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**WORLD 8**  
SOUTH KOREA TO INSPECT ITS BOEING FLEET AS IT STRUGGLES TO FIND CAUSE OF PLANE CRASH



## PUNJAB JAMS NORTH INDIA



Farmers block a road during the statewide 'bandh' called as part of their ongoing protest at Punjab borders, in Amritsar PTI

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
CHANDIGARH / NEW DELHI

Life was hit across Punjab due to a 'bandh' imposed by farmers who have been agitating against the Centre for a legal guarantee of a minimum support price for their crops. Rail and road traffic was crippled and commercial establishments remained shut in several places of the State. Farmers staged 'dharnas' on several roads and highways including in Patiala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Bathinda, and Pathankot as part of their bandh call from 7 am to 4 pm, throwing commuter traffic out of gear. A call for a statewide shutdown was given over a

week ago by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the Centre not acting on the farmers' demand for a legal guarantee for the MSP. The bandh was also enforced to express solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal who has been on a fast for the last 35 days at Khanauri border protest site of farmers. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court would on December 31 examine Punjab Government's measures to provide treatment to the ailing farmer leader. A team of the Punjab Government officials on December 29 attempted to persuade the septuagenarian to take medical aid, but he declined it, fearing use of forces to oust him from the protest site.

A high-level team of Punjab Government officials had met Dallewal requesting him to accept medical treatment irrespective of the fast continuing. A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia would hear the matter virtually at around 11 am on December 31. On December 28, the top court came down heavily on the Punjab Government for not moving Dallewal to a hospital and doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting the administration of medical aid to their ailing leader. The Bench, however, gave the State Government time till December 31 to persuade Dallewal to move him to a hospital, giving it the liberty to seek logistical support

from the Centre, if the situation warranted. The Punjab Government said it was facing a huge resistance from the protesting farmers who had encircled Dallewal and prevented him from being taken to a hospital. On Monday, farmers observed a sit-in at Dhareri Jattan Toll Plaza which affected vehicular movement on the Patiala-Chandigarh National Highway. At Amritsar's Golden Gate, scores of farmers staged a dharna near the city's entry point. Police there assisted some stranded foreign tourists by arranging auto rickshaws for them to reach the Golden Temple. Farmers squatted on tracks at many places, forcing the railways to cancel several trains passing through the state and short-terminated or short-originated some trains. In Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Bathinda, passengers were seen stranded at stations. In Phagwara, farmers staged a dharna near the Sugarmill Crossing on NH-44, blocking the roads leading from Phagwara towards Nakodar, Hoshiarpur, and Nawanshahr. Grain markets were shut in several places across the State. In the Mohali district, farmers staged a dharna at a few points throwing normal movement of vehicular traffic out of gear. Public transport remained off roads at several places, while most private bus operators suspended services, abiding by the bandh call. Many long-distance private buses and trucks carrying fruits and vegetables were held up due to the bandh.

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## COLD WORSENS THE FREEZE

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Amid the inclement weather conditions, north and northwest India would face the brunt of cold day spell over the coming days. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has also forecast 'dense to very dense' fog in northern and western parts of the country during the next two-three days. Dense fog may affect some airports, highways and railway routes in the areas of met-sub-division. According to IMD, a fresh western disturbance in north India starting January 4, expected to bring snowfall and rain. Scattered precipitation is likely in the western Himalayan region from January 1 to 3, with widespread rainfall and snowfall predicted for January 4 and 5. The entire north India was covered by a blanket of dense to very dense fog on Monday. "Recent Satellite imagery detected fog layer over South Jammu, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, north Rajasthan,

**WEATHER**

AQI	173
MAX	15°C(-5)
MIN	10.3°C(+3)

Madhya Pradesh, west and south Uttar Pradesh, south Himachal Pradesh, south Uttarakhand, southwest Bihar, west Jharkhand, north Chhattisgarh and east Gujarat," IMD wrote on X. The IMD has also predicted rain or snowfall over the 'western Himalayan region' between January 1 and January 5 due to a western disturbance. The weather department anticipated that foggy conditions would continue late at night and early in the morning across regions such as Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, and other northeastern states until December 31. These conditions were expected to persist in Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh until January 1.

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## THE FINAL COUNTDOWN



ISRO's PSLV-C60 carrying SpaDeX and its payloads, lifts off from the first launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota PTI

## AAP in Election Mode

**RAJESH KUMAR ■** NEW DELHI



On a day when the imams affiliated with the Delhi Waqf Board protested outside former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, demanding their overdue salaries, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday announced a new scheme that offers a monthly honorarium of Rs 18,000 to Hindu temple's Pujaris and Granthis of Gurudwaras if elected to the upcoming Assembly polls. In a bid to dent the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s Hindu's vote bank the AAP's convenor said the registration for the Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana will begin on Tuesday. He also said he would visit the Hanuman Mandir in Connaught Place on Tuesday to oversee the registration process for priests there. Registration will also be done at other temples and Gurudwaras across the city by the AAP workers, he said. During their protest the All India Imam Association claimed their monthly honorarium of Rs 18,000 (for Imams) and Rs 16,000 (for Muezzins) have been delayed for over one and a half years and accused the Delhi government of ignoring their plight. Amid a huge row over a scheme that promises a monthly stipend to

unemployed women, the announcement by Arvind Kejriwal is a continuation of his welfare schemes for the people of Delhi which has however led to serious controversies. He first announced the Sanjeevani scheme for senior citizens, then the Mahila Samman Yojana, Dr Ambedkar Samman Scholarship scheme for Dalit students and now the monthly salary scheme for priests. "Today I am making an important announcement regarding a scheme. The name of the scheme is Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana. Under this, there is a provision to give an honorarium to the priests of temples and the 'granthis' of the Gurudwara. They will be given an honorarium of about Rs 8,000 per month", Kejriwal announced while addressing a

press conference. "This is happening for the first time in the country. The priest is a class that has carried forward the rituals from generation to generation. They never paid attention to their family and we never paid attention to them," the AAP chief added. Terming Kejriwal's 'Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana' a "political stunt", the BJP claimed that no one would get even a single rupee since the latter does not have any data with him. Delhi BJP chief Veerendra Sachdeva said that Kejriwal is now a "defeated and desperate" leader who is making populist announcements daily to stay in power. Former Delhi MP Parvesh Verma claimed that Kejriwal is remembering 'Ishwar' and 'Waheguru' due to the fear of loss.

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## LG's New Year greetings to Delhi's Temporary Chief Minister

**RAJESH KUMAR ■** NEW DELHI



Extending season's greetings to Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena has taken the opportunity to hit out at her predecessor and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal for calling her a "temporary Chief Minister". In a strongly worded letter to Atishi, Lt Governor expressed his disapproval of the AAP chief referring to her as a 'temporary Chief Minister'. The letter, criticised the remark as an affront to constitutional values and the dignity of the office. Saxena described the comments as not only insulting to Atishi but also disrespectful to the President of India and himself as her representative. He emphasised the importance of maintaining a respectful level of public discourse, particularly regarding the role of the Chief Minister. "... I found this very objectionable and I was hurt by it. It was not only an insult to you, but also to your appointee, the President of India and to me as her representative" As a Lieutenant Governor, I am concerned about this level of public discourse and at the same time, I am hurt by the conversation of presenting the full-time Chief Minister of my government as a temporary Chief Minister..." reads the

letter. Taking a jibe at AAP over the announcement, the Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) shared a poster on X, showing Arvind Kejriwal controlling Atishi with strings, insinuating that he would run the Delhi government through her. In a statement Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, stated that the letter written by the Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena to Chief Minister Atishi Marlena reflects the true reality of the Delhi government. He said that while political ideologies may differ, it is "at least evident that Atishi Marlena is seen carrying out administrative duties as a Chief Minister, something that has been notably absent during the almost ten-year tenure of Arvind Kejriwal, who merely functioned as a

'ribbon-cutting' Chief Minister". The LG further outlined the challenges faced by the Delhi government including the Yamuna pollution crisis, garbage management, and the poor state of infrastructure in industrial and slum areas. He slammed the AAP supremo and said, "The public characterisation of a temporary or stopgap chief minister, as articulated by Shri Kejriwal, has no constitutional basis. It is also a deplorable violation of the democratic spirit and values enshrined in the Constitution authored by Babasaheb Ambedkar". The Lieutenant Governor lauded Atishi for her approach in governance, contrasting it with her predecessor's alleged reluctance to take on administrative responsibilities. "For the first

## Security upgrade for New Year's eve

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Tonight, On the eve of 2025, many will party the night away, but there are some who will be on duty keeping the National Capital safe. Meet the brave hearts who will stand in the chilling cold to help ensure that the celebrations go on safely. "We do not consider this to be a conundrum at all, we are happy to serve the people so that they can celebrate the New Year without any problem and enjoy it to the fullest," were the words of police officers who will ensure that security arrangements do not fall short and crime elements do not hamper celebrations of the common people on December 31st and January 1st. Delhi Police remains on alert as people from its neighbouring states are also expected to come to Delhi for celebrations in large numbers. Delhi shares borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and lies close to Rajasthan. The traffic and local police personnel say they are neither worried nor frustration remains on their faces.

time during my tenure, I have seen a Chief Minister actively performing the duties of the office," he wrote. Saxena had earlier offered words of praise for Atishi, calling her "a thousands times better" than her predecessor, with whom he has had several tempestuous run-ins, on legal, administrative, and governance issues, over the past months. In September, AAP leader Atishi was named as the new Chief Minister of Delhi following Kejriwal's announcement to resign from the top post after being granted interim bail for his alleged involvement in the Delhi liquor policy case. The official announcement was made by Delhi minister Gopal Rai. Notably, several other AAP leaders were in the fray to succeed Kejriwal, including Kailash Gahlot, Saurabh Bharadwaj and Gopal Rai. Atishi was elevated to the position of cabinet minister in the Delhi government after Satyender Jain and Manish Sisodia tendered their resignations last year. She, along with Saurabh Bharadwaj, were made Delhi ministers, but Atishi was given charge of 14 departments, including education, finance, planning, PWD, water, power and public relations.

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## Falling Sensex, Rising Rupee: Where is India headed?

The din around the falling Sensex and depreciating Rupee has been hard to miss, and understandably, human nature makes us worry when markets falter. For many investors, even those with mutual fund investments, the recent market trends might feel like storm clouds on the horizon. But markets, much like seasons, naturally cycle through growth, correction, and recovery phases. What's happening now isn't the collapse of some fear; rather, it's a moment for perspective, patience, and clarity about the underlying factors at play. The equities landscape has seen corrections in the Sensex and Nifty, particularly since September 2024, causing unease. However, it's

worth noting that these indices have been on a nine-year bull run, delivering around 9per cent growth year-to-date, even after recent declines. Much of the decline stems from significant selling by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs), who have offloaded over Rs 1.19 lakh crore worth of equities through exchanges this year. Interestingly, while exiting the secondary market, FIIs have invested more than Rs 1.2 lakh crore in the primary market during 2024, including Rs 17,331 crore in December alone, making them net investors in India. This dual approach suggests the sell-off is more about short-term profit-booking and global fund reallocation than a loss of confidence in India's long-term growth prospects.

Global factors have also fueled this sell-off. China's aggressive stimulus measures boosted the CSI 300 index by 25per cent since the announcement, diverting significant FII flows from India. Investors, however, are closely watching to see how effectively the government can address structural economic challenges and navigate concerns of potential overvaluation in the market. Weak domestic Q2 earnings, with 44per cent of companies missing profit expectations as per an analyst report, further dampened short-term sentiment. The year 2024 was a battleground between bulls and bears, characterised by intense volatility driven by key events such as the Indian general elections, the US presidential race, and a host of geopolitical tensions, including the Israel-Iran conflict. Yet, India's



**PROF. GOURAV VALLABH**

macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong with high potential bank lending, 13-year low gross non-performing assets (GNPA) at 2.5 per cent as of September 2024, expected inflation easing, and robust private spending. This correction, while concerning, does not signal a structural problem. Now, let's address the Rupee, another point of concern. Over 2024, the Rupee depreciated by

around three per cent, with approximately two per cent occurring in the last quarter against the US Dollar. The Dollar is strengthening because of Donald Trump's public pronouncements favouring universal tariff hikes (more on the import of Chinese goods), mass deportation of illegal immigrants and income tax cuts. If translated into policy, these are expected to increase the US economy's inflation. As a result, the 10-year US Treasury yield, now above 4.5per cent, has made US assets more attractive, narrowing the India-US bond yield spread to ~230 basis points, its lowest level since 2006, and has halved in 2 years. All this makes capital outflows from emerging markets, including India. Although the Rupee is hitting lows against the US Dollar, its exchange rate has scaled an all-time high in real terms. The

Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) index of the rupee touched a record of 108 in November 2024, strengthening by 4.5per cent during this calendar year. The REER measures the rupee value not only against the dollar, but against the global currencies. This was a broad dollar strengthening that reduced the attractiveness of the Indian currency, thus making it vulnerable to greater selling pressure and further depreciation. The rupee is not weakening as much as the dollar is strengthening against all currencies. The Rupee has appreciated against major currencies like the Euro, Pound, and Australian Dollar. The Euro fell from Rs 91.84 on December 31, 2023, to Rs 89.10 by December 30, 2024. Similarly, the Australian Dollar dropped from Rs 56.64 to Rs 53.33 and Swiss Franc dipped from

Rs 98.88 to Rs 94.71 over the same period. This shows the Rupee's resilience even against some of the world's strongest currencies. Despite these challenges, India's external accounts have shown resilience. The Current Account Deficit (CAD) narrowed slightly to 1.2per cent of GDP in Q2 FY25 from 1.3 per cent in the previous year. The fiscal deficit, which had ballooned to 9.2 per cent during the pandemic, is now down to 5.6 per cent. In this context, the Rupee's movements reflect global dynamics rather than intrinsic weaknesses in India's economy. Emerging market currencies, including the Brazilian Real, Indonesian Rupiah, Chinese Yuan, and Russian Ruble, also depreciated against the Dollar, reflecting the Dollar's global strength rather than specific Rupee weakness.

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# IT Department denys reports linking DigiYatra to tax data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department has dismissed media reports claiming that data from the DigiYatra app would be used to track tax evaders. In a statement on Monday, December 30, 2024, the department clarified, "News articles are circulating about DigiYatra data being used to crack down on tax evaders. We want to confirm that, as of now, there is no such initiative by the Income Tax Department." The clarification came after a media report alleged that the tax department had accessed passenger data from the DigiYatra

app. The article claimed this data was being compared with tax filings to identify discrepancies, particularly focusing on frequent flyers and those taking high-value international trips. According to the report, notices were expected to be issued in 2025 targeting individuals who either don't file tax returns or underreport their income. Responding to the concerns, Suresh Khadakabhavi, CEO of DigiYatra, also clarified that the app does not centrally store passenger data. In a post on X, he explained, "DigiYatra ensures data security and privacy. There is no central storage of biometric or personal information. All

data remains on users' devices, and facial authentication is decentralized. With over 9 million users and 42 million secure journeys, privacy is our top priority." Press Information Bureau's Fact Check Unit also described the media report as "fake news". DigiYatra is a Government initiative under the Ministry of Civil Aviation aimed at making air travel paperless and more convenient. The app uses facial recognition technology along with passengers' ID, biometric, and flight details to enable faster access through airport checkpoints. However, it is important to note that using the app is entirely optional for travelers.

# LG Urges AAP to increase ASHA worker stipends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor (LG) on Monday advised the AAP government to enhance the stipend of ASHA Workers and release the salary of Aangwadi Supervisors pending for months at the earliest. This comes following his meet with a delegation of ASHA and Aangwadi Workers who shared their grievances and asked for his help and intervention. An official from Raj Niwas said that the Delhi LG advised the AAP government to

enhance the stipend being paid to ASHA Workers in Delhi from the existing Rs 3,000 per month to Rs 9,000, given the fact that their last enhancement had been done in 2018, despite provision being there for such revisions to take place every three years. He has also asked for the salaries of Aangwadi supervisors to be released at the earliest. "This missive from the LG comes after, Saxena interacted with a delegation of ASHA and Aangwadi Workers, who met the LG today at Raj Niwas and brought to his

notice that their stipends had not been revised since 2018 and that the salaries of Aangwadi Supervisors had not been paid for the past seven months. They also brought to the fore various difficulties being faced by them in terms of livelihood and requested the LG for help/intervention," a statement said. It added that accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Workers, who act as non-medical health workers in the community under the National Health Mission (NHM), have been complaining of being under

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

paid despite inflation and the government not listening to them, despite repeated representations and protests. "The stipend being paid to them was last fixed/revised in 2018 and was supposed to be revised every three years as per the cabinet decision taken at that time. The ASHA and Aangwadi Workers delegation that met the LG, brought up these issues and requested him for help. Saxena informed them that the issues raised by them were with regards to transferred subjects, which were fully under the domain of the AAP government," it read.

Among severe cold wave conditions, the political temperatures are soaring in the Kashmir valley over the issue of excluding Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's birth-day and July 13, Martyrs' Day, from the list of holidays for 2025. The holiday calendar was released by the Union Territory Administration headed by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Sunday. The National Conference reacted sharply by claiming the decision reflects the BJP's disregard for Kashmir's history and democratic struggle. However, the Bharatiya Janta Party has appreciated the decision of the government to maintain the status quo in the list of public holidays to be observed in the JK UT during 2025 issued by the General Administration Department. For the first time, the two-state holidays on July 13 and December 5 were deleted from the list of public holidays by the LG administration on December 28, 2019, after the Abrogation of Articles 2019 and 35-A. So far Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has not reacted on the issue. But one of his close aides and Chief Spokesman of

demanding the inclusion of December 5 in the list of holidays. "The firm stand taken by the LG and ignoring the parochial demand is really praiseworthy," stated Brig (Retd) Anil Gupta, Spokesperson of the Party. National Conference Spokesman Tanir Sadiq also observed that under the Union Territory framework, a lot of decisions fall under the domain of the LG administration as they need his approval. "We are hopeful that the Lieutenant Governor's administration will not create road-blocks and hurdles for the government's pro-people initiatives. That is why we want early restoration of statehood," Sadiq said. BJP Spokesman Brig (Retd) Anil Gupta explained, "Both the holidays were mired in controversy and were thrust upon the people of the other two regions of the erstwhile state by the National Conference". Gupta claimed December 5 was never a state holiday between 1948-1981 and was declared a holiday to celebrate the birth anniversary of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah after he died in 1982 by his son and successor Dr Farooq Abdullah. He added that controversy surrounds the actual

birth date of Sheikh Abdullah. According to MY Taing, a noted Kashmiri historian and literary assistant of the Sheikh for writing the latter's autobiography Aatish-e-Chinar, December 5 is not the actual birth date of the Sheikh. Even Sheikh has not mentioned December 5 as his birthdate in his autobiography. "What is the justification of December 5 as a state holiday when the Sheikh himself does not acknowledge it as his birth date?" exclaimed Brig Gupta! Brig (Retd) Anil Gupta also claimed nothing can be more controversial and divisive than celebrating July 13 as a state holiday with full government support. While it was celebrated as Martyrs Day in Kashmir, it was celebrated as a Black Day by the Hindus in Jammu including the Kashmiri Pandits to protest against the plundering of their properties in Kashmir by members of the majority community and also endangering their dignity, honour and lives. Historically, the events of that day divided the people on a regional, religious and ideological basis. The divide continues to persist and has widened further due to the monolithic attitude of Kashmir-based regional political parties.

# Prayagraj's boatmen to become storytellers in Mahakumbh 2025

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Prayagraj is preparing for Mahakumbh 2025, and as part of an innovative initiative, boatmen are being trained to serve as storytellers, offering visitors an enriched experience of the region's historical and mythological heritage. This project, led by the state tourism department, aims to blend tradition with hospitality to impress the anticipated 40 crore devotees expected at the event. The tourism department has partnered with Manyawar Kanshiram Institute of Tourism Management, Lucknow, and the NGO Bewajah Society to empower 4,000 boatmen across the state. "We have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with these institu-

tions to train boatmen and guides in storytelling, disaster management, and modern amenities like digital payments," said Aparajita Singh, regional tourism officer of Prayagraj. The storytelling aspect of the initiative focuses on equipping boatmen with the skills to narrate folk tales and historical accounts in a compelling manner. "Boatmen possess rich knowledge of local stories. If presented emotionally and engagingly, these tales can create lasting impressions on visitors," said Gaurav Srivastava, president of Bewajah Society. Training sessions commenced with 60 boatmen trained in Prayagraj and another 30 in Shringverpur. Similar programs are underway in Ayodhya, Mathura, Chitrakoot, and Bateswar. In Chitrakoot alone, 35 boatmen

have already completed their sessions. This initiative is not just about enhancing tourist experiences but also uplifting the boatmen community. "These boatmen are moving beyond rowing boats—they are becoming river guides and ambassadors of the region's cultural heritage," said Srivastava. The training extends beyond storytelling to include disaster management and water safety. "Boatmen are also being trained in life-saving techniques, CPR, and flood rescue measures. These skills will enable them to ensure safety at the ghats during emergencies," explained Singh. Prakhar Tiwari, assistant professor at the tourism institute, highlighted that the sessions also cover boat handling and relief measures during accidents. To modern-

# Naidu richest CM in India with assets over ₹931 Crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu is the richest Chief Minister in India with assets worth over Rs 931 crore, while West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee is the poorest with just Rs 15 lakh, according to an Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report released on Monday. The total assets of 31 Chief Ministers are worth Rs 1,630 crores. Arunachal Pradesh's Pema Khandu is the second richest Chief Minister with total assets worth over Rs 332 crores, Karnataka's Siddaramaiah is the third on the list with assets worth more than Rs 51 crore. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, with assets worth Rs 55 lakh, is the second poorest in the list.

