villages of 10 districts including Panna, Damoh, Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh, Niwari, Sagar, Raisen, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Datia. About 7 lakh farmer families will be benefited from this. The Ken-Betwa project will provide an annual irrigation facility in 59 thousand hectare area in Uttar Pradesh and stabilization of existing irrigation in a 1.92 lakh-hectare area, which will provide irrigation facilities in Mahoba, Jhansi, Lalitpur, and Banda districts of Uttar Pradesh. The project will provide 44 lakh population of Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh population of Uttar Pradesh with the facility of drinking water. Besides, the project will generate 103 MW of hydropower and 27 MW of solar energy. Madhya Pradesh will get its full benefit. The project also includes the work of saving the historical Chandela era her-



itage ponds. By repairing/renovating 42 ponds of the Chandela era in Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh and Niwari districts of Madhya Pradesh, water can be stored during the rainy season, which will benefit the rural areas and increase the groundwater level. With the construction of Daudhan Dam, Banda district of Uttar Pradesh will get relief from the menace of floods. Daudhan Reservoir will provide drinking water to the wild

animals in Panna Tiger Reserve throughout the year and there will be unprecedented improvement in the ecosystem of the forest. As a result of the liberal policies of Madhya Pradesh, rehabilitation and resettlement package has been chosen by almost all the displaced people. The construction of the project will bring prosperity and happiness in the lives of farmers along with increased crop production through advanced irrigation technology. Besides,

the water crisis prevalent in the Bundelkhand region will end and migration for employment will also be curbed. Unprecedented increase in irrigation area of the state Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that two important national projects of the state, the Ken-Betwa and the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Projects will lead to an unprecedented rise in the irrigation area of the state. The area under irrigation is continuously increasing in the state.

Where in the year 2003, the irrigation area of the state was about 3 lakh hectares, today it has increased to about 50 lakh hectares. From the constructed and under construction irrigation projects of the state, the area under irrigation in the state is likely to be around 65 lakh hectares by the year 2025-26. The government has set a target of increasing the irrigation capacity of the state to 1 crore hectares by the year 2028-29. For this, work is being done at a fast pace in the state. Water Resources Minister Shri Tulsiram Silawat said that the state government has made an adequate provision in the budget for the Water Resources Department. In the budget for the year 2024-25, a provision of Rs 13,596 crore has been made for the construction and maintenance of irrigation projects.

■ The cost of the project is Rs 44 thousand 605 crore.
 ■ The expenditure of the project is determined in the ratio of 90 percent by the Central Government and 10 percent by the State Government.
 ■ The project will provide an irrigation facility in an 8.10 lakh hectare area.
 ■ Ten districts of Madhya Pradesh including Chhatarpur, Panna, Damoh, Tikamgarh, Niwadi, Shivpuri, Datia, Raisen, Vidisha, and Sagar will be benefited from the project.
 ■ About 7 lakh 18 thousand farmer families of two thousand villages will be benefited.
 ■ 44 lakh population of 10 districts will get the facility of drinking water.
 ■ 103 MW of electricity will be generated.

The situation of groundwater level will improve, industrialization, investment, and tourism will be promoted and employment opportunities will be available in the drought-hit Bundelkhand region. This will bring self-reliance among the people at the local level and put a stop to migration.

Ken-Betwa Link Project - Key Points

■ A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoA) was signed on 22 March 2021 between the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and the Union Jal Shakti Minister for the implementation of the project in the presence of Prime Minister Shri Narendra