# Odisha crop damage claims deadline extended

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Odisha government on Monday announced extension of the deadline till January 1 for farmers to submit the report on crop damage due to unseasonal rains, and make claim for compensation. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi made the announcement after the state

government's demand in this regard was accepted by the Centre. He said farmers can now report and claim compensation over crop loss till midnight of January 1. The initial deadline was December 29, which was later extended till December 30. Majhi and other ministers had visited different rain-affected districts on Sunday, following

which the state government had requested the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Empowerment to extend time to the farmers to report crop loss. "Keeping in view the interests of the farmers, the central government has extended the time... Farmers can now inform the insurance companies about the crop loss till January 1, 2025," says a statement issued by the CMO.

# Punjab Jams North India

From page 1

Kapurthala and Jalandhar also observed the bandh with all commercial establishments there remaining closed. Langars of tea and 'daal-parshada' were arranged for the protesters. The bandh's impact was also seen in some neighbouring areas of the state, including Ambala. Hundreds of daily commuters travelling from Ambala to Chandigarh, Mohali, Patiala and other

nearby cities of Punjab were thrown off stride because of the shutdown. Buses took alternate routes to go from Ambala to Chandigarh as they had to cross a stretch of the national highway that passes through Punjab. Farmers, under the banner of SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13, after their

march to Delhi was stopped by security forces. A "jatha" (group) of 101 farmers attempted to march to Delhi on foot three times between December 6 and 14 but were stopped by security personnel from Haryana. Besides the MSP, farmers are also demanding a debt waiver, pension, no hike in electricity tariffs, withdrawal of police cases, and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

# COLD WORSENS THE FREEZE

From page 1

The mercury dipped but remained above normal in the national capital on Monday even as icy northwesterly winds improved the air quality to the moderate category and a shallow fog reduced visibility. Delhi recorded cold to severe cold day conditions on Monday, with the maximum temperature settling 5.4 notches below normal at 15 degrees Celsius and higher than 18 degree Celsius a day earlier. The Met office has forecast similar cold day

conditions in the next few days. The minimum temperature of 10.3 degree Celsius was three degrees above normal. It was 13 degree Celsius a day earlier. The narrowing gap between the maximum and minimum temperature and icy northwesterly wind leading to cold wave conditions in Delhi and its neighbouring states. Palam recorded 8.3 degree Celsius, coldest in the national capital. Delhi experienced overcast skies and winds while the humidity level fluctuated between 81 and 87 per cent, the weather

office said. The Met Department said the minimum was likely to dip by another 2-3 degree Celsius in and hover around 7 degree Celsius on Tuesday. The IMD has forecast the maximum to remain below normal till December 31, hovering around the 18°C mark, as nights become colder again. "For the past two days, maximum temperatures were recorded in the cold day category but the minimum temperatures remained above 10 degrees Celsius. Today (Monday), cold day to severe cold day conditions were

observed over Delhi," a Met official said. The Met office has predicted mainly clear skies with cold day conditions at isolated places for Tuesday. The surface wind is predominantly likely to blow from the northwest at a speed of less than 6 kilometres per hour during the morning and will be accompanied by smog or shallow fog at most places and moderate fog in isolated areas. Wind speeds are expected to increase to 10 to 12 kilometres per hour in the afternoon before decreasing to less than 8 kilometres per hour in the evening and the

night. An average Air Quality Index of 173 (moderate) was recorded at 4 pm on Monday compared to 225 (poor) at 4pm on Sunday as northwesterly winds returned on Sunday due to a western disturbance that brought rain across the northwestern plains on Friday and Saturday. The shallow fog reduced visibility to 600 metres at Safdarjung, which is representative of Delhi's weather, at 5:30am. According to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), December

# AAP in Election Mode

From page 1

But he did not remember them for the last 10 years, Verma alleged, adding he only used to remember 'maulvis' of the mosque, and used to see only one religion and one vote bank. Taking a dig at Kejriwal, South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that Kejriwal should tell how many temples and gurudwaras are there in Delhi and what is the total amount estimated to be spent on this scheme. Earlier this month, Arvind Kejriwal launched the Mahila Samman scheme which offered a stipend of Rs 2100 per month to unemployed

women. AAP leaders started a registration drive for the scheme. However, the next day, the government's women and child development (WCD) department advertised that the "Mahila Samman" scheme was "non-existent" and urged residents not to share personal data. The AAP later claimed the officers involved in the fiasco were under BJP's pressure. The party also vowed action against them. Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has ordered an inquiry against private persons allegedly collecting personal details of women in the name of enrolling them for the proposed scheme of the ruling AAP in Delhi.

# Security upgrade for New Year's eve

From page 1

"If we think like that, we will never be able to solve people's problems. There are army men doing duty in Siachen in minus degrees, Delhi is much better than that. So we don't take it like that. I am happy that I am celebrating my New Year with my fellow officers on the ground helping others enjoy," said a traffic police officer, who will be on a 12-hour shift from 8 pm to 8 am on December 31 and January 1. Defence Colony Station House Officer Sunjay Sharma, who will be stationed at a picket near Ansal Plaza where thousands of youngsters come to celebrate New Year, said that police officers are prepared to serve their country and let go of their own personal desires. "We join duty understanding what our responsibilities will be. There is no question about any negative thoughts or feelings of being away from our families on such occasions," he said, adding that there are common people who celebrate with them too by

bringing them sweets, or clicking selfies with the police on duty. Twentyseven-year-old Pratap, who is patrolling for the first time on the New Year, shared similar thoughts. "I can celebrate with my friends and families even after my duty hours. This is more important and I am looking forward to serving alongside my seniors," he said. While the festivities will be witnessed all over Delhi, districts like New Delhi, South and Southwest remain the most flocked area by tourists and residents alike. Local police are heightening deployment of personnel, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to detect any unlawful activity and roping in the traffic police to ensure smooth flow of traffic. In New Delhi district, where Connaught Place/Connaught Circus, Khan Market, five-star hotels, including The Lalit, Imperial, Park, Royal Plaza, Shagri-La, Le Meridien, Taj Mahal, Taj Vivanta, Metropolitan, Claridges,

Ashoka, Samrat, ITC Maurya, and Taj Palace, India Gate, 'C' Hexagon and Kartavya Path, temples and gurudwara are located, police will use 'Ikshan' vans which have Face Recognition System (FRS) cameras to identify any unwanted elements. Ikshana is equipped with 360 degree cameras which are being monitored through AI operated software, which has the data of suspects who roam around in the crowd. "If they come in the sight of these cameras, 'Ikshana' will immediately inform the police about it after which the 'yodha' of the police will catch them," Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Mahla said. In the South district, where elite clubs and bars are located along with the Saket select city walk mall, the police have roped in the traffic police to facilitate the smooth movement of vehicles and avoid congestion, DCP (South) Ankit Chauhan said. He added that around the mall lies a hospital and Sheraton hotel, which attracts many

people during the New Year's eve. "We have reduced the halting point, made limited numbers of entry/exit points and allotted designated places for commercial vehicles to keep the traffic flow around the area in check," the DCP said, adding that a meeting with this regard was also held with the traffic police. Alcometer, devices used to detect alcohol levels in drivers, will also be provided to the police to curb drink and driving. A senior officer said that officers will also be given 'shoulder lights' which is a beacon mounted on the ground personnel's shoulders and can be seen from a distance even in fog. "It will help people to approach the police, and also save the officer on duty from any accident due to the dark," he said. Police said two ambulances, two fire tenders, two jail vans, two teams of bomb disposal squad, 28 door frame metal detectors, two teams of SWAT, three teams of Parakram

# LG's New Year greetings to Delhi's Temporary Chief Minister

From page 1

The letter also saw LG expressing his concern about the level of political discourse in the capital. "On the occasion of swearing in you as the Chief Minister, I had also congratulated you wholeheartedly and wished you and in the period from then till now, for the first time in my two and a half years of tenure, I saw a person holding the post of Chief Minister doing the work of the Chief Minister. Where your predecessor Chief Minister did not have a single department of the government and neither did he sign files, you took charge of many departments and tried to work on various issues of administration," Saxena said.

# Falling Sensex, Rising Rupee: Where is India headed?

From page 1

For investors, these fluctuations in equities and currency understandably cause concern. Yet, mutual funds remain among the most effective tools for navigating such volatility. Their diversification spreads risk across sectors and asset classes, cushioning downturn impacts. Professional fund management ensures investment decisions are data-driven and strategic, avoiding emotional reactions. These strategies work particularly well in volatile markets like today's. History offers reassurance too. Market corrections are not new, and those who stay invested typically see rewards over time. The Sensex has weathered several corrections, each

followed by strong recoveries. Mutual funds' long-term focus allows investors to ride out market cycles without attempting the challenging task of market timing. What we see today is flux, not collapse. The Sensex and Nifty remain among the top-performing indices globally over the past decade, and the Rupee's movement aligns with trends in other emerging market currencies. India's strong economic fundamentals, structural reforms, and strategic trade agreements suggest the long-term trajectory remains upward. This correction is not a reason to exit but a reminder to stay the course. — The writer is Professor of Finance - XLRI Xavier School of Management and a BJP Leader



# DDA announces three housing schemes including 25 per cent discount to building, construction workers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to provide affordable abodes to economically weaker sections of society in Delhi, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Monday announced three housing schemes which include 25% discount for Building and Construction workers, including beneficiaries of PM-Vishwakarma Scheme, in Narela and for other disadvantaged sections of society in Siraspur, Narela and Loknayak Puram. The other disadvantaged sections include auto-rickshaw drivers, (permit holders), cab drivers, women, and persons from SC/ST categories, war widows, persons with disabilities, ex servicemen, and gallantry award recipients

including PM-SVANidhi Scheme. These proposals have been approved at the DDA's meeting chaired by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena. Addressing the meeting the Lt. Governor said nobody till now, had given a serious thought to the Housing needs of the poorest of the poor in the City. He underlined that construction workers, who constructed houses for millions of others did not have a roof over their own head and were forced to live in tents and shanties. This decision of the Authority will go on to prove a monumental turning point in the lives of such people, who would be able to live a life of dignity and earn their livelihood, the Lt. Governor

emphasized. Apart from this, launching of DDA Special Housing Scheme 2025, that will offer 110 flats in sought-after localities like VasantKunj, Dwarka and Rohini in addition to AshokaPahari, and Jahangirpuri was also approved by the Authority. To provide affordable housing to the construction workers, the Authority has approved the launching of a Special Housing Scheme offering a 25% discount on flats to registered Building and Construction Workers under the Delhi Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (DBOCWWB) including beneficiaries of PM-Vishwakarma Scheme. Approximately 700 EWS flats in Narela (Sector G2) to be



offered with a 25% discount to be offered under the scheme. DDA is collaborating with financial institutions for on-the-spot financing options. This initiative to benefit workers in industrial areas such as Narela, Bawana, and Bhargharh in North-West Delhi and surrounding NCR regions and the scheme to be

available for limited period till March 31, 2025. To promote Housing for all, the Authority has given nod to 25% discount on flats under the DDA Sasta Ghar Housing Scheme 2024 and DDA Madhyam Vargiya Housing Scheme 2024 for certain categories of people. These include auto-rickshaw drivers (permit holders), cab drivers, women, SC/ST, war widows, persons with disabilities, ex-servicemen, and gallantry award recipients and beneficiaries of PM-SVANidhi Scheme. Under the scheme, 25% of available flats in Narela (all categories), Siraspur (LIG), and Loknayakpuram (LIG) will be reserved for eligible applicants on a first-come, first-serve reserved flats. Besides, 10% of flats at

Loknayakpuram (MIG) will also be reserved for the discount scheme. The scheme is available for limited period until March 31, 2025. After the impressive performance of its recently launched housing schemes, the Authority has approved launching of DDA Special Housing Scheme 2025. Under this scheme, 110 flats (7 HIG, 58 MIG, and 45 LIG) to be offered in various localities like VasantKunj, Dwarka, Rohini, AshokaPahari, and Jahangirpuri. The flats at VasantKunj to be offered through an e-auction route while at other places will be offered on a first-cum-first-serve basis. This scheme provides a rare opportunity for buyers to own property in established,

well-connected areas across Delhi. The Authority has also approved change of land use of railway land at Shakurbasti measuring 4.63 Ha. from "Transportation (Circulation-Rail)" to "Residential (RD)". The request was received from Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA), a statutory authority under Ministry of Railways for development of railway land parcels entrusted to RLDA by the Railway Board, Govt. of India. Now, a public notice to be issued for inviting objections and suggestions. The Authority also approved modification in the regulation for setting up fuel station on privately owned land in Delhi and policy guideline for developed entities for disposal of EWS Units.

# Over 80,000 applications received for voter name deletion, 4.8 lakh new registrations: City CEO office

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a war of words between ruling AAP and opposition BJP over alleged removal of names from Delhi's electoral roll before the upcoming polls, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said on Monday it has received 82,450 applications for deletions and 4.8 lakh for new registrations since November 29. In a statement, the CEO office said the final electoral roll is being prepared and it is scheduled for publication on January 6, 2025 after making additions, deletions or modifications, if any. The CEO office also said FIRs have been filed against eight individuals for allegedly submitting false documents for registration as a voter in the Okhla Assembly constituency of the city. "Submission of false documents for obtaining Voter ID is a punishable offence. Strict action will be taken against



such violations," the statement said. The AAP and BJP have been at loggerheads over the alleged deliberate deletion of voters' name from the electoral roll. The AAP has accused the BJP of submitting bulk applications for removing the names of voters in constituencies where they fear a defeat. The BJP, on the other hand, has alleged the AAP is trying to allow illegal Rohingya and Bangladeshi

migrants to get voter ID cards so that the party can use them as a vote bank. The Chief Electoral Officer in the statement said it is actively conducting the Special Summary Revision of electoral rolls with the qualifying date set as January 1, 2025. This process is being carried out as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, ensuring that the electoral rolls remain updated and inclusive for all eligible

voters, it said. During the pre-revision period, house-to-house verification was carried out from August 20, 2024, to October 18, 2024, by Booth Level Officers. This exercise aimed to identify unregistered eligible citizens, prospective voters turning 18 by October 1, 2025, as well as permanently shifted or deceased electors and duplicate entries. Following this, the draft electoral rolls was published on October 29, 2024, inviting public to file claims and objections. These were accepted until November 28, 2024, and all the claims and objections received were already disposed by December 24, 2024, the statement said. "The final electoral roll, reflecting these updates, is scheduled for publication on January 6, 2025," the statement said. It added that between November 29 and the present date 4,85,624 applications for new registrations, 82,450

applications for deletions, and 1,71,385 applications for modifications have been received. The CEO office cautioned multiple entries in the electoral roll or multiple voter ID cards is a punishable offense under Sections 17 and 18 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. "Recently, FIRs have been filed against eight individuals for submitting false documents for voter registration in the Okhla Assembly constituency in Delhi. Strict action will continue to be taken against such violations," it said. It said meetings with representatives of political parties on various occasions were held during the special summary revision period. Political parties that have objections to any additions, deletions, modifications carried out in the Electoral Roll during the special summary revision period and during the continuous updation, can file their objections before the officials concerned, it said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Monday launched an online crowd funding platform and appealed for financial support from the public to contest the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls. Sisodia, a key figure in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), has been fielded from the Jangpura constituency this time. He has represented the Patparganj constituency in the Delhi Assembly since 2015. "Today I have launched an online crowdfunding platform to contest the election from Jangpura. Every time I contested elections and achieved success because of your financial support. This time too I want your financial support for my election," he wrote on X. The former deputy chief minister also posted a video featuring his journey from a journalist to politician. "Every rupee you donate will



help advance the politics of work and education in Delhi," he said in a press conference. The AAP has started a hashtag on X, "MS4Jangpura" seeking public support. A blue and yellow coloured poster with the message "support and fund Manish Sisodia" was also released during the presser. Earlier in the day, Sisodia attended a jagan at the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. "Listening to the problems of the people of the slum and working on their suggestions is our priority. This trust and partnership is the strength of our government. Together we will strengthen this relationship and take it to new heights," he wrote on X. The Delhi Assembly polls are scheduled to be held in February next year.

Nizamuddin Basti and offered prayers at the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. "Listening to the problems of the people of the slum and working on their suggestions is our priority. This trust and partnership is the strength of our government. Together we will strengthen this relationship and take it to new heights," he wrote on X. The Delhi Assembly polls are scheduled to be held in February next year.

# Kejriwal is realising that his ground is slipping, claims BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Monday claimed creation of fake voters is an ongoing issue in the national capital and Arvind Kejriwal, realising that his ground is slipping as his theft is exposed, is no longer crying about EVMs but about fake votes. These charges were leveled in a new conference by Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva and former MP Pravesh Sahib Singh. Sachdeva said Kejriwal is a fraud master who does not even hesitate to deceive the very people who helped him hold on to power for 12 years. In order to win the assembly elections, Kejriwal has ruined Delhi, Sachdeva said adding there is an address in the voter list where the house number is "Zero," and 144 votes are registered there. The state BJP chief said the BJP is always talking about removing A.S.D. voters, but sadly, Kejriwal is trying to protect these fake votes. Sachdeva also claimed there is a conspiracy to increase votes in constituencies that border other states. In the past four days, applications have been submitted to create 1,83,323 new voters. In Narela: 4503, Burari: 7027, Badli: 4575, Rithala: 4197,



Mundka: 4501, Kirari: 6255, Nangloi Jat: 6523, Badarpur: 6647, Okhla: 4601, Gokalpur: 5171, Mustafabad: 5502, and Karawal Nagar: 7087 applications have been received. Former MP Pravesh Sahib Singh said the man who calls himself the owner of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, is now clearly showing his frustration. Fearing defeat, he has started telling lies. In the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections, there were 1,46,000 voters, and today, there are only 1,06,000 voters left, with 22,000 new additions, meaning that 61,000 voters have disappeared over the last five years. Every month, 1000 voters are disappearing, but Kejriwal has never held a press conference to address this. Pravesh Sahib Singh accused that Kejriwal's team is targeting BJP voters and cutting

votes. New Delhi constituency has three areas, and the Sarojini Nagar area has traditionally been won by BJP; however, the most votes have been cut there. He pointed out that in house number "A," votes were removed, and at house number "Zero," where no house exists, 144 votes are registered. Moreover, several house addresses are missing, but they still have 87 voters. Who are these people, where do they live, and how is Arvind Kejriwal winning elections in his constituency? It's becoming evident now that misuse of power. Pravesh Sahib Singh challenged Kejriwal to visit the addresses he has mentioned and explain where these voters are. If he cannot prove this, he should cooperate regarding the fake voters issue that the BJP has raised.

# City police decides to try 11 minors involved in heinous crimes as adults

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the increasing number of crimes in the national Capital especially by juveniles, the Delhi Police has decided to try 11 minors as adults in the outer north district of the city involved in heinous crimes like attempt to murder, murder and robbery among others. The Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Nidhin Valsan on Monday informed that while they had identified 52 juveniles accused of heinous crimes, 11 will be tried as adults in the outer North Delhi district of the national capital. Juvenile justice has traditionally focused on rehabilitation, emphasizing that young offenders have a higher potential for change due to their cognitive and emotional immaturity. However, in response to a rise in violent crimes such as murder, rape, and armed robbery, several legal systems, including India's, have adapted to allow minors aged 16 and above to be tried as adults in cases involving serious offenses. Police said the district has undertaken a special drive aimed at creating a stronger and safer law-and-order envi-



ronment for its residents. "As part of the special drive, a total of 52 juveniles, all between the ages of 16 and 18, have been identified for their involvement in heinous crimes, including robbery, snatching, murder, attempt to murder, and other such offenses. Recognising the gravity of these cases, 52 applications were moved to try them as adults. We got approval for 11 applications," Valsan said. Sharing break-ups from different police stations of the district, the DCP said that they moved eight applications from the Bawana police station and one person will be tried as adult. Similarly, the NIA police station moved 20 applications out of which six will be tried as adult, four applications were moved by the Alipur police Station out

of which one will be tried as major, eight applications were moved by the Samaypur Badli police station, of which one will be tried as major and 12 applications were moved by the Bhalaswa Dairy police station out of which two will be tried as major. "Applications were subsequently submitted to the court, requesting that these juveniles be tried as adults, given the severity of their alleged crimes. As a result, these juveniles will now be treated as adults under the law and face trial accordingly," said the DCP. He added that this decision marks a significant step toward ensuring that individuals who engage in such grievous criminal activities are held accountable to the fullest extent of the law, irrespective of their age.

# MCD revamping public toilet infrastructure with BOT system, multi-faceted approach

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is revamping the public toilet infrastructure with a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) system and multi-faceted approach. A statement by the civic body said, "The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is transforming the city's public toilet landscape to improve the cleanliness level in the city which includes construction of new toilets blocks, repair of old toilets and effective management." It added that at present 409 number of Community Toilet Complexes (CTCs), 905 number of public toilets (PTs), and 1621 number of Urinals are operational. "These toilets are maintained by the sanitation department of MCD & NGOs/Market Associations," it said. MCD is also expanding toilets coverage through Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) system and comprehensive maintenance initiatives. Currently, 65 BOT toilets are operational at various locations in the city under the MCD jurisdiction. The work of 26 BOT toilets is being processed. During last year, 10 BOTs

were constructed and made operational for the general public. The statement said, "MCD has allocated Rs. 18 Crore for repairs and improvements across 12 zones. This multi-faceted approach demonstrates MCD's commitment to providing clean, safe, and accessible public toilets for Delhi's residents and visitors." The MCD has also launched several initiatives to improve the monitoring and maintenance of public toilets including regular inspection, daily cleaning and maintenance schedule and feedback collection through QR code among others. "Regular inspection of these public conveniences is carried out, and equipment needed for maintenance is distributed from the MCD store as per requirement. Further, a daily roster has been established to organize regular cleaning and maintenance of each facility, promoting consistent standards of hygiene," it read, adding that a QR code based system has been introduced to collect user feedback for every public toilet, ensuring transparency in the maintenance process.

# Jimmy Carter's death revives memories of Carterpuri's waltz with fame

STAFF REPORTER/AGENCIES ■ CARTERPURI (GURUGRAM)

Its link with the US and first world development is tenuous and perhaps in name only. But some memories still live on in Carterpuri, the small village that waltzed with fame, albeit briefly, when then US president Jimmy Carter came visiting 46 years ago and it was rechristened. On Monday, when news came in of Carter's death at his Georgia home at the age of 100, some of those memories were revived. Carter, dressed in a dark suit, brought with him the glamour of the west and stoked aspirations, but left a long lull in his wake, says Yadram Yadav, a former sarpanch of the village, an hour's drive from Delhi. The day was January 3, 1978.

Carter visited the village in Gurugram and sent it into international pages of newspapers worldwide. "My village now lost his son and we are deeply saddened by the death of our village son Jimmy Carter," Yadram Yadav said on the Democratic Party leader's death. Carter, who died on Sunday, was an "adopted son" of Daulatabad Nasirpur. The village was named Carterpuri after him at the suggestion of then prime minister Morarji Desai. According to The Carter Center, he was the third American president to visit India and the only one with a personal connection to the country as his mother, Lillian, had worked there as a health volunteer with the Peace Corps during the late 1960s.

Villagers already knew Carter through his mother, who, volunteering as a social worker, helped midwife babies, gave medical aid, and lived in the mansion of Jaidar Sarfaraz. The house was later sold and rebuilt. Locals remember Carter visiting the village with First Lady Rosalynn Carter and his retinue and delving into the life of the natives for a day. Yadav also recalled how the First Lady was dressed in traditional village attire during the visit and the couple posed for photos - an album of which he has kept. According to revenue records, Carterpuri was formerly known as Daulatpur Nasirabad, in the Gurgaon (Gurugram) district, part of the National Capital Region. People also used to call it Kheda village.



Carter promised he would help turn the place around into a "model village." "Jimmy Carter wanted Carterpuri to be a model village, but at that time chief minister Chaudhary Devi Lal said he would do it at his end, but nothing happened. I wrote a few letters to the White House as I was the sarpanch of the vil-

lage and a delegation from the White House visited the village in 1979, but Carterpuri is still a village like any other till today," Yadram Yadav told PTI. Forty-six years after the visit, the village 2 kms from Gurugram's Palam Vihar indeed bears little signs of out-of-ordinary development and still awaits the "model village"

promise to be realised. According to The Carter Center, on January 3, 1978, Carter and then First Lady Rosalynn Carter travelled to the village of Daulatpur Nasirabad, an hour southwest of New Delhi. "The visit was so successful that shortly after, village residents renamed the area 'Carterpuri' and remained in contact with the White House for the rest of President Carter's tenure," the Carter Center said. "The trip made a lasting impression: Festivities abounded in the village when President Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, and January 3 remains a holiday in Carterpuri," it said, adding, the visit laid the groundwork for an enduring partnership that has greatly benefited both countries.

Jimmy Carter was the US president from 1977 to 1981 and was conferred with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for brokering a peace deal between Israel and Egypt in 1978 in the form of Camp David Accords. He was the first American president to visit India after the removal of the emergency and victory of the Janata Party in 1977. In his address to the Indian Parliament, Carter spoke against authoritarian rule and praised India for its democracy. "The India's difficulties, which we often experience ourselves and which are typical of the problems faced in the developing world, remind us of the tasks that lie ahead. Not the Authoritarian Way," Carter said on January 2, 1978. "But India's successes are just as

important because they decisively refute the theory that in order to achieve economic and social progress, a developing country must accept an authoritarian or totalitarian government and all the damage to the health of the human spirit which that kind of rule brings with it," he told members of parliament. "Is democracy important? Is human freedom valued by all people?... India has given her affirmative answer in a thunderous voice, a voice heard around the world. Something momentous happened here last March, not because any particular party won or lost but rather, I think, because the largest electorate on earth freely and wisely chose its leaders at the polls. In this sense, democracy itself was the victor," Carter said.



## BJP attacks Rahul Gandhi for New Year trip, Congress Responds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Launching a scathing attack on the Congress, the BJP on Monday alleged that Rahul Gandhi "exploited" former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's death for his "expedient politics" and flew to Vietnam to ring in the New Year while the country is mourning his demise. The Congress hit back and asked when will the "Sanghis stop this 'take diversion' politics." "While the country is mourning Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's demise, Rahul Gandhi has flown to Vietnam to ring in the new year," BJP's IT cell head Amit Malviya said in a social media post. Rahul Gandhi politicised and exploited Dr Singh's death for his expedient politics but his contempt for him is unmissable, he charged. "The Gandhis and the Congress hate Sikhs. Never forget that Indra Gandhi desecrated the Darbar Sahib," Malviya added. Reacting sharply, Congress leader Manickam Tagore responded saying when will the Sanghis stop this 'take diversion' politics?" He alleged that the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi denied Dr Singh a place for cremation on the Yamuna banks and his ministers cornered his family was "shameful." "If Gandhi travels privately, why does it bother you?" he asked Malviya and said "Get well in New year".

## Defence Exports Hit ₹ 21,000 Crore: Defence Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday India's defence exports have crossed a record Rs 21,000 crore from Rs 2,000 crore a decade ago. Addressing officers at the Army War College (AWC) in more than two-centuries-old Mhow Cantonment, Singh said a target has been set to achieve defence exports of Rs 50,000 crore by 2029. He said mastering frontier technologies is the need of the hour in the constantly evolving times, noting that military training centres are playing a crucial role in equipping and readying soldiers to deal with future challenges. "Our defence exports, which were around Rs 2,000 crore a decade ago, have crossed the record figure of Rs 21,000 crore today. We have set an export target of Rs 50,000 crore by 2029," the defence minister said. He also said Made-in-India equipment is being exported to other countries. Rajnath mentioned radical changes in warfare in his speech, saying that unconventional methods like information warfare, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based warfare, proxy warfare, electromagnetic warfare, space warfare, and cyber-attacks are posing a big challenge. He stressed the need for the military to be well-trained and equipped to fight off such attacks and lauded training centres in Mhow for their valuable contributions. The defence minister commended the training centres for constantly improving their training curriculum as per changing times, and striving to make the personnel fighting fit for every kind of challenge. Rajnath said the Modi government is committed to strengthening integration and jointness among the three services. "In the times to come, the armed forces will be able to face challenges together in a better and more efficient way," he added. The defence minister said high-level training is provided to officers of all wings in the Mhow Cantonment. He appealed to



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during his visit at the Army War College, at Mhow, in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh. PTI

officers to explore the possibility of promoting integration through training in areas such as weapons training in Infantry School; AI and communication technology in Military College of Telecommunication Engineering (MCTE), and leadership - junior and senior command in AWC. Rajnath Singh said some officers will work as defence attaches in the future, and they should strive to secure national interests at the global level. "When you take up this post of defence attaches, you should imbibe the government's vision of 'aatmanirbhar Bharat'. Only through self-reliance can India strengthen its defence capabilities and gain more respect on the world stage," he added. The defence minister is on a two-day visit to Madhya Pradesh since Sunday. He said the government is committed to making India one of the strongest economic and military powers in the world. "Economic prosperity is possible only when full attention is paid to security. Similarly, the security system will be robust only when the economy is strong. Both complement each other," he added.

At AWC, the defence minister was briefed by commandant Lt Gen H S Sahi on the role and significance of the institute towards training and empowering military leaders for war-fighting across the spectrum of conflict. The defence minister was also briefed upon the significant steps in training methodology through jointness in multi-domain operations, infusion of technology in training curriculum and exchange programmes being undertaken with academia, universities and industries along with training of CAPF officers, a release stated. He was also apprised about the global footprints of the institute achieved through training the officers from friendly countries and contributing immensely towards military diplomacy. Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi and other senior officials of the Army were present on the occasion. The defence minister laid a wreath and paid homage to brave-hearts at the Infantry Memorial. Earlier in the day, the defence minister and General Dwivedi offered prayers at the famous Mahakaleshwar temple in Ujjain city.

## Film industry praises PM Modi's WAVES summit 2025 initiative

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Akshay Kumar, Anil Kapoor, Ekta Kapoor, Praseon Joshi and Sunjay Dutt were among personalities from the Indian film industry who praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the WAVES Summit 2025, an initiative aimed at making India a hub of global creation. In his monthly radio address Mann Ki Baat, the prime minister on Sunday announced that India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time between February five and nine in New Delhi. The official social media page of the Prime Minister also shared a post about the upcoming

event which was reposted by many celebrities on the microblogging platform. In his address, Modi compared WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, adding the leaders from the media and entertainment industry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather in Delhi for the Summit. He also urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES. Actor Akshay Kumar termed WAVES Summit 2025 as a "wonderful idea". "Now this is PM @narendramodi ji's vision towards promoting the Media & Entertainment sector... Waves 2025 summit will hopefully be a fabulous global forum to have the entire entertainment industry come and grow together," he wrote. Anil Kapoor said Modi's visionary leadership continues to inspire. "The #WAVES2025 summit is a groundbreaking step towards making India the global hub for film and entertainment. Looking forward to seeing the world come together to celebrate creativity and collaboration #MannKiBaat," the actor added. "Excited to witness India become a global hub for film and entertainment. Looking forward to contributing to this landmark initiative," said producer Ekta Kapoor. Praseon Joshi, CBFC head and lyricist-writer, said WAVES Summit 2025 will put the "spotlight on India's content industry & its vast potential".

## Baghpat doctor kills man to fake his death, escape loan repayment; arrested

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a chilling attempt to evade loan repayments, a Unani doctor from Baghpat, Dr. Mubarik, allegedly orchestrated his own "death" by burning a youth alive in a car. Inspired by a TV show, he meticulously planned the act to clear his debts amounting to Rs 20-25 lakh. The police, however, apprehended him after his plan unraveled due to a crucial mistake. Disclosing the details of the case, Superintendent of Police (SP) Abhimanyu Manglik said: On December 23, Jabbar Ali of Bijopura reported a burned car near a canal bridge, containing a charred body. Later, on December 26, Gulzar, a resident of Khanalampura, filed a missing person report for his nephew Sonu (31), a resident of Yamunanagar, who had been missing since December 22. During the investigation, it

was revealed that Dr. Mubarik, overwhelmed by debt, had devised this heinous plan after watching a TV show "Crime Petrol". Six months earlier, he had purchased two cars and two bikes on finance, taken out a Rs 10 lakh personal loan, and acquired Rs 5 lakh in insurance. Additionally, he owed Rs 9 lakh to his neighbor Masood, alias Leelu, for a land deal and had borrowed lakhs more from others. Dr. Mubarik bought a second-hand Maruti 800 car for Rs 26,000 a month ago to execute his plan. He needed a body that matched his physical characteristics. After failing to procure a body, he befriended Sonu, a worker at his brother-in-law's factory, who bore a striking resemblance to him. On December 22, Mubarik invited Sonu to a roadside eatery, where they drank together. He spiked Sonu's drink with sedatives, rendering him unconscious. The doctor then drove Sonu to a secluded spot near the canal, removed his chain, doused the car with petrol, and set it ablaze with Sonu inside. His intent was to fake his death, allowing his wife to claim ₹5 lakh in insurance and secure a death certificate to absolve the ₹10 lakh personal loan. However, Dr. Mubarik's scheme failed when he returned to the crime scene on December 27 to check if the car had burned completely. Acting on a tip-off, the police detained him for questioning. Upon interrogation, Mubarik confessed to the crime, revealing his meticulous planning inspired by a crime show episode he watched multiple times. Dr. Mubarik has been arrested, and further investigations are underway. The incident has shocked the local community, shedding light on the lengths some individuals go to escape financial burdens.

## Kerala BJP chief K Surendran in quandary over Annamalai's public flogging

KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■ KOCHI

The anguish expressed by Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai by flogging himself in public over the ever increasing incidents of rape in the DMK ruled State has put his Kerala counterpart K Surendran in a major quandary. Annamalai's action was a fall out of a girl student getting sexually assaulted in a gruesome manner in the Anna University campus and also the charges by Annamalai that the incidents of rapes happening in the State are

shooting up in an unprecedented manner under the DMK regime. Annamalai's anguish drew instant response from Governor R N Ravi on Saturday as he made an unscheduled visit to the university campus and interacted with students as well as the authorities. A late evening release by Raj Bhavan said the Governor expressed his concern over the attack on girl students and instructed the university administrative staff to beef up the security arrangements in the campus.

The Tamil Nadu BJP chief, himself a former officer of the Indian Police Service, also declared that he would not wear footwears till the DMK Government was removed from power. Though the DMK leaders and ministers ridiculed Annamalai for his decision terming the same as theatrics, public response to his swear has rattled the State administration. But neighboring Kerala, where the BJP is struggling to get a mooring, has been interesting. Annamalai's self-inflicted torture by flogging has earned wide

appreciation from all walks of life. "He is trying to establish the BJP as a formidable force in the Dravida Land. His actions speak a lot and I will not be surprised to see the Hindutva party emerge as an alternative to the DMK and the AIADMK which is getting disintegrated fast under Edappadi Palaniswami, the reigning chief of Tamil Nadu BJP," said P Sujathan, author and political critic. Many in Kerala want Surendran also to undertake a self flogging a la Annamalai style and stop wearing footwears till the ruling

CPI(M)-led government is ousted from power in a democratic manner. "The present BJP leadership in Kerala is hand in glove with certain national leaders and they have not done anything to make the party an alternative force to the CPI(M) and the Congress. The BJP leaders in the State have resorted to attacking the minority community members, especially the Christmas Carols to send a message that the saffron brigade is an exclusive Hindu party," said Jaiby Kuruvithadam, a BJP leader based in Muvattupuzha.

## AIIMS joins AI hype, to invest ₹300 Crore

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, has also joined the artificial intelligence (AI) bandwagon with Director Dr M Srinivas on Monday at a meeting held here revealing that plans are afoot to invest more than Rs 300 crore in AI by developing digital infrastructure, introducing innovative solutions that enhance patient care, streamline operations, and improve health outcomes. According to various studies, 79 per cent of healthcare organisations are presently utilising AI technology. At the meet, leaders in healthcare, technology, and policy shared insights into how AI is poised to bridge critical gaps in health communication, making information more accessible, reliable, and patient-centric. "AI is revolutionising everything from patient care to health communication," said Dr Srinivas, indicating AIIMS' commitment to integrating cutting-

edge technology into healthcare, furthering its mission to revolutionise medical practices and healthcare delivery. "We are investing over Rs 300 crore in digital infrastructure to ensure that every stakeholder - patients, doctors, and researchers - benefits from this innovation. By integrating AI, we can improve efficiency, reduce delays, and enable world-class research," he added. The experts at AIIMS also stressed the need to bridge the gap of misinformation by delivering accurate, easily understandable, and personalised healthcare information via AI to people across diverse demographics. Dr Srinivas also emphasised that leveraging AI to simplify and disseminate health information will empower patients and improve their engagement with healthcare systems, ultimately leading to better health outcomes. "A good health system isn't reliant on individuals. AI can play a vital role in making healthcare more accurate, com-

passionate, and equitable," Dr Kavita Narayan, Senior Technical Advisor, HRH for Health Systems at the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. "To truly make a difference, we must integrate technology thoughtfully and ensure collaboration between policymakers, technologists, and healthcare providers," she added. The experts also caution against overdependence on technology at the expense of human connection. KP Kochhar, Professor and Head of the Physiology Department at AIIMS, felt that there was a need to balance innovation with empathy in healthcare. "While AI can enhance precision and efficiency, we must preserve the human touch in healthcare. Compassion and technology must work together to create systems that prioritise the well-being of patients," Kochhar said, adding that AI in healthcare is a game changer, especially for a diverse and populous countries like India.

## TN leads in third gender voters, but low participation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More people enrolled themselves in the voters' list for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in the 'third gender' category but only 27 per cent of them turned up at the polling stations, according to Election Commission data. According to the data issued by the poll authority last week, 48,194 people were eligible to vote as third gender elector in 2024, compared to 39,075 in 2019 - an increase of 23.5 per cent over the five-year period. But only 13,058 of them actually exercised their franchise, which comes to 27 per cent of the total registered third gender electors. As per the data, Tamil Nadu had the highest number of registered third gender elector - 8,467. But only 2,709 cast vote.

## 'Can't ignore speeches to brainwash youth': Delhi HC rejects appeal in UAPA case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Speeches to brainwash innocent youth and recruiting them for illegal acts against the country cannot be completely washed away in the absence of a specific terrorist act, the Delhi High Court has said and dismissed the plea of a terror case accused. A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma made the observation while rejecting the plea of Mohd Abdul Rehman, an alleged associate of Al-Qaida's Indian outfit, against his conviction and seven-year-five-month jail term by a trial court under the anti-terror UAPA law. "Speeches which are given to brainwash innocent youth coupled with attempts to recruit them for committing unlawful and illegal acts against the country cannot be completely washed away on the ground that no specific terrorist act has

been committed," it said. The appellant argued though he was held guilty of indulging in preparatory acts for the commission of a terrorist act and recruiting persons for terrorist act, there was no evidence to show he committed such acts. The bench, however, said the terms terrorist act had a wide definition, enough to include "indulging in conspiracy with terrorist organisations and associated with persons who are rendering support to terrorist organisations", whereas the identification or existence of a specific act of terror was not required for punishment under the provisions. The High Court upheld the trial court conviction verdict, observing evidence to show he was in close connection with the other accused who were a part of a larger network. The network was said to be carrying out inflammatory speeches, dis-

seminating material, having links with Pakistan-based organisations and travelling there for secret meetings, recruiting persons for terrorist acts, collecting funds to help such travels and other activities fanning hatred against the country and its political leaders, among other things. "In conspiracies of this nature specific covert acts would not be required but secretive and clandestine support to declared terrorist organisations would also be sufficient. The evidence and the testimonies which have been recorded in the present case clearly disclose association with terrorist organisations for commission of conspiracy for committing a terrorist act. The appeal is, accordingly, dismissed," the bench ruled. The court said the planning to execute terrorist acts could extend over years and Section 18 of UAPA aimed to address

such a preparation, even when a specific terrorist act was not identified. It said it was "common knowledge" that terrorist organisations like Al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent functioned in an extremely secretive manner and its associates often left no trail of evidence. In February 2023, the trial court convicted the appellant and other accused persons for conspiracy to commit acts that constituted preparation towards commission of some terrorist act. The trial court considered the evidence that indicated the existence of a conspiracy to commit a terrorist act, including their illegal travel to Pakistan, inflammatory speeches, various passports by creating false and fabricated documents. The State said the material showed appellant's ideology professed violence against the country and the Prime Minister.

## Muslim forum says no to Rushdie ban, calls for intellectual defense

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposing the Muslim organisations calling for reban of Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses", the Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy (IMSD) on Monday urged the Muslims to remember iconic social reformer Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's teachings and to "fight words with words" instead of resorting to book bans or burnings. The renewed sale of Rushdie's book, which has returned to Indian bookshelves 36 years after it was banned by the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1988, has been strongly condemned by some Muslim organisations.