Ken-Betwa Project to Alter Bundelkhand's development scenario

The water deficit Bundelkhand will undergo a green revolution with Ken-Betwa Project, the foundation stone of which will be laid by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on Dec.25 in Chhatarpur on the 100th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. With this, the people of the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh will get irrigation and drinking water. The estimated budget of Ken Betwa Link Project is Rs 1 lakh crore. The Central government will bear the expenditure of Rs 90 thousand crore on this project costing Rs 1 lakh crore. The project will pave the way for a new era of progress, benefiting residents of the Bundelkhand region and setting Madhya Pradesh on course to become an ideal state for future generations. The much-awaited Ken-Betwa Link National Project will transform and reshape the socio-economic landscape of the Bundelkhand Region, providing large scale irrigation and drinking water facilities. Additionally, the project will boost power generation, enhance crop production, and drive the development of the tourism sector, ensuring widespread prosperity for the region's citizens. The Ken-Betwa Link Project will provide water for irrigation, drinking water, and industrial use in an 8.5 lakh hectare area of Madhya Pradesh and a 2.5 lakh hectare area of neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. Under the Ken-Betwa Link Project, by constructing a dam in Daudhan village, the water of Ken River will be released into Betwa River through a 221 km long link canal, providing irrigation facilities on both sides of the route. The project will provide an irrigation facility in total 8 lakh 11 thousand hectare area of the state. This will benefit about 2013 villages of Chhatarpur, Panna, Damoh, Tikamgarh, Shivpuri, Niwari, Datia, Raisen, Vidisha and Sagar districts. Through the project, 44 lakh population of the state will get the facility of drinking water and 103 MW hydropower and 27 MW of

solar power will also be produced.



development of the Ken-Betwa Link Project Bundelkhand Region on 22.12.21 Central Govt. approved an estimated amount of Rs. 44,605 crore. ■ From the first and second of the project 8.11 lakh hectare area under 1900 villages of the 10 districts of Bundelkhand i.e. Chhatarpur, Panna, Damoh, Tikamgarh, Niwadi, Shivpuri, Datia, Raisen, Sagar and Vidisha will get irrigation facility throughout the year and 41

lakh population will get drinking water facility.
 ■ Madhya Pradesh will get total of 103 Megawatt hydro electricity.

KEN BETWA LINK PROJECT PHASE 1:

- Under the project area of 6.05 lakh hectare in Madhya Pradesh & 2.51 lakh hectare in Uttar Pradesh will be irrigated annually.
- Drinking water facility to the population 41 lakh in Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh in Uttar Pradesh.
- Generation of two powerhouse 78-Megawatt hydro electricity and 27 Megawatt Solar electricity which will wholly be utilised by Madhya Pradesh.
- Under the first phase Daudhan Dam, 221 kilometer link canal and two 78 Megawatt hydro electricity power house will be constructed by Ken Betwa Link Project Authority.

PROJECT PHASE 2:

- Expenditure of MP's under construction Lower orrdam, Kotha Barrage and Bina Complex Projects will be in the proportion of 60% by Central Govt. contribution, 30% central loan and 10% state's contribution.
- Total cost of the three projects is Rs 6720 crore.
- Under the projects through the micro irrigation technology 2.06 lakh hectare area will be irrigated annually along with providing drinking water.
- Five districts of Madhya Pradesh Sagar, Raisen, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Datia will be benefited.
- Project will facilitate generation of 25 Megawatt electricity.
- In all three projects 91% of the average construction work of Dams has been completed and 44.5% of the construction of canal works has been completed.

Ken-Betwa Link project to start on former PM Atal Bihari Bajpayee's 100th Birth Anniversary

The Ken-Betwa link project is going to be started on the 100th birth anniversary of Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, will change the picture and destiny of Bundelkhand. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that he was happy to honour the personalities who brought glory to Sagar at the national and international levels. Yadav said that Bundelkhand is known for the bravery and sacrifice of Maharaja Chhatrasal and Alha-Udal. Now a new history of Bundelkhand region will be written when Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi lays the foundation of the Ken-Betwa Link Project to realise the dream vision of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Late Shri Vajpayee on 25th December in Khajuraho of Chhatarpur district. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav made the people present at the programme take a pledge to come to the Bhoomi puja programme of the project. While comparing Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Bhagiratha said he has gifted two huge river interlinking projects to make Madhya Pradesh prosperous. These projects will provide irrigation water to every farm and drinking water to every person. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav informed that Prime Minister Shri Modi is visiting Khajuraho in Chhatarpur district on December 25 to fulfill former Prime Minister Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee's pledge of river linking campaign. I invite all the citizens of Niwari district to attend the historic event. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav was speaking at the Kisan Sammelan organized under Jan Kalyan Parv in Niwari on Sunday. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that water for irrigation will reach every farm in Bundelkhand through the Ken-Betwa Link Project. With an adequate supply of electricity in the state, now plenty of water will be available for agriculture, industry, and drinking.