"IMSD calls upon Muslims to recall the views expressed by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan well over a century ago. In his time, he staunchly opposed Muslims who made a bonfire of books they did not like, or demanded its ban by the authorities," the IMSD said in a statement. "His advice was simple. Fight words with words if the book in question is worthy of a reasoned critique. Burning or banning such books implies that Muslims are incapable of an intellectual and moral defense of their faith. If the book (cartoon, play, film) is nothing but a gratuitous, salacious or malicious attack on Islam or its Prophet, his suggestion was: ignore it," the statement added. The IMSD's statement is

endorsed by 42 eminent citizens, including civil rights activist Teesta Setalvad, oral historian Sohail Hashmi, poet-scientist Gauhar Raza, acclaimed theatre director Feroz Abbas Khan and documentary film-maker Shama Zaidi, among others. Earlier in November, the Delhi High Court closed proceedings on a plea challenging the Rajiv Gandhi government's ban on the book's import. The High Court stated the failure of officials to present the relevant notification from October 5, 1988 led to the assumption that the notification did not exist. To buttress their point, the Muslim forum gave the example of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) founder Sir



Salman Rushdie holds a copy of the newly-published novel "The Satanic Verses", during a speech in Arlington, Virginia on March 24, 1992. India was one of the first countries to ban the book's import and sale, citing concerns over its content being offensive to the Muslim community. PTI

Syed Ahmad Khan's approach to counter English writer William Muir's controversial book in 1861 where he allegedly made disparaging remarks against Prophet Mohammad. "In response, Sir Syed travelled to London to study the books and journals that Muir had relied on and eight years later published a reasoned critique debunking Muir's work," the statement said. The IMSD said Sir Syed's advice to his fellow Muslims long ago is 'the more relevant in today's new India' where "minorities are daily targets of Hindutva's hate politics". "Any ill-advised or hotheaded response to the publication of Satanic Verses - a book not many Muslims are likely to have read earlier or will read

now -- will only provide more fodder to the Muslim-baiters. Besides, it will only give free publicity to the very book they want banished," it added. Underlining the Constitution of India guarantees the right to freedom of speech along with penal action against hate speech, the statement said that Muslims, or anyone else, have the right to be offended by a book, cartoon, play or film and are within their right to invoke existing provisions of criminal law to seek redressal of their grievance. However, no one has the right to "silence the offender. A fatwa, firman or call to kill Salman Rushdie, as also the demand for a ban on Satanic Verses amounts to just that: silencing the offender," it explained.



# UP Govt invites CMs, Governors of all States for Mahakumbh 2025

## AI-enabled cameras, RFID wristbands and mobile app tracking will be used to track headcount of the pilgrims: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh government will invite the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, and the chief ministers and governors of all states, among host of other dignitaries, for the Maha Kumbh Mela which is set to begin from January 13. The mega religious event, which is held every 12 years, will continue for 45 days in Prayagraj. More than 40 crore devotees from all over the world are expected to attend the mega event. State Finance Minister Suresh Khanna said at a roadshow in the national capital on Monday that invites are being sent to the governors the chief minister of all states, including those ruled by non-NDA parties. "We have invited Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Vinai Kumar Saxena and will be meeting Delhi Chief Minister Atishi as well," he said at the event.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath met President Droupadi Murmu in New Delhi on Sunday and invited her to attend the Maha Kumbh. Adityanath also extended invitations to Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena for the grand event. As part of the invitation, the Chief Minister presented the dignitaries with special gifts, including a symbol featuring the Mahakumbh 2025 logo, a 'kalash' (sacred urn), literature related to the event, a New Year table calendar and a diary. The Uttar Pradesh chief minister reached New Delhi on Saturday and met former President Ram Nath Kovind, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP National President and Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda, and Mizoram Governor General VK Singh. Each of them received person-

alised invitations and mementos related to the Mahakumbh. On Sunday, Yogi expressed gratitude to the dignitaries for their time through a post on his official handle on social media, sharing photographs of the meetings. With the event just weeks away, the Uttar Pradesh government has intensified efforts to invite dignitaries and the general public from across the country, with the chief minister and his cabinet ministers personally leading the outreach campaigns in different states. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday described the upcoming 'Maha Kumbh' as the "Maha Kumbh of unity" as he asked people to return from the grand religious congregation with a resolve to banish hate and division from society. Speaking in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast, Modi said, "Maha Kumbh ka sandesh ek ho pura desh (Message from the Maha Kumbh should be that the entire country must be united)." He added, "Ganga ki



aviral dhara, na bante samaj hamara" (Like the uninterrupted flow of Ganga, let our society remain one). Noting the diversity of people visiting the mammoth congregation, he said there is no other example of such a sight of unity in diversity. "Maha Kumbh's speciality lies not just in its vastness but also in its diversity," he said. Artificial intelligence-enabled

cameras, RFID wristbands and mobile app tracking are among the methods that will be used to track headcount of the pilgrims attending the Maha Kumbh. Sharing details of the arrangements being made for the event, Khanna said the headcount of pilgrims attending the Maha Kumbh will be efficiently managed using advanced technology. "The first method is attribute

based search, where tracking will be conducted using person attribute search cameras. The second method involves RFID wristbands, which will be provided to the pilgrims. Through these wristbands, entry and exit times will be tracked using RFID readers," Khanna said at a roadshow here. "The third method is mobile app tracking, where with the consent of pilgrims, their location will be tracked through GPS using a mobile application," he added. The minister said the government is gearing up for a divine, grand and digital Maha Kumbh. "The preparations include the launch of a dedicated website and app, an AI-powered chatbot in 11 languages, QR-based passes for people and vehicles, a multilingual digital lost and found centre, ICT monitoring for cleanliness and tents, software for land and facility allocation, multilingual digital signage (VMD), an automated ration supply system, drone-based surveillance and disaster man-

agement, live software for monitoring 530 projects, an inventory tracking system and integration of all locations on Google maps," he added. Khanna said the arrangements have been made to ensure the tourists do not face parking issues. "In this regard, 101 smart parking facilities have been created, capable of accommodating up to five lakh vehicles daily. The parking area spans 1867.04 hectares, which is 763.75 hectares larger compared to the 1103.29 hectares allocated for parking in 2019. These parking facilities will be monitored through the Integrated Command Centre," he added. Meanwhile, in compliance with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's instructions to ensure a 'digital' and 'cyber safe' Maha Kumbh, Uttar Pradesh Police has formulated a strategy to protect the devotees from cyber frauds. "We have prepared a multi-dimensional strategy to fight cybercrime during the Maha

Kumbh. Apart from police officers, we have also roped in cyber experts from specialised institutions like IIT-Kanpur. Acting on the complaints received, police have already arrested some cyber frauds," Director General of Police (DGP), Prashant Kumar, said. "We will also launch a comprehensive awareness campaign to protect the devotees from cybercrime during the event," he added. A meeting of cyber experts and top police officials was held recently at the Integrated Command and Control Centre in Lucknow which discussed various issues concerning cybercrime, the DGP said. Held in hybrid mode under the chairmanship of Additional Director General of Police (Prayagraj Zone), Bhanu Bhaskar, the meeting was attended by professors from IIT-Kanpur, ADGP (cyber crime), Prayagraj police commissioner, IG (Prayagraj range), and cyber experts, among others.

# Bitter-sweet 2024 for BJP in Uttar Pradesh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh, 2024 will be remembered as a year of mixed fortunes. The party witnessed a significant decline in its Lok Sabha tally, dropping from 62 seats in 2019 to 32. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) also saw a reduction, with its total seats in the state falling from 64 to 36. This dip diminished Uttar Pradesh's commanding presence in national politics. For the first time in his political career spanning from Chief Minister to Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, MP from Varanasi, had to head a coalition government where the BJP lacked an absolute majority. The year marked a historic moment for the BJP, as it became the second-largest party in Uttar Pradesh after a decade. The setback was particularly poignant, as the party even lost the Faizabad (Ayodhya) seat—a symbolic constituency given its connection to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Political analysts saw this loss as a wake-up call for the party, emphasizing the need for recalibrating its electoral strategy. However, the BJP managed to end the year on a high note by securing seven out of nine seats in the



state assembly by-elections. This victory allowed the party to regain its position as the leading political force in Uttar Pradesh, offering a glimmer of hope amid a challenging year. The year began with optimism for the BJP, bolstered by the consecration ceremony of Ramlala at his birthplace in Ayodhya. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role as the main host for the event was a defining moment. For the first time in independent India, a Prime Minister publicly aligned with the sentiments of the country's majority community. The unprecedented nature of this move was underscored by comparisons to the objections

raised by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, during the re-establishment of the Somnath temple. Nehru had refrained from attending the event and even discouraged the President from participating. In stark contrast, Modi's presence at the Ramlala consecration symbolized a revolutionary shift in the political narrative. This event generated immense enthusiasm among the BJP cadre and supporters, creating an atmosphere where Modi's slogan of crossing 400 seats in the Lok Sabha seemed achievable. Yet, the electoral reality fell short of these expectations, with the party's reduced tally

signaling the need for introspection. The assembly by-elections later in the year proved to be a turning point. Under the leadership of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the BJP reclaimed its dominance by winning seven out of nine contested seats. The Chief Minister's hands-on approach, including direct communication with party workers and meticulous planning for each constituency, played a pivotal role in this success. "The by-election results reflect not just Yogi Adityanath's administrative acumen but also his ability to galvanize the organization in challenging

times," said a senior BJP leader. The results served as a testament to Adityanath's leadership and offered a morale boost for the party as it looked ahead to 2025. From an organizational perspective, 2024 was a year of learning for the BJP. The party faced criticism for its inability to translate Modi's popularity into votes across all regions of Uttar Pradesh. "The year taught us valuable lessons about complacency and the importance of grassroots engagement," admitted a BJP strategist. "It's a reminder that even a strong leader's appeal needs to be complemented by robust on-ground efforts." As the party charts its course for the future, the setbacks of 2024 are being viewed as opportunities for recalibration. The BJP's ability to turn defeat into a rallying cry will define its trajectory in the coming years. While 2024 ended on a mixed note for the BJP, the year's experiences have set the stage for a reinvigorated approach to Uttar Pradesh's complex political landscape. The party's ability to adapt, strategize, and rebuild will determine whether it can reclaim its former dominance in the state. For now, 2024 stands as a year of introspection, resilience, and hard-earned lessons for the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

# Kerala BJP cadres want party leader to undergo flogging a la Annamalai

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI/KOCHI

The anguish expressed by Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai by flogging himself in public over the ever increasing incidents of rape in the DMK ruled State has put his Kerala counterpart K Surendran in a major quandary. Annamalai's action was a fall out of a girl student getting sexually assaulted in a gruesome manner in the Anna University campus and also the charges by Annamalai that the incidents of rapes happening in the State are shooting up in an unprecedented manner under the DMK regime. Annamalai's anguish drew instant response from Governor R N Ravi on Saturday as he made an unscheduled visit to the university campus and interacted with students as well as the authorities. A late evening release by Raj Bhavan said the Governor expressed his concern over the attack on girl students and instructed the university administrative staff to beef up the security arrangements in the campus. The Tamil Nadu BJP chief, himself a former officer of the Indian Police Service, also declared that he would not wear footwear till the DMK

Government was removed from power. Though the DMK leaders and ministers ridiculed Annamalai for his decision terming the same as theatrics, public response to his swear has rattled the State administration. But neighboring Kerala, where the BJP is struggling to get a mooring, has been interesting. Annamalai's self-inflicted torture by flogging has earned wide appreciation from all walks of life. "He is trying to establish the BJP as a formidable force in the Dravida Land. His actions speak a lot and I will not be surprised to see the Hindutva party emerge as an alternative to the DMK and the AIADMK which is getting disintegrated fast under Edappadi Palaniswami, the reigning chief of Tamil Nadu BJP," said P Sujathan, author and political critic. Many in Kerala want Surendran also to undertake a self flogging a la Annamalai style and stop wearing footwear till the ruling CPI(M)-led government is ousted from power in a democratic manner. "The present BJP leadership in Kerala is hand in glove with certain national leaders and they have not done anything to make the party an alternative force to the CPI(M) and the Congress.

The BJP leaders in the State have resorted to attacking the minority community members, especially the Christmas Carols to send a message that the saffron brigade is an exclusive Hindu party," said Jaiby Kuruvithadham, a BJP leader based in Muvattupuzha. Sudheer Damodaran, a political commentator, said that Surendran can revive the BJP in the State by following the footsteps of Annamalai. "People in the State are waiting for a third force to emerge in the political landscape as it is known all over Kerala that the CPI(M) and the Congress are the two sides of the same coin," said Damodaran. Meanwhile the SNDP, the platform of the powerful Eezhava community in Kerala have made its displeasure public. There is no point in continuing our alliance with the BJP as it has ignored our interests while appointing Governors and chiefs of other Constitutional institutions. The Congress under Ramesh Chennithala is certain to perform well in the coming months," said Vellappilli Natesan, general secretary of SNDP. The NDA led by the BJP is almost certain to see a realignment of forces in the coming days if the words of Natesan are any indication.

# Didi finally lands at Sandeshkhali, slams BJP and LF

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday launched a scathing attack on the BJP and the Left for spending money to spread canards against her Government even as she landed at Sandeshkhali for the first time after the all-women movement against land grab and mass rape that hit the national headlines last year. Some 'mischievous' people had been playing 'a game of money and money only... they were intentionally misleading the people of this area... But as lies cannot last forever they have failed in their dirty mission and the people of Sandeshkhali particularly the women have come in large number to this meeting," Banerjee told a massive gathering even as she promised a number of projects. "I request the people of Sandeshkhali not to fall in the trap of the mischievous people... the BJP has plenty of money and they spend these in misinformation campaign... my message is to the mothers and sisters of Sandeshkhali to avoid those bad people... you could see things. With your eyes how some people resorted to disinformation but finally nothing came out... please don't go anywhere if someone asks you to. It's your right to get the benefits of Government schemes," Banerjee said asking the women not to go anywhere. "The Government will come at your doorstep with Duare Sarkar," one of her patent schemes via which the Government functionaries hold regional camps to address people's problems.



Sandeshkhali hit the national headlines for several weeks last year when the local women came out in hordes against strong arm tactics of local Trinamool Congress strongman Sheikh Shahjehan whose men allegedly physically exploited women and grabbed their lands to convert them into fisheries. Post Sandeshkhali incident the State Government was repeatedly indicted by the National Commissions for Women and Scheduled Tribes. Subsequently Shahjehan, also accused of other crimes like multi-crore ration scam --- along with the jailed Food Minister Jyotipriya Mullick --- was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation and has since been in jail. While there was a common refrain among the people against the Chief Minister for not visiting once this Sunderbans islands in North 24 Parganas off Basirhat, Banerjee's visit tended to impact the local women many of whom said they were willing to once again repose faith in her. This even as Banerjee asked the people to forget and leave behind the past incidents and move forward. "I want you to forget all that is past and proceed forwards... I want Sandeshkhali to tank among the

best... a girl from Sandeshkhali to top the board exams... someone from here to become an IPS or IAS officer... This is not a place for riots and violence. We want peace," Banerjee said before announcing a plethora of Government projects. Even as the locals requested the construction of a bridge joining the riverine islands with the mainland Banerjee said, "infrastructure projects like bridges require significant funding. I am noting your request, but we need to arrange the necessary resources... as you all know that the Centre provides us with nothing... they have stopped all the funds for rural development and I have to manage from my own resources." Aware that the Left had been quite active in the region Banerjee attacked the CPI(M) too saying, "BJP and Left have joined hands to malign the Government... while the BJP spends their ill-gotten money to mislead the people and ignite violence the CPI(M) is a party that talks big having forgotten their bloody past... they are a party of skeletons that killed people and buried them... so never believe them." Reacting to Banerjee's charges local face of the movement Rekha Patra who even unsuccessfully contested on a BJP ticket in this year's parliamentary elections said, "Didi has missed the bus... the people who have come... have been forcibly brought here... had she come the last year when the women were in trouble they would have definitely hugged her... but now they hate her and she will never be welcome here."

# Will focus on youth empowerment, overhauling education sector in 2025: Arunachal Pradesh CM

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said his government would focus on youth empowerment and overhauling the education sector in 2025, noting that these areas are crucial for the state's development and prosperity. The state government has declared 2024-25 as the 'Year of Youth' in its budget. This initiative highlights the administration's gratitude and recognition of the critical role young people play in shaping both the nation and the state, Khandu said. "The 'Year of Youth' is our acknowledgment of the immense responsibility our youth hold in building 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) and 'Viksit Arunachal' (prosperous Arunachal)," the chief minister said told PTI in an interview. He also noted that this initiative aligns with promises made in the ruling party's election manifesto. One of the primary objectives of the 'Year of Youth' is to encourage entrepreneurship among the younger generation and not to depend solely on government jobs. The government aims to create a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem through various schemes and policies. "Our government will lay emphasis on skill development programmes to equip the youth with the tools needed to embark on entrepreneurial ventures," Khandu said. The Arunachal Pradesh Entrepreneurship Development Programme (APEDP) has already been



launched to achieve this goal, he added. The APEDP, spearheaded by the state's Finance, Investment and Planning Department, aims to address local challenges by fostering entrepreneurship. The programme provides aspiring entrepreneurs with necessary support and mentorship to succeed. "We envision a future where Arunachal Pradesh's youth become job creators instead of job-seekers, generating livelihoods for thousands in the process," Khandu said. The Indian Institute of Management Calcutta Innovation Park (IIMCIP) has been roped in as the knowledge partner to run the programme, he said. Additionally, the chief minister said that the state is collaborating with renowned institutions such as IIMs and the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) Guwahati, to offer advanced skill development training. Khandu also revealed that special grants are being provided to support youth-led startups in the state. The chief minister said that the education sector is another key area of focus for the government.

Over the next three financial years, the state plans to undertake transformative changes to ensure quality education, improved infrastructure, and better opportunities for students. "To address the existing challenges, brainstorming sessions were conducted across the state, led by Education Minister P D Sonu and his advisor Mutchu Mithi," Khandu said. These sessions aimed to identify core issues and propose practical solutions for the education department, he said. The outcomes of these sessions will be compiled into a comprehensive report with recommendations for reform, which the state government will fully implement. "We are committed to cent per cent implementation of the recommended changes on the ground," he assured. Preferring quality over quantity, Khandu highlighted the importance of improving the learning experience rather than merely increasing the number of schools. The government plans to develop well-equipped inter-village schools with facilities such as hostels, adequate teaching staff, and modern teaching methods, he said. "The government is focused on quality education instead of just improving the state's literacy rate," the chief minister said. To optimise resources, the government has already closed or merged approximately 600 non-functional schools or those with low enrollment. Schools with fewer than 50 students are also being considered for closure.

# Gurugram Traffic Police issued 13.66 lakh challans till 28 December

PARVESH SHARMA ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant crackdown on traffic violators, the Gurugram Traffic Police issued 13.66 lakh challans amounting to Rs 15.17 crore till 28 December 2024. Under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Virender Vij, the department issued such huge number of challans, marking one of the most successful operations in 2024. These fines include 1,74,073 challans for the wrong side, 1,49,462 challans for wrong parking, 694 challans for under-age driving, 2,15,390 challans for not wearing helmet, 27,439 challans for not wearing a seat belt, 25,968 challans for drink and drive, 17,122 challans for over speeding, 10,894 challans for signal jump, 10,967 challans for black film, 4,231 challans for using a mobile phone, 13,330 for triple riding, 33,107 without a number plate, 1,475 challans for illegal siren and 60,466 challans were issued for wrong lane driving. "The operation was part of a larger special campaign launched across all traffic zones to target violators and reckless drivers. The traffic department is also strictly enforcing various provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act to maintain law and order on the roads," Vij said. Apart from this, a special campaign was also conducted against the drivers who did not give way to the ambulance and



162 vehicles were challaned. Meanwhile, a total of 333 vehicles were impounded under NGT in the year 2024, out of which 108 are diesel and 225 are petrol vehicles. Apart from this, the Gurugram Police also identify the places with black spots and remove them. In 2024, 05 black spots were also resolved/removed by Gurugram Police. In 2023, a total of 494 people died in 1172 road accidents. Which decreased to 448 people dying in 1019 road accidents in the year 2024. Due to this, road accidents have reduced by more than 13 per cent. Gurugram Police has been monitoring traffic movement with the help of drones and fined those who change lanes/drive. Apart from this, with the help of drones. In 2024, a total of 45 green corridors were given by the Traffic Police Gurugram. Out of which 9 were given for ambulances and 36 for NSG/Army and Air Force. Under the rules of GRAP-4, checkpoints were set up by Gurugram Traffic Police on all Delhi borders, and during this time, more than 7,000 vehicles violating GRAP-4 rules were challaned.









## FIRST COLUMN OVERCOMING THE GRIP OF FEARFUL THOUGHTS

Fearful thoughts often take hold of our minds, leading to obsession with worst-case scenarios



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We routinely become obsessed with fearful thoughts. The word obsession is defined as a persistent disturbing pre-occupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling. We don't stop there; we think of the worst. What is the probability of that happening? But that does not prevent us from this common flaw; we do it willingly. There are several reasons for succumbing to this. We have many attachments. We are desperate for something like a good result, and a few like we shouldn't get sick. Unfortunately, these are decided by the Divine Authority based on our past 'Karmas' (deeds). We have no say in it, and they manifest at their designated times. Fortunately, they are very rarely the worst we think of. If so, life would be hellish, which it is not. This earth's planet is a place of misery (The Bhagavad Geeta 8.15) alright, but is not a concentration camp by any standard. But our imagination has no bounds.

The next big offender is a refusal to be prepared to tolerate. We want zero tolerance. Is it possible? Everything is changing like the weather. Bad 'Karmaphalas' (results of bad deeds) will manifest for sure because this is no Vaikuntha; we have most certainly a past with many bad karmas. How else are we here, not even in Heaven? We feel that we are intelligent, but hardly anyone escapes making this mistake. Yes, we are supposed to get fearful, because that protects us from acting foolishly, but excessive fear is due to faulty assessment. Due diligence is required.

The fourth offender is greed. Our desires are open-ended. Is it wise? The evidence shows that downfalls occur due to being too greedy.



But to become greedy and then fear the consequences makes zero sense. Over-stress also causes fearful thoughts, especially about health. It is better to avoid to lessen this possibility. We want to control and are unable to. We act stupidly and then fear the worst. The same problem exists in acting big, which no one can ever become; we are intrinsically small and will remain eternally so. Acting as the sole doer also evolves fearful thoughts. Giving control of our minds to fearful thoughts is making ourselves our enemies. Lord Krishna has warned about it (4.6). Similarly, intelligence is supposed to curb this tendency but, again, we find some justification in harming ourselves. This is also a sad commentary on our knowledge, about which we are so proud. A soul has severe limitations, as we realize; he must remain in the shelter of God. This is the only worthwhile solution. I am sorry to be so stern, but the proliferation of mental diseases points to it only. God controls the Creation (9.10) and He, therefore, has to guide and help to deal with it. By ourselves, we are quite helpless really. How it works? It is quite simple, but a very long drawn exercise, because this problem involves our 'svabhava' (nature). This is what I do. The moment a fearful thought crosses my mind, I pray sincerely for guidance and help, because I need to know a way out. I need exact guidance for my actions. God signals to me what I should do; He uses many ways to communicate. He helps where I fall short. Blissfully, my painful habit of fearing excessively is coming under some control. Thank God for this 'Kripa' (mercy).

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

# Assessing efficacy and challenges of compensatory afforestation

With ecosystem at stake, the nation's approach to monetising and restoring nature demands careful evaluation and sustainable strategies write BKP SINHA and ARVIND KUMAR JHA

Compensatory Afforestation (CA) relates to the mitigation of environmental damage caused by the diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes and is a mandatory requirement for obtaining clearances under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980; now Van (Sanrakshanevam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam (VSSA) 1980 and Rules. The Government of India guidelines state that normally CA must be carried out on a suitable non-forest land equal to the forest area proposed for diversion and for minimizing the adverse impact on the micro-ecology, such land should be located as near as possible to the diverted area. If suitable non-forest land is unavailable, CA may be carried out on degraded forest land equal to twice the area of the diverted forest land. The unavailability of non-forest land in a district is certified by the District Collector and in the exceptional case of its unavailability in the whole state/union territory (UT), the chief secretary has to certify accordingly and CA land may be identified preferably in a neighbouring state/UT. As regards CA, the Government of India guidelines of 2017 and 2019 emphasised compensation for loss of land by land and that of trees by trees.

They indicate that at least 1000 plants are to be planted in one hectare and in case 1000 plants are not possible to be accommodated, the balance may be planted in some other government forest identified by the state government. The states having more than 75% forest cover, however, are exempted from the task of procuring non-forest land for CA. Their CA can be taken up in states with deficient forest land/cover. As regards size, lands smaller than 5 hectares can also be accepted for CA if it is contiguous to a wildlife conservation area like National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries. Area equivalence criterion often leads to an understanding that any forest can be equated with tree plantations of any kind but the concept of Net Present Value (NPV) is additionally used to calculate the worth of diverted forests by attaching a monetary value to a whole range of goods and services provided by them. This amount is recovered from the project proponent.

The World Bank's 2002 strategy elaborates the NPV to include goods and services like wood and non-wood items, ecosystem services, support to wildlife, climate regulation, soil & water conservation and flood prevention, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, health support systems and non-material benefits which may be spiritual, inspirational, recreational, aesthetic, educational etc. Its value thus extends far beyond economics and considering the interest of different stakeholders, the values of different components may also vary, such as the cultural significance of a tree species versus its commercial value as timber.

The January 2022 guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) have clubbed the forests of India into six Eco-classes to realize NPV instead of diverted forest land. Out of them, class I includes Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests, and Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests, while class II contains Littoral and Swamp Forests.



HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND PROJECT IS WORTH A LOOK. THE RS 72,000 CRORE INVESTMENT WILL DIVERT 130.75 SQ. KM. OF FOREST LAND FOR INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT THAT INCLUDES A TRANS-SHIPMENT PORT, AN AIRPORT, A POWER PLANT, A DEFENCE BASE, AN INDUSTRIAL PARK AND A TOWNSHIP

Interestingly, the per hectare value of NPV for both these classes has been kept the same, an equality that appears surprising. It is crucial to arrive at a monetized figure for a unit of Nature/biodiversity and ensure that investing in it will offset the loss caused by diversion. Simultaneous sustainable development of biodiversity is of course a formidable challenge. Accordingly, any oversimplification of biodiversity assessment can lead to inaccuracies and undermine genuine conservation efforts.

The limitations faced in offsetting losses just through CA are amply covered by CAG reports. Unfortunately, the resource position at the world level also, despite the wrath of climate change being faced globally, shows an annual funding gap of about USD 700 billion in nature conservation. Against the above background, the proposed CA and NPV to mitigate the diversion of forest land in the 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island' (GNI) project is worth a look. The Rs72,000 crore investment will divert 130.75 sq. km. of forest land for infrastructure development that includes a trans-shipment port, an airport, a power plant, a defence base, an industrial park, and a township.

The project involves the felling of an estimated one million trees with habitat destruction that would also impact the life, livelihood, and forest rights of the Shompen; a particularly vulnerable hunter-and-gatherer tribal group. The MoEFCC claims to have incorporated into the project some exemplary mitigation measures, including compensatory afforestation, into the project in compliance with the provisions of the VSSA 1980 while securing India's strategic national and defence interests. Out of the total CA area of 26,000 hectares, locating 24,354 hectares in Haryana is justified by highlight-

ing that planting native species in arid landscapes and near urban areas is of greater ecological value. Talks are said to be on with the Madhya Pradesh government for situating the balanced CA area. The CA in Aravali's arid/semi-arid region, approximately 2,400 kilometres away, to compensate for the loss of pristine rainforests of Great Nicobar is a significant departure from the guideline regarding the positioning of CA land. Reportedly, the CA with ₹3000 crore's investment is expected to be mostly a revival plan to improve the soil texture and fertility and to make stone boundary walls since the proposed area already has root stock requiring just protection and supplemental planting wherever required.

Indicative of the natural limits imposed by edaphic, geographical, and climatic factors, the Forest Survey of India (FSI) 2021 report on forest status shows that the carbon stock per hectare in A&N forests is fourth highest in the country; next only to Himachal, Sikkim, and J&K while Haryana has the second lowest; next only to Delhi.

This fact does raise questions regarding the possibility and efficacy of compensating adequately Nicobar's loss of carbon stock and biomass by investing CA money in Haryana. Considering the aspect of NPV, it is worth noting that Nicobar Island forests are more like that of Malaysia and Indonesia while the Andaman Islands' flora is more akin to the species found in Myanmar, Thailand, and Northeast India. FSI's rapid biodiversity assessment in A&N islands in 2018-19 found that shrubs and herbs together were more than double the number of trees. Many species found there do not occur in mainland India. The understory and emergent layers with profuse regeneration, herbs, and

shrubs indicate a vibrant ecosystem wherein approximately half of the mammals, a third of the birds, a quarter of the reptiles, and over a tenth of flowering plants are endemic. A crucible for the habitat rights of the Shompen tribe notwithstanding, it is home to the endangered Nicobar Megapode and Leatherback Turtle, and has over twenty thousand coral reefs in its vicinity. In 1989, The UNESCO declared a significant portion of the island as a biosphere reserve. Despite such uniqueness, distinctive parameters, and ecological significance; its NPV per hectare is exactly equal to the forests in Eco-classes I and II. GIN is just one project.

An in-depth analysis of forest land diversion cases can provide, in addition to actionable issues related to limitations and risks in offsetting just through the prevalent CA and NPV model, important insights into ways to minimize harm to Nature, redeemability of loss to forest ecosystems, correct determination of NPV, efficient investments in Nature recovery and restoration initiatives, handling of habitat rights of the primitive tribes and pre-agricultural communities, and regulations needed to ensure accountability.

Nature's monetization and biodiversity markets are fast emerging as potential funding sources for conservation. Their effectiveness demands an honest valuation of diverted forests and a strict implementation of conservation strategies. The outcomes depend on those having the power to decide. Only time will tell, but the decisions made today will echo through the annals of history shaping the destiny of our country and of humanity itself.

(The writers are former PCCFs of U.P. and Maharashtra; views are personal)

# Indian agriculture and climate change: Challenges and strategies

India is forging a path toward climate-resilient agriculture, leveraging innovative strategies, integrated farming practices and government-led initiatives

The agriculture and allied sectors play a central role in the sustainable growth and development of India's economy. These sectors not only ensure food and nutritional security for the country's 1.4 billion people but also contribute significantly to production, employment, and demand generation through various backward and forward linkages. While agriculture constitutes about 16% of India's GDP, it supports nearly 49% of the workforce (Economic Survey, 2018). However, with over 50% of India's cultivated land dependent on rainfed irrigation, the sector is highly vulnerable to climate variability. The ongoing challenges to sustain the natural resource base further



PRAVESH SHARMA

amplify the adverse impacts of climate change, which disproportionately affect the poor. Challenges Posed by Climate Change on Agriculture

**1. Rainfall Variability:** The increasing intra-seasonal variability of rainfall has emerged as a major concern. Rainfall patterns are becoming increasingly skewed, characterized by fewer rainy days with higher intensity. This results in sig-

nificant soil erosion and exacerbates the length of dry spells. Deviations in the hydrological cycle are contributing to extreme events, such as floods caused by intense rainfall or droughts triggered by prolonged dry spells, impacting different parts of the country.

**2. Temperature Rise:** Rising temperatures pose a greater threat to tropical countries like India, which already operate near the higher end of the temperature spectrum. Elevated temperatures influence various climatic factors, adversely impacting crop production. For instance, extreme heat reduces fruit setting in citrus crops and increases transpiration losses in vegetables.

**3. Livestock and Poultry Impact:** Climate variability also affects animal production and reproduction. Increased temperatures and higher temperature-humidity index levels lead to reduced feed intake, lower milk yields, and decreased meat and egg quality. Poultry, in particular, suffers from heat stress, resulting in thinner eggshells and increased egg breakage.

**4. Pests and Diseases:** Climate change influences the population, survival, and geographic distribution of pests and diseases. Rising temperatures and humidity levels create favorable conditions for pest proliferation, making control measures more challenging and unpredictable.

**Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies** Adaptation to climate change involves anticipating adverse impacts and taking proactive



measures to minimize damage or leverage emerging opportunities. Given that most Indian farmers are smallholders with limited coping capacity, building resilience is key.

**1. Water Resource Management:** Enhancing rainwater productivity through scientific rainwater harvesting, recycling, and precision water use is essential. Improved irrigation techniques and water budgeting can mitigate the impact of erratic rainfall.

**2. Integrated Farming Systems:** Combining crop cultivation with livestock, fisheries, and plantations offers diverse income streams and reduces climate vulnerability. Contingency planning for alternate crops and activities based on agro-climatic conditions further strengthens resilience.

**3. Technology and Innovation:** Developing stress-tolerant crop varieties, conserving agro-biodiversity, and promoting resource-efficient technologies are critical. Pest forecasting models, weather-based advisories, and agricultural risk management systems should be expanded to aid farmers in decision-making.

**4. Community Involvement and Education:** Engaging

local communities in production system management and raising awareness about climate-resilient practices is vital. Farmers, consumers, and markets must be educated to embrace sustainable agriculture practices that align with cultural and social contexts.

**Government Initiatives to Address Climate Change** The Government of India has taken several steps to combat climate change. **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** Guided by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, the NAPCC includes the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), focusing on resource conservation, soil health, integrated farming, and water-use efficiency.

**National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA):** This initiative provides scientific and technical guidance for sustainable agricultural development. Key Program Interventions: Policies like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, National Food Security Mission, and Soil Health Card Scheme aim to enhance soil health, water efficiency, and farm productivity.

**District Agricultural Contingency Plans:** These plans provide integrated solutions for crop, livestock, and fishery challenges arising from weather anomalies, supporting farmers during extreme conditions.

(The writer is a retired IAS officer; the views expressed are personal)



# South Korea to inspect its Boeing fleet as it struggles to find cause of plane crash

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean officials said Monday they will conduct safety inspections of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines, as they struggle to determine what caused a plane crash that killed 179 people a day earlier. Sunday's crash, the country's worst aviation disaster in decades, triggered an outpouring of national sympathy. Many people worry how effectively the South Korean government will handle the disaster as it grapples with a leadership vacuum following the recent successive impeachments of President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's top two officials, amid political tumult caused by Yoon's brief imposition of martial law earlier this month. New acting President Choi Sang-mok on Monday presided over a task force meeting on the crash and instructed authorities to conduct an emergency review of the country's aircraft operation systems. "The essence of a responsible response would be renovating the aviation safety systems on the whole to prevent recurrences of similar incidents and building a safer Republic of South Korea," said Choi, who is also deputy prime minister and finance minister. The Boeing 737-800 plane

operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air aborted its first landing attempt for reasons that aren't immediately clear. Then, during its second landing attempt, it received a bird strike warning from the ground control center before its pilot issued a distress signal. The plane landed without its front landing gear deployed, overshot the runway, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into a fireball. Alan Price, a former chief pilot at Delta Air Lines and now a consultant, said the Boeing 737-800 is a "proven airplane" that belongs to a different class of aircraft than the Boeing 737 Max jetliner that was linked to fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019. But South Korea's Transport Ministry said Monday it plans to conduct safety inspections of all of the 101 Boeing 737-800 jetliners operated by the country's airlines as well as a broader review into safety standards at Jeju Air, which operates 39 of those planes. Senior ministry official Joo Jong-wan said representatives from the US National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing were expected to arrive in South Korea on Monday to participate in the investigation. Ministry officials also said they will look into whether the Muan airport's localizer — a concrete fence housing a set of antennas designed to guide



aircraft safely during landings — should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact. Joo said the ministry has determined that similar concrete structures are in other domestic airports, including in Jeju Island and the southern cities of Yeosu and Pohang, as well as airports in the United States, Spain and South Africa. Video of the crash indicated that the pilots did not deploy flaps or slats to slow the aircraft, suggesting a possible hydraulic failure, and did not manually lower the landing gear, suggesting they did not have time, said John Cox, a retired airline pilot and CEO of Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida. Despite that, the jetliner was under control and traveling in a straight line, and damage and injuries likely would have been minimized if not for the barrier being so close to the runway, Cox said. Other observers said the videos showed the plane was suffering from suspected engine trouble but the landing gear malfunction was likely a direct reason for the crash. They said there wouldn't likely be a link between the landing gear problem and the suspected engine issue. Earlier Monday, another Boeing 737-800 plane operated by Jeju Air returned to Seoul's Gimpo International Airport shortly after takeoff when the pilot



Buddhist monks (above) pray for the victims on a plane which skidded off a runway and burst into flames (left), at a memorial altar at Muan sport park in Muan, South Korea, on Monday.

detected a landing gear issue. Song Kyung-hoon, a Jeju Air executive, said the issue was resolved through communication with a land-based equipment center, but the pilot decided to return to Gimpo as a precautionary measure. Joo said officials were reviewing whether there might have been communication problems between air traffic controllers and the pilot. "Our current understanding is that, at some point during the go-around process, communica-

tion became somewhat ineffective or was interrupted, ahead of the landing and impact," he said. Ministry officials said Monday the plane's flight data and cockpit audio recorders were moved to a research center at Gimpo airport ahead of their analysis. Ministry officials earlier said it would take months to complete the investigation of the crash. The Muan crash is South Korea's deadliest aviation disaster since 1997, when a Korean Airlines plane

crashed in Guam, killing 228 people on board. The crash left many South Koreans shocked and ashamed, with the government announcing a seven-day national mourning period through Jan. 4. Some questioned whether the crash involved safety or regulatory issues, such as a 2022 Halloween crash in Seoul that killed 160 people and a 2014 ferry sinking that killed 304 people. The Transport Ministry said authorities have

identified 146 bodies and are collecting DNA and fingerprint samples from the other 33. Park Han Shin, a representative of the bereaved families, said they were told that the bodies were so badly damaged that officials need time before returning them to their families. "I demand that the government mobilize more personnel to return our brothers and family members as intact as possible more swiftly," he said, choking down tears. The crash was yet more major news for South Koreans already reeling from a political crisis set off by Yoon's martial law decree, which brought hundreds of troops into Seoul streets and revived traumatic memories of past military rule in the 1970-80s. The political tumult resulted in the opposition-controlled National Assembly impeaching Yoon and Han. The safety minister stepped down and the police chief was arrested over their roles in the martial law enforcement. The absence of top officials responsible for managing disasters has led to concerns. "We are deeply worried whether the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters really can handle the disaster," the mass-circulation JoongAng Ilbo newspaper said in an editorial Monday.

## Shehbaz, Nawaz Sharif criticised for not offering condolences on Manmohan Singh's demise

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's decision of not offering condolences on the passing of former India premier Manmohan Singh was severely criticised on social media. Singh, who was born in Gah village in Chakwal district of Pakistan's Punjab and served as prime minister from 2004 to 2014, died in New Delhi last Thursday aged 92. While condolence messages poured in from around the world, neither Shehbaz Sharif nor his elder brother and three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif chose to offer any words on his demise. Ironically, only Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar offered his condolences. Contrary to this, Shehbaz Sharif and other top func-

tionaries of the Pakistan government wasted no time to offer condolences on the passing of former US president Jimmy Carter. They issued condolence messages on X, which is banned by the Shehbaz Sharif government to control dissenting voices of jailed former premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party on social media. "Neither Shabbaz nor Nawaz Sharif have yet offered a public condolence on the loss of Manmohan Singh. There was a message from Ishaq Dar. Still, it's perplexing. They were contemporaries, had some similar economic views, and shared a desire for better India-Pakistan relations," Wilson Centre South Asia Institute Director Michael Kugelman said on X on Sunday. He further said: "I

really don't see so much at stake with India-Pak ties now that the Sharifs feel something could be lost if they upset Modi. Also not sure I see Modi being bothered if they do say something about Singh. It's all a bit odd!" Pakistani author and expert on military affairs Ayesha Siddiqi sarcastically said on X: "Seems they — the Sharif brothers — don't want to annoy Modi, or maybe typical PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) that whoever is gone is gone and so done and dusted with." Pakistani journalist Ammara Ahmad said: "It has never happened before. This means that Pakistan and India have no diplomatic ties. Though they negotiated the Kartarpur corridor again this year. I can't imagine what prompted this decision. I have yet to find a press release even. Very lowly

and uncouth." Mona Farooq Ahmad, an overseas citizen of Pakistan, said on Monday: "This level of pettiness is unprecedented. In the past, leaders have always set politics aside for such moments. Their silence is truly intriguing and disappointing. It's a missed chance to show humanity and statesmanship." Amer Mirza said on X: "These individuals — Shehbaz and Nawaz — are neither serious politicians nor statesmen. We cannot hold any expectation of dignified conduct or due protocol. They are a family consumed with sustaining their ill-gotten privilege under the dark auspices of the military junta. They neither have time nor respect for the people. They are little men in big offices." Dar on Friday said he was saddened by the passing of Singh who "played a

notable role in improving India-Pakistan ties." "Saddened by the passing of Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India. Born in a village in Pakistan's Chakwal district, Singh was a distinguished economist and political leader. He will be remembered for his wisdom and gentle demeanour," Dar said in a post on X. "Beyond his remarkable achievements in the field of economics, Dr. Singh demonstrated a commitment to promoting regional peace. His approach to regional issues reflected his belief that mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation were essential for collective progress. He played a notable role in improving Pakistan-India bilateral relations during his tenure as Prime Minister," Dar said.

PTI ■ LONDON

The body of a 22-year-old Indian student missing since earlier this month has been found in a river in Scotland and her family has been informed while formal identification is awaited. Santra Saju from Kerala was enrolled at the Heriot-Watt University in the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. Police Scotland said in a statement over the weekend that they were made aware of a body in a river near Newbridge, a village near Edinburgh. "Around 11.55 am on Friday, December 27, 2024, police were made aware of a body found in the water near to Newbridge," Police Scotland said. "Formal identification has still to take place however the family of Santra Saju, 22,

has been informed. The death is not believed to be suspicious," the police said. The statement added that a report will be sent to the Procurator Fiscal, Scotland's prosecution service and death investigation body. Saju was last caught on CCTV at an Asda supermarket store in Almondvale, Livingston, on December 6 evening. An urgent missing person's appeal was issued by the police, describing Saju as being around 5 feet 6 inches in height, of Indian ethnicity, slim build, with short black hair. She was wearing a black jacket with a fur-lined hood, beige furry earmuffs and a black facemask. Enquiries also revealed she had a black rucksack in her possession. The police appeal encouraged anyone who may recognise her to

come forward with any information. Inspector Alison Lawrie from Corstorphine Police Station said in a statement at the time: "We now know that Santra picked up a black and white shopper style bag from an address in Burnvale on Friday evening, but she did not have it when she entered the supermarket. "The bag is distinctive and someone may remember seeing her carrying it. We are continuing to review CCTV footage and have released images of Santra from the supermarket in the hope that someone recognises her. Extensive enquiries are being carried out in an effort to trace her." Her friends and family had said the disappearance was out of character and had become very worried for her safety.