MP To Get Immense Gains from Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Project

An Ambitious Parbati-Kalisindh Chambal project, has come to be ing under the guidance of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. To realise the vision of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Late Shri Atal Bihari Vaj payee, of Linking of Rivers, the path breaking river linking project is set to take shape under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. At the foundation laying ceremony on Dec.17, 2024 at Jaipur, a tripartite Memorandum of Agreement of Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project was signed between Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and the Central Government, in the presence of the Prime Minister. This will benefit 13 districts of Chambal and Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. It will be a boost and irrigate about three lakh hectares immensely benefitting the regions. It is attributed to constant pursuance of the Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav. Resultantly, religious and tourist sector in these areas will also develop. Rightly says Prime Minister that Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project will make Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan 'Sujalam-Sufalam'. Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav has described it as the unique gift of "Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project" that will prove a boon for the farmers and citizens of both the states. This will provide water for irrigation to the

GATEWAY TO FARMER'S PROSPERITY: 13 DISTRICTS OF CHAMBAL AND MALWA REGIONS TO EXPERIENCE NEW DAWN OF PROGRESS



farmers and open new doors of development. The MoA covers the scope of work of the link project, sharing of water, exchange of water, sharing of costs and benefits, implementation mechanism and arrangements for management and control of water in the Chambal Basin. The PKC project will provide 3,000 MCM (million cubic meters) of water to Madhya Pradesh and 4,103 MCM (million cubic meters) to Rajasthan. This project will help ensure efficient utilization of water resources of Chambal Basin of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, which will benefit the industrial and agricultural sectors in both the states.

90 PERCENT OF FUNDS FROM THE CENTER The estimated cost of the Parvati Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project is Rs 72 thousand crore, in which Madhya Pradesh will spend Rs 35 thousand crore and Rajasthan will spend Rs 37 thousand crore. In this scheme, 90 percent of the

total cost will be the Central Govt. share and the State Govt. share will be only 10 percent. ENTIRE WESTERN MP TO BENEFIT MORE ■ Total water storage capacity of the project will be 1908.83 cubic meters. ■ 172 million cubic meters of water will be reserved for drinking water and industries. ■ 21 dams/barrages will be constructed under the

project. ■ In Malwa and Chambal region, 6 lakh 13 thousand 520 hectares will be irrigated ■ 40 lakh population will get drinking water along with irrigation water. DISTRICTS OF MP TO GET MAJOR GAINS The PKC project will benefit 3217 villages of the state. The project will provide adequate water supply for

drinking as well as irrigation purposes in 13 districts in the entire Western Madhya Pradesh including Sheopur, Bhind, Morena, Shivpuri, Guna, Ashoknagar, Aggar, Indore, Dhar, Ujjain,

Districts	Villages To Get Benefits
Guna	592
Morena	635
Shivpuri	470
Bhind	440
Sheopur	278
Ujjain	238
Sehore	110
Mandsaur	147
Indore	75
Dewas	74
Agar Malwa	73
Shajapur	21
Rajgarh	64
Total	3217

Modified Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link National Project

State	Project Cost (in Rs.)
Estimated cost	72,000 crores
Madhya Pradesh	35,000 crores
Rajasthan	37,000 crores

District wise Irrigation Benefit

Districts	Irrigation Area (In Hectares)
Guna	1,42,660
Shivpuri	1,30,860
Morena	27,000
Sehore	47,500
Dewas	36,500
Shajapur & Rajgarh	15,500
Agar Malwa	25,000
Indore	27,000
Ujjain	1,01,500
Mandsaur	60,000
Total	6,13,520