## Taliban to close all NGOs employing Afghan women

AP ■ KABUL

The Taliban say they will close all national and foreign non-governmental groups in Afghanistan employing women. It comes two years after they told NGOs to suspend the employment of Afghan women, allegedly because they didn't wear the Islamic headscarf correctly. In a letter published on X Sunday night, the Economy Ministry warned that failure to comply with the latest order would lead to NGOs losing their license to operate in Afghanistan. The ministry said it was responsible for the registration, coordination, leadership and supervision of all activities carried out by national and foreign organisa-

tions. The government was once again ordering the stoppage of all female work in institutions not controlled by the Taliban, according to the letter. "In case of lack of cooperation, all activities of that institution will be cancelled and the activity license of that institution, granted by the ministry, will also be cancelled." It's the Taliban's latest attempt to control or intervene in NGO activity. Earlier this month, the UN Security Council heard that an increasing proportion of female Afghan humanitarian workers were prevented from doing their work even though relief work remains essential. According to Tom Fletcher, a

senior UN official, the proportion of humanitarian organisations reporting that their female or male staff were stopped by the Taliban's morality police has also increased. The Taliban deny they are stopping aid agencies from carrying out their work or interfering with their activities. They have already barred women from many jobs and most public spaces, and also excluded them from education beyond sixth grade. In another development, the Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada has ordered that buildings should not have windows looking into places where a woman might sit or stand. According to a four-clause decree posted on X late Saturday, the

order applies to new buildings as well as existing ones. Windows should not overlook or look into areas like yards or kitchens. Where a window looks into such a space then the person responsible for that property must find a way to obscure this view to "remove harm," by installing a wall, fence or screen. Municipalities and other authorities must supervise the construction of new buildings to avoid installing windows that look into or over residential properties, the decree added. A spokesman for the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing was not immediately available for comment on Akhundzada's instructions.

AP ■ BANGKOK

A fire broke out at a hotel near Bangkok's Khao San Road, a popular tourist destination, killing three foreigners and injuring several other people, Thai police said Monday. The three who died in the fire on Sunday night were all foreign tourists, Police Colonel Sanong Saengmanee told The Associated Press. One was found dead at the scene and the other two died after being transported to the hospital. Police later identified the dead as a Brazilian woman, a Ukrainian man and an American man. Four people were hospitalised, of whom one was in critical condition.

## Bangkok hotel fire kills 3 foreigners

The fire erupted on the 5th floor of the six-story Ember Hotel, police said. Khao San Road is a popular backpacker street in the Thai capital that's also known for its lively nightlife. The flames were eventually contained and the cause of the blaze is under investigation. Seventy-five people were staying at the hotel at the time of the fire. Sreekanth Kolamala, a 37-year-old Indian national who lives in Singapore and was in Thailand on vacation, witnessed the rescue operation and said that firefighters "broke the glass over there to try to pull people out." Sanga Ruangwattanakul, the president of the Khao San Road Business

Association, stood outside The Ember Hotel on Monday, looking at the damage. He said 20,000 people were expected at a New Year's Eve countdown event on Tuesday night. "Now everybody's scared about what happened and they're scared it will affect the event tomorrow. But definitely there's no worry because we already had a meeting with the police station and we have over 150 police and district staff to cover on Khao San Road for security," he said. Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt also emphasized the importance of safety following the incident, especially as New Year's Eve approaches, with fireworks and other celebrations planned across the city.

## Syria's long-ruling Baath party faces collapse

AP ■ DAMASCUS

A few days after insurgents in Syria overthrew President Bashar Assad, his ruling Baath party announced it was freezing its activities, marking a stunning change in fortunes for the political group that had ruled for more than six decades. Many members of the party's leadership have gone into hiding and some have fled the country. In a symbolic move, Syria's new rulers have turned the former party headquarters in Damascus into a center where former members of the army and security forces line up to register their names and hand over their weapons. Calls are on the rise to officially dissolve the Arab Socialist Baath Party that had ruled Syria since 1963. Many Syrians — including former party members — say its rule damaged relations with other Arab countries and aided in the spread of corruption that brought the war-torn nation to

its knees. "The party should not only be dissolved, it should go to hell," said Mohammed Hussein Ali, 64, who worked for a state oil company and was a party member for decades until he quit at the start of Syria's anti-government uprising in 2011 that turned into civil war. He never left the country and said he is happy the Baath rule is over. An official with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, the group that led the insurgent offensive that overthrew Assad, said no official decision has been made on what to do with the Baath party. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter, noted that HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa has said that officials who committed crimes against the Syrian people over the past decades will be brought to justice and hinted that they include party members. The Baath party, whose aim

was to unify Arab states in one nation, was founded by two Syrian Arab nationalists, Michel Aflaq and Salaheddine Bitar, in 1947 and at one point ruled two Arab countries, Iraq and Syria. A rivalry developed between the Syrian branch under Assad and his late father, Hafez, and the one in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, who was removed from power by a US-led invasion in 2003. In Syria, the Baath party became inextricably associated with the Assad family, which took power in 1970. For decades, the family used the party and its pan-Arab ideology to control the country. Many senior military jobs were held by members of the family's minority Alawite sect, and party membership was used as a cover to give it a nationalist rather than a sectarian nature. A former soldier and decades-long Baath party member who came to party headquarters to cut his military ties, Abdul-Rahman Ali, said he had no

idea it was founded by Aflaq and Bitar. He had always thought that Hafez Assad was the founder. "I am happy. We have been liberated from fear," said Ali, 43. "Even the walls had ears. We didn't dare express opinions with anyone." He was referring to the dreaded security and intelligence agencies that detained and tortured people who expressed criticism of Assad or government officials. Many Syrians were required to join the Baath Vanguard, the party's youth branch, while in elementary school, where Arab nationalist and socialist ideology was emphasized. It was difficult for people who were not party members to get government jobs or join the army or the security and intelligence services. In 2012, a year after Syria's uprising began, a paragraph of the constitution stating that the Baath party was the leader of the nation and society was abolished, in a move aimed to appease the public's demand for

political reforms. In practice, however, the party remained in control, with members holding majority seats in parliament and government. Another former soldier, who gave only his first name, Ghadir, out of fear of reprisals as a member of the Alawite sect, said he came from a poor family and joined the party so he could enter the military for a stable income. "You could not take any job if you were not a Baathist," he said. While few are mourning the party's fall in Syria, some are concerned that the Sunni majority that now controls the country could carry out a purge similar to the one in Iraq after Saddam's fall. A de-Baathification committee was formed in Iraq and its main job was purging Saddam loyalists from government and military institutions. The Sunni minority considered it a means of sectarian score-settling by Iraq's Shiite majority. The Sunni resentment and disenfranchisement that followed helped to

drive the rise of extremist groups in the country including al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq. In Syria, a Baath party statement issued three days after Assad's fall called on all members to hand their weapons and public cars to the new authorities. On Dec. 24, party member and former army colonel Mohammed Merhi was among hundreds who lined up at the former party headquarters and handed over weapons. Merhi said the Baath party should be given another opportunity because its principles are good but were exploited over decades. But he said he might want to join another party if Syria becomes a multiparty democracy in the future. He handed over his Soviet Makarov pistol and received a document saying he can now move freely in the country after reconciling with the new authorities. "I want to become again a normal Syrian citizen and work to build a new Syria," he said.

## 66 killed as truck plunges into river in south Ethiopia

AP ■ ADDIS ABABA

At least 66 people have died and a village director said Monday, a hospital director said Monday. The accident took place Sunday when an old, overcrowded truck that was contracted by wedding guests fell off the Gelan Bridge, where villagers said traffic crashes have happened before. The medical director at Bona General Hospital in the southern Sidama region, Lemma Lagide, told The Associated Press on Monday that 64 people died on site and two others at the hospital. He said those patients in need of more sophisticated critical care were transferred to a bigger hospital in Hawassa. Delays in rescue efforts in the remote village were blamed for the high number of casualties. Villagers said they tried to save people from the raging

river only with sticks. A villager, Serak Boko, told AP that moments before the accident, music was blasting out of the truck and people dressed in suits were dancing and waving. It is common for people in rural Ethiopia to hire trucks instead of buses to transport them to social events like weddings because they are more affordable and carry many people. Most of those on the truck were men because they are culturally required to escort the bride from her home to the groom's house. "The area always has regular accidents around the river as it is poorly constructed," said resident Fasil Atara, referring to the road lacking bumps and warnings. With desolate infrastructure and overcrowded public transportation, Ethiopia has had similar accidents in the past. In August, 38 people died after a bus rolled over in Amhara region.



# South Korean authorities seek warrant to detain impeached President Yoon in martial law probe

**AP ■ SEOUL**  
South Korean law enforcement officials requested a court warrant on Monday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol as they investigate whether his short-lived martial law decree on December 3 amounted to rebellion.  
The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which leads a joint investigation with police and military authorities into the power grab that lasted only a few hours, confirmed it requested the warrant from the Seoul Western District Court. They plan to question Yoon on charges of abuse of authority and orchestrating a rebellion.  
Yoon Kap-keun, the president's lawyer, denounced the detention attempt and filed a challenge with the same court, arguing that the warrant request was invalid. He also claimed the anti-corruption agency lacked the legal authority to investigate rebellion charges. Still, he evaded answering how the legal team would respond if the court approved the warrant for the president's detention.  
"An incumbent president cannot be prosecuted for abuse of power," the lawyer said. "Of course, there are differing academic opinions on whether a president can be investigated for abuse of power and some assert that investigations are possible. But even when investigations are allowed, the pre-

vious opinion is that they should be exercised with the utmost restraint."  
The anti-corruption agency didn't immediately respond to the lawyer's comments.  
Han Min-soo, spokesperson of the liberal opposition Democratic Party, called for the court to issue the warrant, saying Yoon Suk Yeol's detention would be the first step toward "ending the rebellion and restoring normalcy."  
The warrant request came after Yoon dodged several requests by the joint investigation team and public prosecutors to appear for questioning and also blocked searches of his offices.  
While Yoon has the presidential privilege of immunity from criminal prosecution, such protections don't extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. It's not clear whether the court will grant the warrant or whether Yoon can be compelled to appear for questioning.  
Under the country's laws, locations potentially linked to military secrets cannot be seized or searched without the consent of the person in charge, and it's unlikely that Yoon will voluntarily leave his residence if he faces detention. There are also concerns about possible clashes with Yoon's presidential security service if authorities attempt to forcibly detain him.  
Yoon's presidential powers were suspended after the National Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14 over his imposition of martial law, which last-

ed only hours but has triggered weeks of political turmoil, halted high-level diplomacy and rattled financial markets.  
Yoon's fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberations on whether to uphold the impeachment and formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him.  
The National Assembly voted last week to also impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who had assumed the role of acting president after Yoon's powers were suspended, over his reluctance to fill three Constitutional Court vacancies ahead of the court's review of Yoon's case. The country's new interim leader is Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, who is also finance minister.  
To formally end Yoon's presidency, at least six justices on the nine-member Constitutional Court must vote in favour. Three seats are currently vacant following retirements and a full bench could make conviction more likely.  
Choi, who has been handling the government's response to a plane crash on Sunday that killed 179 people, has yet to say whether he intends to appoint the Constitutional Court justices.  
In a separate criminal investigation of Yoon, authorities have already arrested his defense minister, police chief and several other military commanders involved in the attempt to enforce the martial law decree, which harkened back to the days of authoritarian leaders the country hasn't seen since the 1980s.  
In theory, the authority to investigate rebellion charges lies solely with the police, following a 2021 reform that redistributed investigative powers among law enforcement agencies and removed rebellion from the list of crimes prosecutors and the anti-corruption office could pursue. But those agencies have still been investigating rebellion accusations against Yoon, allegedly linked to charges related to abuse of power, a type of crime they are authorized to investigate.  
Yoon and his military leadership have been accused of attempting to block the National Assembly from voting to end martial law by sending hundreds of heavily armed troops to encircle the building. Lawmakers who managed to get in voted unanimously 190-0 to lift martial law, hours after Yoon declared it in a late-night television address.  
Yoon has also been accused of ordering defense counterintelligence officials to detain key politicians, including opposition leader Lee Jae-myung, National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik and the ex-leader of his own conservative party, Han Dong-hun, a reformist who supported investigations into corruption allegations against first lady Kim Keon Hee.  
Yoon has defended the martial law decree as a necessary act of governance, portraying it as a temporary warning against the liberal opposition Democratic Party, which he has described as an "anti-state" force obstructing his agenda with its majority in the National Assembly. Yoon has claimed he had no intention to paralyze the functioning of the assembly, saying that the troops were sent to maintain order, and also denied planning to arrest politicians.  
Yoon's claims have been denied by Kwak Jong-keun, the now-arrested commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, who testified in the National Assembly that Yoon called for troops to "quickly destroy the door and drag out the law-makers who are inside" the assembly's main chamber where the vote occurred.  
Kwak said he did not carry out Yoon's orders.  
The joint investigation team has also questioned Maj. Gen. Moon Sang-ho, commander of the Defense Intelligence Command who has also been arrested over suspicions that he sent troops to the National Election Commission in the city of Gwacheon after Yoon declared martial law.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given to Public that I Mrs. Sunita Takkar, D/o Sh. Kundan Lal Kalra, owner of Flat No. 236 RPS Flats, Sheikh Sara, Phase - 1, New Delhi - 110017, has lost the Original Registered Sale Deed entered on 06.05.2014 between Mrs. Raj Sehi and Mrs. Sunita Takkar bearing registration No. 2499, Book No. 1, Vol. No. 648 on Pages 164 to 174, with respect of Flat No. 236, RPS Flats, Sheikh Sara, Phase - 1, New Delhi - 110017. An Information Report in respect of Article/Document Lost is registered at Police Station Crime Branch, Delhi Police. All the persons are hereby informed not to carry out any transaction on the basis of said lost document. Any transaction carried out on the basis of such lost document shall be illegal and would be held void. Any person having found or in possession of the said document is requested to approach the owner Mrs. Sunita Takkar on vinitadakk@hotmail.com, +44740101950 or Advocate Ananddeep Singh at anand@vinitadakk.com, +919175170356.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Be it known to all that my client Shri Haninder Pal Singh S/o Shri Harbans Singh R/o WZ-41, Prithvi Park, Tilak Nagar, New Delhi-110018 has disowned/debarred his son Gagandeep Singh from all his movable & immovable properties and has severed all relations from him due to his misconduct. Any person dealing with him shall be doing at his/her own risk.  
**PRAVEEN RASTOGI (Advocate)**

# German govt seeks to downplay Musk's backing of far-right party ahead of poll

**AP ■ BERLIN**  
The German government on Monday sought to downplay efforts by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk to get involved in the country's general election campaign by again endorsing the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, party.  
Musk caused uproar over the weekend after backing the AfD in an opinion piece in a major newspaper, leading to the resignation of the paper's opinion editor in protest.  
"Freedom of expression also includes the greatest nonsense," government spokesperson Christiane Hoffmann said, adding that should wouldn't comment further on Musk's statements. She did, however, say that "it is indeed the case for this country," Musk wrote in his translated commentary. He went on to say the far-right party "can lead the country into a future where economic prosperity, cultural integrity and technological innovation are not just wishes, but reality."  
The Tesla Motors CEO also wrote that his investment in Germany gave him the right to comment on the country's condition.  
The AfD is polling strongly, but its candidate for the top job, Alice Weidel, has no realistic chance of becoming chancellor because other parties refuse to work with the far-right party.  
An ally of US President-elect Donald Trump, the technology billionaire challenged in his opinion piece the party's public image.  
Musk's guest opinion piece for German over the weekend, and German on Sonntag published in Musk's guest opinion piece for German over the weekend, was the second time this month he had supported Alternative for Germany, or AfD.  
"The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the last spark of hope

**CHANGE OF D.O.B**  
I, Lakhan Lal Sharma, Father of- No. 17031273H CFN Santosh Kumar Sharma, R/O At Kasmabad, Po- Gangapur, PS- Sultanganj, Distt- Bhagalpur, Bihar- 813213, declare that in my son's service records, my D.O.B is wrongly written as 05/01/1955 whereas my correct D.O.B. is 05/01/1965, which may be amended accordingly.  
**PD(1173)C**

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, Dinesh Chauhan S/o- Lajje Ram Village- Shahpur Sector-128 Gautam Buddha Nagar, Noida, I have changed my name to Dinesh Kumar Chauhan for all future purposes.  
**PD(1171)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, JC-473048K Sub Sanjai Kumar Singh, R/o- Vill+Post-Banki Khurd, Teh- Mohammadabad, Distt- Ghazipur, U.P.- 233229, declare that in my service records, my Mother's name is erroneously recorded as Jayanti Singh, whereas her correct name is Jayanti, which may be amended accordingly.  
**PD(1172)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I Sukhchain S/o Sh Satpal, R/o Village Mandi Khurd Teh. Safidon District Jind Haryana have decided to change Name of my Minor Daughter from Rajkumari Anaya to Avira Singh for our family cultural heritage and personal preferences via affidavit number 55AA 254375/2024 dated 03/07/2024  
**PD(1174)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, Muskan D/o Shri Ram Bhajan Prasad / R/o B-2, O block Rajeev Nagar Extension, Begum pur, Delhi 110086 my name is wrongly spelt Muskaan in marksheet but my actual name is Muskan. Muskan and Muskaan both are same person  
**PD(1175)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, Mohammad Aslam Asif S/o S.K. Ahamad Ali R/o H.NO.- C-544, behind telephone exchane, Sector-19, Noida, Gautam Buddha naar, Uttar Pradesh-201301 declare that My daughter name has been wrongly mentioned as (School) Arisha Faiza Masuwari whereas my daughter correct name is Arisha Asif  
**PD(1176)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, Ashi Chhabra W/o Sumeet Chhabra R/o A-241, Sector-43, Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. (201301), declare that after marriage I have changed my name from Deep Shikha Kukreja to Ashi Chhabra for all purposes.  
**PD(1177)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, Gulafsha, D/o Shri Mohammad Jalaluddin, R/o House No-1191, Gali No 1, block D, Sangam Vihar, Pushpa Bhawan, South Delhi 110062 my Father name is wrongly writes as Jalaluddin in 10th class marksheet but my Father actual name is Mohammad Jalaluddin. Jalaludin and Mohammad Jalaluddin both are same person  
**PD(1178)C**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
It has been informed that original registered property documents of Mr. Shiv Shankar Gautam S/o Sunder Lal, H- No 679/1 Flat # 5B, First Floor, Noida, Haryana, Panpur, ND- 110062 have been lost/Misplaced. If anyone finds the document please return/contact to 9953130864  
**NTIN BHASKAR (Advocates & Consultants) Off.: Chamber No. G-712, KKD Court, Shahdara, New Delhi-110032**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
It is to inform to all concern that Mr. Parvinder S/o Sh. Kartara R/o Vill. Harola, Sector-5, Noida (U.P.) who is the original attor of Plot No. B-281, Sector-151, Noida (U.P.) had sold the said property on General power of attorney basis to the following person(s). GPA was executed on in favour of Mr. Ravish Kumar S/o Sh. Ranjan Choudhary R/o KM-4, 407, Jaypee Kosmos, Wisth Town, Sector-134, Noida (U.P.) which is registered on Dated 19.11.2024 in Sub Registrar office Noida-1 Gautam Budh Nagar, Bahi No. 4, Jild No. 1822, Page No.125-138, Serial No.541. The agreement to sell was not registered or not executed. So it is informed to all concern that the said property is going to be transferred in favour of Sh. Rinkal Goyal S/o Sh. Darshan Kumar Goyal R/o B-42, Sector-50, Noida (U.P.) If any one has/one has any objection he/she may file his/her objection along with the sufficient proof in the Residential Plot Department of the Noida Authority within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.  
**Mr. Ravish Kumar**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
It is to inform to all concern that Mr. Pramod Kumar Shrivastava is the owner Land area measuring 90 Sq. Yds. out of Kharsa No. 676, situated at Village Roza Jalpaudh/Pargana and Telsal Dadrh, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar through Sale Deed dated 15.03.2005 in favour of Mr. Prasad Kumar S/o Mr. Anil Kumar in respect of land area measuring 90 Sq. Yds. out of Kharsa No. 676. (2) Original Sale Deed dated 18.03.2019 as doc. No. 5764 executed by Mr. Prasad Kumar S/o Mr. Anil Kumar in favour of Mrs. Bhatika Sarkar in respect of land area measuring 90 Sq. Yds. out of Kharsa No. 676. Application No.- 20240001017937, registered at Police Computer Centre, Technical Services HC, Lucknow on dated 29.12.2024. Anyone who finds the above mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager of Hero Fincorp Limited, Mohan Estate.  
Mr. Pramod Kumar Shrivastava is in the process of merging the said properties with Hero Fincorp Limited. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of publication of this notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07 day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said properties of the interests of court.  
If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07 days period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh- 201301; Landline No.: +910120-301683, e-mail: accounts@nvorth.in

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
**E-TENDER NOTICE**  
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender for the under noted work:-  

Name of Work with its Location	RMITIS (Roof Mounted Infrared Thermal Imaging System) for conducting monitoring and live line thermal scanning of 25KV AC OHE System	Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 48,75,697.66
2	Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 97,500/-	
3	E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	09.01.2025 (00:00 Hrs.) to 23.01.2025 (15:00 Hrs.)	
4	E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	23.01.2025 (15:00 Hrs.)	
5	Fund Allocation	07041032	
6	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www ireps.gov.in	

  
E-Tender No.: 43-TRD-NDLS-2024-25 Dated: 27.12.2024 3973/2024  
**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE**

**Indian Overseas Bank**  
**SONIPAT BRANCH**  
(Address : Gohana Road Opp. Om Petrol Pump, Sonipat (Haryana) Pin code-131001 Phone No. 0130-2200193 & Email id : iob2721@iob.in)  
**SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE (for immovable property) [Rule 8(1)]**  
Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the Indian Overseas Bank, SONIPAT BRANCH, Sonipat, under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(2) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 13/08/2024 calling upon the borrower Shri Praveen Kumar S/o Ramkishan House no. 312/29, Dev Nagar Gali No. 06 Dist. Sonipat Haryana-131001 and Smt. Geeta W/o Shri Praveen Kumar S/o Ramkishan House no. 312/29, Dev Nagar Gali No. 06 Dist. Sonipat Haryana-131001. Smt. Geeta W/o Parveen Kumar/Mortgagor, having residential address House no. 312/29, Dev Nagar Gali No. 06 Dist. Sonipat Haryana-131001, (hereinafter referred as 'borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors') to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 10,52,325.56 (Rupees Ten lakhs fifty two thousand three hundred twenty five and paise fifty six only) as on 13.08.2024 with further interest at contractual rates and rests, charges etc. till date of realization within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.  
(1) The Borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on this 28th day of December 2024.  
(2) The borrowers in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Indian Overseas Bank for an amount Rs. 10,52,325.56 (Rupees Ten lakhs fifty two thousand three hundred twenty five and paise fifty six only) as on 13.08.2024 with interest thereon at contractual rates & rests as agreed, charges etc., from the aforesaid date mentioned in the demand notice till date of payment less repayments, if any, made after issuance of Demand Notice. The dues payable as on the date of taking possession is Rs. 10,47,501.50 (Rupees Ten lakhs forty Seven thousand five hundred one and paise fifty only) as on 26.12.2024 payable with further interest at contractual rates & rests, charges etc., till date of payment.  
(3) The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section (8) of the Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to them, to redeem the secured assets.  
**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**  
Equitable mortgage of residential plot having Property Id 35-C-282-U-122 situated at Khatwani No. 166 Killa no. 6/16(15-16) with total land of 5K-16M, marla having share of 13/464' which works out to be measuring 96 Sq. Yds. i.e., situated at 4' sub internal street called Gali No. 06 near Sonipat Gas Agency/ Shiva Shiksha School Waka called Gali No. 06 within the revenue estate of Jamalpur khurd within the abadi of Dev Nagar, Sonapat and within the M.C. limit, Sonapat pin code 131001 standing in the name of Smt. Geeta w/o shri Praveen and same is bounded by East: House of Promilia West: House of Harshi & Deepak North: Hali Rasta South: Plot of Ram Kumar  
● Vehicle loan No. 272103452000131 availed in the name of Mr. Praveen Kumar and Geeta is also NPA with present outstanding of Rs. 3,32,411.94 (Three lakhs thirty two thousand four hundred eleven and paise ninety four) as on 24.12.2024 payable with further interest at contractual rates & rests, charges etc., till date of payment  
Dated: 26.12.2024  
Place: Sonipat  
**Sd/- Authorised Officer Indian Overseas Bank**

**NOTICE OF DISSOLUTION**  
Notice is hereby given that M/s Daffodils International, situated at 294, Lower ground Floor, Sant Nagar, East of Kailash, New Delhi-110065 was running under by its partners namely (1) Mr. Pankaj Mathur and (2) Mr. Abhishek Mathur as per Indian Partnership Act. The term of its existence until 26th December 2024, thereby dissolving the said firm on said date after been published in the newspaper adopted by one of its partner Mr. Pankaj Mathur for dissolution of firm at will.  
It is also made clear by way of this publication that one of the partner Mr. Pankaj Mathur of M/s Daffodils International will not be liable for any transaction already done with Mr. Abhishek Mathur or entered upon by him for exchange of goods or services which has been dealt in cash or any money/amount taken by him in his personal accounts from the general public, representing as partner of the firm, the other partner Mr. Pankaj Mathur and its firm M/s Daffodils International has no concerned nor is liable for any misdeeds done by Mr. Abhishek Mathur. Mr. Pankaj Mathur or his firm M/s Daffodils International will not be liable any further after publication of the aforesaid notice.  
It is also persistent to inform all that if any firm / individual / corporation deals with Mr. Abhishek Mathur in exchange of cash, goods or services, transactions will be solely liable for doing at their own risk, cost and consequences.  
This announcement serves as notice to all concerned and of the legal dissolution of the aforesaid firm.  
**S/d. PANKAJ MATHUR (PARTNER)**

**EXTENSION OF PERIODICITY OF SPECIAL TRAIN**  
It is notified for extension of rail passengers that Railways have decided to extend the periodicity of the run of Train No. 05577/05578 Saharsa Jn.-Anand Vihar T.-Saharsa Jn. Garib Rath Special as per details given below:-  

Train No.	From	To	Days of Run	Notified up to	Period of Extension
05577	Saharsa Jn.	Anand Vihar T.	Exp-Thu, Sat	31.12.24	01.01.25 to 28.02.25
05578	Anand Vihar T.	Saharsa Jn.	Exp-Sat, Mon	02.01.25	03.01.25 to 02.03.25

  
Note :- Rest of the instructions will hold good.  
For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of other stations enroute and composition etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTEs App.  
Please join us on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp  
**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
Your Convenience - Our Concern  
Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in  
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
**Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P.)**  
Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in  
**E-TENDER NOTICE**  
E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & https://etender.up.nic.in. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.  
**A) Short Term Fresh-Tender Work:**  

Sl. No.	Jobs No.	Name of the work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
1.	36/DGM/SM(WC-1)/2024-25	M/o Building (Renovation & Maintenance work of House No. 16 in Sector-14A), Noida.	33.44

  
The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 01.01.2025 up to 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 02.01.2025 at 11.00 AM.  
**B) Re-Tender Work:**  

Sl. No.	Jobs No.	Name of the work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
2.	21/DGM/SM(WC-1)/2024-25	M/o Building (Annual Maintenance Work in CAG Guest House, Police Control Room and Staff Quarter in Sector-14A and Sector-15A), Noida.	39.96

  
The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 01.01.2025 up to 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 02.01.2025 at 11.00 AM.  
महत्वपूर्ण सूचना-  
नवीन ओखला औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण के अधिसूचित क्षेत्र में शासन से स्वीकृत मास्टर प्लान एवं उत्तर प्रदेश औद्योगिक विकास अधिनियम, 1976 के विधेयक जॉइंटिंग या किसी भी प्रकार का अन्य निर्माण पूरी तरह अर्ध है। जनसामान्य को आगाह किया जाता है कि इस प्रकार की अवैध कॉलोनीयों एवं अवैध निर्मित भवनों में सूखण्डों/अपार्टमेंट/दुकान/गोलाऊन/कॉन्स्ट्रक्शन की खरीद-फरोख्त से पूर्णतः सचेत रहें तथा कॉलोनाइजर के सुझाव एवं भ्रामक विज्ञापनों से बचें। साथ ही नौएडा अधिसूचित क्षेत्र के हिण्डन एवं यमुना नदियों के डूब क्षेत्र (Flood Plain Zone) में अनधिकृत/अवैध प्लॉट एवं फर्म हाऊसों के कारोबार में सखिप्त भूमिकाधारकों के कार्र में न करें।  
**Dy. General Manager (Civil) NOIDA**  
**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA**  
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# UP unveils ambitious five year export policy to boost share to 7.5 per cent: Industry Minister Gupta

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh government is gearing up to unveil a five-year export policy to boost its share in the country's overall outward shipments to 7.5 per cent and help the state become a USD 1 trillion economy. The new export policy for 2025-30 will replace the existing five-year policy. The state government provides a host of incentives and hand-holds the exporters to push shipments from the state. Uttar Pradesh Minister for Industrial Development, Export Promotion, NRI, and Investment Promotion Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi' said the state government is working on the 2025-30 export policy, with a focus on enhancing export capabilities to promote overall development. "The new export policy is being



formulated with a target to increase the state's share from 4.71 per cent in 2023-24 to 7.5 per cent. This policy also aims at accelerating economic growth and job creation," Gupta said in an email interview. The focus on enhancing export

capabilities will propel Uttar Pradesh towards becoming a USD 1 trillion economy, driving revenue and fostering development, he added. "Since the state government has adopted export as well as investment-friendly policies, along with continuous

development of smooth logistics facilities in the state, hence this will boost the export from the state and contribute significantly to make the state a USD 1 trillion economy," Gupta noted. During the April-September period of the current financial year, Uttar Pradesh's share in the country's total exports was estimated at 4.89 per cent. The minister also informed that the state is already providing incentives to exporters under the Marketing Development Assistance, Gateway Port Scheme, and Air Freight Rationalisation plans. He further said that the upcoming Jewar Airport will enhance connectivity to exporters with overseas destinations. The airport will help in saving time and expenditure on freight charges. Gupta also said the one-district-

one-product scheme has played a pivotal role in creating employment and upskilling traditional artisans engaged in various traditional arts of different districts. The state government is providing training to upgrade the skills of artisans and toolkits to artisans to enable them to establish their own enterprises. Since the inception of the scheme, the government has trained 1,33,472 artisans across the state, Gupta said. The scheme was launched in January 2018 with the objective of promoting the traditional arts and crafts being practised in different districts by identifying district-specific products for all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh. India's goods and services exports may cross USD 800 billion in 2024-25. It was USD 778 billion in 2023-24.

# India Inc seek tax relief, fuel duty cut and job boosters in pre-budget meet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Representatives from industry bodies sought reduction in personal income tax rates to ensure higher disposable income in the hands of the middle class, reduction in excise duty on fuel, and measures to provide impetus to employment-intensive sectors in their customary pre-Budget meeting with the Finance Minister on Monday. Industry bodies also raised the issue of dumping of excess stock by China globally, including in India, and challenges posed to food security and inflation due to the "climate emergency", during the fifth pre-Budget consultation meeting. The 2025-26 Union Budget will be presented on February 1. Apart from the finance minister, the meeting was attended by finance secretary, secretary of DIPAM (Department of Investment and Public Asset Management), Secretaries of



the Department of Economic Affairs and the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India, among others. Speaking to the media after the meeting, CII President Sanjiv Puri said while the Indian economy is doing very well, globally there are a lot of challenges. "We are seeing dumping of a lot of products (by China) into various parts of the world, including India. We also have the issue of climate emergency, which, besides other things, also impacts food and nutrition, (food) security and inflation. In this context we have made several suggestions and ideas".

He said the CII has sought measures to provide impetus to areas that have large employment potential like garments, footwear, tourism, furniture, among others, apart from making suggestions for MSMEs and integrating India into global value chains. "From a perspective of boosting consumption, we have suggested that there be some relief provided to income tax up to a Rs 20 lakh on the marginal income tax rate so that it boosts consumption, there is more disposable income and in turn also leads to buoyancy in revenues.

# Adani to sell stake in food venture Adani Wilmar, raise over USD two Billion



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group on Monday announced its exit from FMCG joint venture Adani Wilmar by selling its entire stake to the Singaporean partner and in the open market for an estimated over USD 2 billion in a first major deal since the US bribery indictment. In a statement, Adani Enterprises Ltd - which held 43.94 per cent stake in Fortune brand cooking oil, wheat flour and other food product maker Adani Wilmar Ltd -- said it will sell 31.06 per cent stake to Wilmar International. About 13 per cent will be sold in the open market to meet minimum public shareholding requirements. Adani will sell a 31.06 per cent stake to Wilmar for Rs 12,314 crore (share price of no more than Rs 305 apiece). Adding the share sale through OFS, the total proceeds will exceed USD 2 billion (about Rs 17,100 crore). "With this, AEL (Adani Enterprises Limited) will fully exit Adani Wilmar Ltd," it said. "Adani's nominee directors will step down from the board of Adani Wilmar Ltd." The transaction is expected to conclude before March 31, 2025. Proceeds from the stake sale

will be used to turbocharge the growth of AEL in core infrastructure businesses. With this transaction, Adani is back with a bang, removing the liquidity perception overhang. This is the first major transaction post US federal prosecutors in November charge-sheeted founder chairman Gautam Adani and his associates over a USD 265 million bribery scheme to win renewable energy supply contracts. Adani group has denied the allegations as baseless and said it will seek legal recourse. "Adani Enterprises Ltd, Adani Commodities LLP (a wholly-owned subsidiary of AEL) and Lence Pte Ltd (a wholly-owned subsidiary of Wilmar International Ltd) have entered into an agreement on December 30, 2024, pursuant to which Lence will acquire all the paid-up equity shares of Adani Wilmar Ltd held by Adani Commodities as at the date of exercise of the call option or put option, as the case maybe, in respect of a maximum of 31.06 per cent of the existing paid up equity share capital of AWL," the statement said. In addition, "it has been agreed between the parties that AEL will divest a 13 per cent share in Adani Wilmar to achieve compliance with minimum public shareholding requirements," it said without giving details. Adani Wilmar Ltd is an equal joint venture between Adani Group and Singapore-based commodity trader Wilmar. The two partners currently own a combined 87.87 per cent of Adani Wilmar, far above the maximum permissible 75 per cent.

# Sebi to auction 23 properties of nine companies in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Monday said it has scheduled an auction of 23 properties belonging to nine firms, such as Tower Infotech and Vibgyor Group of Companies in February, aimed to recoup funds illicitly collected from investors. Additionally, GBC Industrial Corporation, Waris Group, Pincon Group, Kolkata Weir Industries Ltd (KWIL), Annex Infrastructure India, I-core Group and MPS Group were the other firms whose properties will also be auctioned. The process for the sale of the companies' assets has been initiated by the markets



watchdog following the orders of Calcutta High Court. The properties include plots, apartments and buildings located in West Bengal. It will be auctioned at a reserve price of Rs 55 crore, according to a notice issued by the Securities

and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). Justice Sailendra Prasad Talukdar has been appointed as the one-man committee for liquidating the assets of the firm and repaying the investors. The move is part of Sebi's effort to recover

investors' money. Adroit Technical Services has been engaged by Sebi to assist it in the sale of the properties. Of the 23 properties, seven each belong to Tower Infotech and Vibgyor Group, two each related to the Waris Group and GBC Industrial Corporation and the rest belong to MPS Group, I-Core Group, Annex Infrastructure India, KWIL and Pincon Group. Sebi on behalf of the committee is inviting bids for the sale of the properties from the bidders. The regulator said the auction will be auctioned online on February 6, 2025, from 11 am to 1 pm. The markets watchdog has

asked the bidders to make their own independent enquiries regarding the encumbrances, litigations, title of the properties put on auction and claims, before submitting their bid. These firms had mopped up money from investors without complying with regulatory norms. Vibgyor Allied Infrastructure had issued optionally fully convertible debentures in 2009 and raised Rs 61.76 crore. Tower Infotech had raised nearly Rs 46 crore through the issuance of non-convertible debentures and redeemable preference shares between 2005 and 2010.

# Sensex drops by 451 points, Nifty ends below 23,650

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex declined by nearly 451 points on Monday due to selling in heavyweight stocks HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries, weak global trends and unabated foreign fund outflows. In a volatile trading session, the 30-share BSE barometer dropped by 450.94 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 78,248.13. As many as 23 of its constituents closed lower while seven closed with gains. The barometer opened lower but recovered losses in the mid session to hit a high of 79,092.70. The index failed to hold onto gains in the second half due to selling in bluechips and tanked 621.94 points or 0.79 per cent to touch a low of 78,077.13. The NSE Nifty declined 168.50 points or 0.71 per cent to settle at 23,644.90 as 38 of its components fell and 11 closed higher. Among Sensex shares, Tata Motors fell the most by 2.24 per cent. Titan, Tata Steel, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, ICICI Bank, Maruti, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Infosys were among the laggards. Zomato, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers. "The market began the week on a volatile note, ending with a loss of over half a per cent. After a flat opening, the Nifty gained ground in the first half but faced selling pressure in heavyweight stocks across sectors,

# Prospects of economy expected to improve in 2025: RBI Governor

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Facing criticism from the government over the central bank prioritising inflation over growth, the new RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Monday said that prospects of the Indian economy are expected to improve on the back of high consumer and business confidence in 2025. "As we strive to preserve financial stability to support a higher growth path for the Indian economy, our focus remains steadfast on maintaining stability of financial institutions and, more broadly, systemic stability," Malhotra said in foreword to the Financial Stability Report. He further said that despite the global uncertainties Indian economy is expected to pick up pace in the second half of the current financial year. "Notwithstanding the



uncertainties shrouding the global macro-financial ethos as it unfolds, prospects for the Indian economy are expected to improve after the slowdown in the pace of economic activity in the first half of 2024-25. "Consumer and business confidence for the year ahead remain high and the investment scenario is brighter as corporations step into 2025 with robust balance sheets and high profitability," said Malhotra who took over as 26th Governor earlier this month. Flagging the issue of growth moderation in the first half, the Finance Ministry in its November Monthly Economic

Review had raised concerns that the possibility that structural factors may also have contributed to the slowdown in H1 should not be ruled out. India recorded a slowdown in GDP growth to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent for the second quarter ended September 2024. For the first half, the GDP growth stood at 6 per cent. Slowdown in growth and moderation in inflation are building case for RBI to slash policy rate in its upcoming Monetary Policy Committee meeting. Malhotra further said that financial sector regulators in India too are intensifying reforms and sharpening their surveillance against the backdrop of the soundness of the financial system bolstered by robust earnings, low levels of impaired assets and strong capital buffers, as this report highlights.

# Rupee falls four paise to close at ₹85.52 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee dropped 4 paise to 85.52 (provisional) against the US dollar in early trade on Monday, as dollar demand from importers, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the rupee witnessed heavy volatility on Friday as well on Monday amid significant dollar demand linked to the expiry of December currency futures and maturing positions in the outstanding forwards. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and witnessed an intra-day low of 85.59 and a high of 85.43 against the American currency. The local unit settled for the day at 85.52 (provisional), registering a fall of 4 paise over its previous close.



On Friday, the rupee registered the steepest fall in almost two years to hit its lifetime intra-day low of 85.80 before a likely central bank intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 21 paise lower at a record low of 85.48 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strength in the US dollar and month-end dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs).

# 'Silent firing' on a rise with rapid technological advancement: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With rapid technological advancement, silent firing - a strategy by companies to indirectly push employees to leave their roles - has picked up pace, with 10 per cent of employers preferring layoffs for redundant positions, a report said on Monday. The report by staffing solutions and HR services provider Genius Consultants said that silent firing is often intertwined with technological advancements, with employers adopting varied strategies to navigate the evolving workplace landscape. While 79 per cent of employers interviewed said they prioritise upskilling their current workforce to adapt to technological changes, 10 per cent prefer layoffs for redundant positions, the report said. While 6 per cent resort to assigning excessive workloads to underperforming employees as a subtle means of attrition, it added. The report by Genius Consultants is based on a survey that analysed feedback



from 1,223 employers and 1,069 employees, exploring 'silent firing's implications against the backdrop of rapid technological adoption and evolving workforce dynamics. According to the report, 39 per cent of employers anticipate complete reliance on advanced technologies to minimise manual intervention five years ahead, however, 31 per cent emphasised the importance of balancing technological growth with human resource development. Nearly half of the

respondents (48 per cent) opposed replacing human employees with AI, emphasising the importance of a human-centric approach to workforce management. On the other hand, 36 per cent of employers support the complete adoption of AI, reflecting a growing inclination toward automation and technological advancement, it stated. This split highlights the contrasting strategies organizations are considering as they navigate the balance between innovation and

human capital, added the report. Despite advancements, 52 per cent of employers believe manual intervention remains indispensable, underscoring the enduring importance of human contributions in the workplace, it said. Silent firing remains contentious, with 34 per cent rejecting it entirely, while 28 per cent use it frequently and 29 per cent occasionally, citing improved efficiency and professional growth opportunities as justifications, it added. Meanwhile, from the employees' perspective, the

rise of 'silent firing' and the implementation of advanced technologies have profoundly impacted their workplace experiences. When asked if they have faced sudden side-lining, exclusion, or isolation from critical projects and decision-making processes, 55 per cent of respondents confirmed that they have experienced this issue. A substantial 68 per cent of employees have experienced undue pressure from management, often citing AI and technology as benchmarks for performance, leading to workplace tension. Over 32 per cent believe their roles are becoming redundant due to technological advancements, causing delays in promotions or acknowledgement, and prompting resignation considerations, said the report. The report also found the impact of technology on employee retention, with 41 per cent of respondents admitting they are feeling compelled to quit their jobs due to automation replacing manual roles. While 52 per cent disagreed, indicating that their roles are unaffected or that they have

adapted to the technological changes. This data underscores the varied employee experiences in the face of automation, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities posed by the integration of advanced technologies in the workplace. Nearly 32 per cent of respondents have felt that their positions are becoming increasingly irrelevant due to the rising influence of artificial intelligence, and a reassuring 61 per cent have expressed confidence in the continued value and significance of their roles. "Silent firing is an emerging phenomenon that organisations must approach cautiously. While it may appear as a quick fix for managing underperformance, it risks undermining employee morale and trust. "Our survey underscores the importance of open communication, skill development, and empathy to foster a balanced workplace where both technology and human potential can coexist," Genius Consultants Chairman and Managing Director R P Yadav added.

## INBRIEF

### GNDU EXAMS POSTPONED, NOW ON JANUARY 12

**AMRITSAR:** Guru Nanak Dev University has announced that all annual and semester (theory) exams originally scheduled for Monday, December 30, have been postponed due to the Punjab shutdown.

### GNDU'S PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT LEADS MENTAL HEALTH OUTREACH PROGRAMS

**AMRITSAR:** The Department of Psychology at Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) is taking significant steps to address the growing mental health challenges in marginalized and underserved communities.



### LAW DEPARTMENT OF GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY SETS BENCHMARK IN LEGAL INTERNSHIPS

**AMRITSAR:** The Law Department of Guru Nanak Dev University has witnessed remarkable growth in its internship program over the past year, showcasing its dedication to providing students with practical legal exposure.

### GNDU PROFESSOR SUNIL KUMAR APPOINTED AS MEMBER OF BSF VIDWAT MANDAL

**AMRITSAR:** In recognition of exceptional scholarship and literary achievements, Professor Sunil Kumar, Head of the Hindi Department and Dean of the Language Faculty at Guru Nanak Dev University, has been nominated as a member of the Border Security Force (BSF) Vidwat Mandal for three years.





# Magnus Carlsen returns to World Blitz Championship after FIDE allows jeans

**AP ■ NEW YORK**  
Top-ranked chess player Magnus Carlsen is headed back to the World Blitz Championship on Monday after its governing body agreed to loosen a dress code that got him fined and denied a late-round game in another tournament for refusing to change out of jeans.

Lamenting the contretemps, International Chess Federation President Arkady Dvorkovich said in a statement Sunday that he'd let World Blitz Championship tournament officials consider allowing "appropriate jeans" with a jacket, and other "elegant minor deviations" from the dress code.

He said Carlsen's stand — which culminated in his quitting the tournament Friday — highlighted a need for more discussion "to ensure that our rules and their application reflect the evolving nature of chess as a global and accessible sport."

Carlsen, meanwhile, said in a video posted Sunday on social media that he would play — and wear jeans — in the World Blitz Championship when it begins Monday.

"I think the situation was badly mishandled on their side," the 34-



year-old Norwegian grandmaster said. But he added that he loves playing blitz — a fast-paced form of chess — and wanted fans to be able to watch, and encouraged by his discussions with the federation after Friday's showdown.

players to be comfortable, sure, but also relatively presentable."

The events began when Carlsen wore jeans and a sportcoat Friday to the Rapid World Championship, which is separate from but held in conjunction with the blitz event. The chess federation said Friday that longstanding rules prohibit jeans at those tournaments, and players are lodged nearby to make sartorial switch-ups easy if needed.

An official fined Carlsen \$200 and asked him to change pants, but he refused and wasn't paired for a ninth-round game, the federation said at the time. The organisation noted that another grandmaster, Ian Nepomniachtchi, was fined earlier in the day for wearing sports shoes, changed and continued to play.

Carlsen has said that he offered to wear something else the next day, but officials were unyielding. He said "it became a bit of a matter of principle," so he quit the rapid and blitz championships.

In the video posted Sunday, he questioned whether he had indeed broken a rule and said changing clothes would have needlessly interrupted his concentration between games. He called the punishment "unbelievably harsh."



## No Indian player among nominees for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year award

**PTI ■ DUBAI**  
No Indian player features among the nominees for the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year award which has Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu and New Zealand's Amelia Kerr, among others.

The other two players nominated for the honour are Australia's Annabel Sutherland and South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt.

"Sri Lanka's all-format captain has been producing the goods with the bat for a long time now for her country. Athapaththu is ranked among the top-10 players in the ICC Women's rankings for batters and all-rounders in ODIs as well as T20Is, proving her mettle with both bat and ball," said ICC in a release.

"A stellar year with over 1,000 runs across formats, picking up 30 wickets as well along the way has underlined her position as one of the most impactful players in women's cricket," it added.

Athapaththu made 458 runs in nine ODIs at 65.42 and claimed nine wickets while in 21 T20Is, she scored 720 runs and took 21 wickets.

Kerr has been nominated for her stellar performances, especially in New Zealand's title-winning campaign in the Women's T20 World Cup.

"Melie Kerr had a remarkable year, highlighted by leading New Zealand to their maiden Women's T20 World Cup title and setting a national record for the most Women's T20I wickets in a calendar year," the ICC said.

"Her crowning achievement came during the White Ferns' triumphant World Cup campaign, where she amassed 135 runs and claimed 15 wickets — a tournament record — culminating in their maiden Women's T20 World Cup crown."

Wolvaardt was short-listed following her highest run tally in ODIs as well as in the T20 World Cup.

"Laura Wolvaardt has been a force to reckon with for the Proteas, leading the team from the front as the all-format skipper as well as piling up runs when needed at the top of the batting order," the ICC said.

Wolvaardt scored 697 runs in 12 ODIs at 87.12 with a highest score of 184 not out, and made another 223 runs across three Tests with a highest score of 122. In nine T20Is, Wolvaardt made 673 runs at 39.58 with a highest score of 102.

Australia's Sutherland was rewarded for her knock of 210 against South Africa at Perth in the one-off Test in February. She also made 369 runs and took 13 wickets in 12 ODIs.

"The 23-year-old set new standards with a breakout year that places her among the best all-rounders in the world in the 50-over format," the ICC said.

"Sutherland became the first cricketer in women's ODI history to score back-to-back centuries while batting at No 5 or lower in the ODI series against New Zealand. Sutherland also became the second-youngest Australian to score three ODI centuries behind former captain Meg Lanning," it added.

## World Blitz Championship: Koneru Humpy eyeing a grand double

**PTI ■ NEW YORK**  
Having achieved the monumental feat of winning the World Rapid chess title for a second time, Indian stalwart Koneru Humpy would be eyeing a grand double when the FIDE World Blitz Championship commences here on Tuesday.

Humpy had on Sunday capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess champion.

The Indian had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia and, on Sunday, became only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title a



second time. At stake is not just the title but a chance to win another USD 60,000 (around Rs 50 lakhs) cheque as the Blitz championship carries the same prize money as Rapid.

The strong Indian contingent is geared up for the championship that will have 13 rounds in the 'Open' category and 11 in the women's section.

Another Indian, Dronavalli Harika is also a formidable force in Blitz, but the fans would be hoping for an improved performance from

R Vaishali and Divya Deshmukh, both of whom failed to impress in the Rapid event.

In the 'Open' section, Magnus Carlsen, who was disqualified from the Rapid event following a dress code saga, starts as the overwhelming favourite.

But the likes of India's R Praggnanandhaa and Arjun Erigaisi, France's Alireza Frouzja and Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattorov can all give the Norwegian a run for his money.

Erigaisi, who missed the opportunity to win the Rapid title which was won by 18 year-old Volodar Murzin of Russia, will have to fight it all over for a place in the 2026 Candidates tournament.



## West Bengal, Kerala clash in blockbuster Santosh Trophy final

**PTI ■ HYDERABAD**  
West Bengal and Kerala, two of India's finest teams with a rich history in the game, will clash in a blockbuster summit showdown of the National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy here on Tuesday.

The two states that have rightfully earned the tags of Indian football hubs are no strangers to the pinnacle of the national championships with West Bengal gearing up for a record 47th final and Kerala standing on the verge of playing their 16th summit clash.

Both sides have shown form befitting of their stature in the tournament, winning nine of their 10 matches, while drawing one each.

Historically, Bengal have dominated at this stage, winning the tournament 32 times, while Kerala are seven-time champions.

In recent years, however, Kerala have had the edge over their eastern rivals, winning the 2017-18 and the 2021-22 titles defeating West Bengal.

History, however, has no part to play in the final on New Year's Eve, believes Bengal head coach Sanjoy Sen.

"Perhaps reaching the (Santosh Trophy) final is an achievement for other states, but that is not the case for us. It means nothing to Bengal — Zero," he exclaimed.

"Unless we win the trophy, it all counts for nothing.

"Yes, we have won the tournament 32 times in the past, but the Santosh Trophy is a much bigger tournament now in terms of the number of states that participate in it. I do not intend to downplay past achievements, but I feel that it is more difficult to win it now," said Sen.

Sen's counterpart Biby Thomas Muttath echoed similar expectations from his home state.

"The Santosh Trophy is like a World Cup for us, back in Kerala. The minimum expectation is for us to reach the final, but of course, everyone wants a win," he said.

In the 10 matches so far, Kerala have scored 35 goals, while Bengal netted 27 times. The former have had a number of options for their goals, Naseeb Rahman (8), Muhammad Ajsal (9), and Sajesh E (5) leading the charts for the southern state.

But then, Kerala players are no strangers to their Bengal counterparts. There are half a dozen players in the current Kerala squad, including the semi-final hat-trick hero Muhammad Roshal PP, who ply their trade in the Kolkata CFL and are known faces in the Maidan circle.



## Prolific Lille striker Jonathan David considering new contract offer

**AP ■ LILLE**  
Jonathan David is considering a new contract from Lille and says his chances of staying at the French club are "50-50".

The 24-year-old Canada striker is enjoying his fifth season at Lille and tops the league's scoring charts with 11 goals from 15 games. He is out of contract at the end of June and has reportedly been offered a two-year contract.

"As the president (Olivier Létang) said several times, discussions are going on. We're talking but no decision has been reached," David told regional newspaper La Voix du Nord on Monday in an interview.

"The door is never closed. It's 50-50." David has netted 17 goals overall this season — including four in the Champions League and two in the qualifying rounds — to take his tally to 101 since joining in 2020.

He is one of the most sought-after strikers in Europe and Lille risks losing him for nothing if he does not sign a new deal.

## Norway Chess: Top woman player Ju Wenjun confirms participation

**PTI ■ STAVANGER**  
Women's world No.2 Ju Wenjun of China, No. 9 Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and No. 21 Sarasadat Khademalsharieh of Spain on Monday confirmed their participation in next year's Norway Chess Women, which also has India's R. Vaishali in the fray.

The event will be held from May 26 to June 6.

Vaishali, the elder sister of Grandmaster R. Praggnanandhaa and one of the rising stars in women's chess, had confirmed her participation in the prestigious tournament last month.

Wenjun is one of the most formidable figures in women's chess with a live rating of 2,563. She is the reigning four-time Women's World Rapid champion, a two-time World Rapid champion, and the reigning Norway Chess



Women champion. She is also only the fifth woman in history to achieve a rating above 2600, marking her place among the elite.

Muzychuk is a three-time world champion in fast chess. She clinched the Women's World Rapid Championship in 2014 and the Women's World Blitz Championship in

champion in her adopted country. She finished second in both the 2018 World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships, as well as the 2015-16 FIDE Women's Grand Prix.

The Norway tournament brings together the top male and female players in a distinctive six-player double round-robin format.

India's recently-crowned world champion D. Gukesh will take on Magnus Carlsen, the world's highest-rated player, in a highly-anticipated contest in the men's category.

In 2023, Gukesh finished third in Stavanger.

Besides Gukesh, Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi, who recently became the second Indian after the legendary Viswanathan Anand to reach the gold-standard ELO rating of 2800, will make his debut at the prestigious tournament.

## Paulo Fonseca fired by AC Milan

**AP ■ MILAN**  
Paulo Fonseca has been fired by AC Milan, with the club confirming the decision Monday morning after the Portuguese coach was informed following a 1-1 draw at home to Roma the previous night.

"Yes, it's true. I'm out," Fonseca told reporters when he lowered his car window as he left San Siro following Sunday's match. "That's life. ... I did everything I could."

Milan is expected to hire Sergio Conceicao, another Portuguese coach, as Fonseca's replacement. The Serie A club released a short statement confirming Fonseca's dismissal.

"AC Milan announces that Paulo Fonseca has been



relieved from his duties as head coach of the men's first team," it said. "The club extends its gratitude to Paulo for his great professionalism and wishes him the very best in his future endeavours."

Fonseca was hired in June and produced only 12 wins in 24 matches across all competitions. His last action

as Milan coach was to be sent off for dissent in the first half of Sunday's match.

Milan is eighth in Serie A, trailing leaders Atalanta and Napoli by 14 points — far worse than the second place result earned under Stefano Pioli last season. Pioli left the club at the end of the campaign after a near five-year stint that included the 2022 Serie A title.

Milan has fared better in the Champions League lately following four straight wins, including a 3-1 result at Real Madrid. The Rossoneri are in 12th place and on course to qualify for the knockout playoff round.

Fonseca was already under pressure early in the season after just one victory in his first five matches in charge but that eased following a derby victory over Inter Milan.

There were protests from fans before and during the match against Roma but the chants were mainly aimed at the club's American owners, with the supporters urging RedBird founder Gerry Cardinale to sell up.

## Naomi Osaka wins her 1st match of new season

**AP ■ WELLINGTON**  
Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka made a winning return to the court after an almost three month absence Monday in the first round of the ASB tennis classic in Auckland, undeterred by protests outside the stadium against her Israeli opponent.

Osaka beat qualifier Lina Glushko 6-4, 6-4 in a tight contest in her first match since October when a back injury at the China Open ended her 2024 season.

All the hallmarks of Osaka's game were present Monday: the powerful serve, forceful ground-strokes particularly from the forehand side and the aggression. She looked relaxed and comfortable on court with no sign of her recent injury.

Osaka had to deal with a swirling wind on center court and with delays in play caused by the chants of a small group of protesters which were clearly audible



within the stadium. There was a longer break as Osaka was poised to serve out the first set when Glushko had to leave the court for treatment to a hip injury.

"I had no idea what the score was most of the time," Osaka said. "I just kept trying to tell myself one point at a time and trying not to get discouraged. "Thankfully it came out in my favor in

the end."

Osaka was supported at courtside by her new coach Patrick Mouratoglou who previously had a long-term association with Serena Williams.

She broke Glushko in the third game of the first set and held comfortably to win 6-4.

The second set was tighter. Osaka broke Glushko in the third game but Glushko converted her only break point of the match to level at 2-2.

Glushko held to love in the seventh game to lead 4-3 but Osaka seemed to step up at that point, held with two aces for 4-4, broke for 5-4 and held serve to love to clinch the win.

Her serve was solid throughout. She sent down seven aces and won 74 percent of first serve points. Her first serve averaged around 180kmh (111mph) and her slice around 140kmh (87mph).

"I think she's a really amazing opponent. I've never played her before," Osaka said.



# Australia beat India by 184 runs in fourth Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India slumped to a demoralising 184-run loss to Australia in the fourth Test here on Monday with contemporary greats Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli failing to come good yet again, signalling that their walk towards the exit door is not too far. Chasing a near improbable target of 340, both Rohit (9 off 40 balls) and Kohli (5) failed to battle their technical frailties and mental cobwebs as India lost seven wickets for 34 runs in just 20.4 overs in the final session to be all out for 155 in 79.1 overs. Australian captain Pat Cummins (3/28 in 18 overs) was superb as usual and Scott Boland was also magnificent (3/39 in 16 overs) in his every spell. Nathan Lyon (2/37 in 20.1 overs) took advantage of variable bounce while Mitchell Starc (1/25 in 16 overs) got the prized scalp of Kohli. This was after an 88-run fourth-wicket stand between Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant. "Pretty disappointing. We wanted

to fight but we could not do it," a dejected Rohit said in the post-match presentation. "We tried everything but they fought hard. We did not grab our chances," he conceded. Australia now lead the series 2-1 and unless India draw level in Sydney, a third successive World Test Championship final could become a distant dream. Even to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, India would need to post a win. Save Jaiswal (84, 208 balls), whose controversial caught-behind in which the third umpire overruled technology to adjudge him out, none of the other batters performed well enough to save the team. "They batted well in the middle session. We knew that we had to get one breakthrough and anything can happen and that proved to be the case. "We had plenty of runs to play with, we had plenty of fielders with the helmet around," a beaming Cummins, who was also adjudged player of the match for his haul of



six wickets, said in the presentation ceremony. The art of saving Test matches has slowly become extinct but India would have depended on their two

senior-most players, who are also fighting to save their legacy and reputation built over nearly two decades. In case of Rishabh Pant, it was one

bad shot too many after a full session in which he concentrated. He got a rank long hop from Travis Head but after a 103-ball vigil, it all came to a naught.

Even Jaiswal's guts and grit couldn't prevent a once highly-rated, but currently a trifle over-rated, Indian batting line-up from implosion with over-the-hill seniors and young superstars unable to handle the pressure. The defeat could have severe repercussions as there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel for skipper Rohit. As for Kohli, despite all his white-ball exploits, the problems outside the off-stump will stick out like a sore thumb. For Rohit, his ultra-defensive approach in the opening slot, is causing India to stare down the barrel with alarming regularity. Rohit did all the hard work during the first hour before opposition skipper Cummins got his bunny for the 10th time in Test matches. Kohli could never control his urge of playing the cover drive again and was caught at first slip after Mitchell Starc pushed one across with the angle. Rahul was out without troubling the scorers after getting a second good ball in the game.

Rohit's decision to bat up the order backfired and it also tinkered with Rahul's mindset despite him being perfectly fine opening the innings. The captaincy was pedestrian as he let the game drift on occasions and there were lot of phases that led to India's defeat but none more telling than the final wicket partnership between Scott Boland and Nathan Lyon where the target went out of reach on Sunday. Save Jasprit Bumrah, who once again toiled manfully for 50 overs and took nine wickets, and find-of-the-series Nitish Reddy, who scored a gritty hundred, there are no positives to be taken from this defeat. The batting, save for the second innings in the opening Perth Test, has been absolutely below par and India won't be doing themselves any favours if they have walking wickets at the top of the order. The team is going through a tough transition and it is now time that their feisty head coach Gautam Gambhir shows some spark along with chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar.



## Seniors like Rohit, Kohli haven't really contributed: Gavaskar

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Monday lashed out at senior players such as Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for letting the team down and blamed the Indian top-order for losing the Boxing Day Test against Australia here. Set a target of 340 on the final day of the fourth Test, the Indian batters, with the exception of Yashasvi Jaiswal (84), faltered yet again to lose the match by 184 runs and trail 1-2 in the five-match series. "It all depends on the selectors. The contributions that were expected have not come. It is the top-order which has to contribute, if the top-order is not contributing, why blame the lower-order. "The seniors have not really made the contribution that they should have, all that they had to do was bat out today and live to fight another day in Sydney," Gavaskar told India Today. "It's just that the top-order didn't contribute and that is the reason India found itself in this position." While Gavaskar praised Jaiswal for his gritty knock, the batting great once again was not impressed by Rishabh Pant's shot selection, which opened the floodgates for Australia. Joining hands at 33 for 3, Jaiswal and Pant looked to have settled down, taking India to 121 in the post-lunch session, before a rash shot from Pant set the team back. "Yes, absolutely around tea time when Rishabh

Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said. "The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple of overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared 84 runs for the fourth wicket with Jaiswal, he hit it straight to Mitchell Marsh at in the deep in search of a six. "...The issue is you know there is this shot called sixer in cricket and which is like a drug. Once you hit a couple of sixes, then you think that's a real a high because once you hit the ball cleanly of the middle of the bat and it goes into the stands, there is no better feeling for a batter. Sixer is a different feeling and it's a drug, it gets into your system," Gavaskar said. "The difference between a boundary and a six is just two runs but the risk percentage is 100 per cent. Boundary is hit along the ground no risk at all, a six is attempted with the ball up in the air and if you don't time it, if it hits the toe of your bat, it can go up and you can be out caught."

## New Zealand beats Sri Lanka by 45 runs in second T20

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI

Sri Lanka again fell short in a Stough run chase as New Zealand won the second Twenty20 international by 45 runs Monday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. The tourists were edged by eight runs chasing 172-8 in the first match two days ago and again faltered late while chasing New Zealand's 186-5 on Monday. Sri Lanka was all out for 141 in 19.1 overs. "It's really important to finish the game, no matter how it started," Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said. "The way you finish is the most important thing. In the first game we were almost there to win and again we're disappointed." Once again, Jacob Duffy was New Zealand's key bowler, dismissing opener Pathum Nissanka for 37 and returning



to remove Kusal Perera for 48 when both batters looked well placed to steer Sri Lanka to victory. Nissanka made 96 in the first match in a 120-run opening partnership with Kusal Mendis before Duffy turned that match in New Zealand's favor when he took three wickets in four balls, including Mendis, to stifle the Sri Lanka chase. He took 4-15 Monday to once

again stand out as the difference between the teams. After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire.

Matt Henry took two wickets with consecutive balls in the 19th over before Zak Foulkes finished off the Sri Lanka innings with five balls remaining. New Zealand depended on a century partnership between Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell to post a competitive total in the first match. It produced a more balanced batting effort Monday to reach a testing total on a tricky pitch which sometimes skidded, sometimes held up and provided a batting challenge. A strong wind across the Bay Oval also made hitting to one side of the ground difficult and gave an edge to the bowlers. Tim Robinson made 41 from 34 balls at the top of the New Zealand innings, hitting three fours and two sixes to impart early momentum while Rachin Ravindra failed again and was out for 1.



## Mentally disturbing, we fell short in finding ways to win: Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma on Monday said the 184-run drubbing at the hands of Australia in the fourth Test here is "mentally disturbing", conceding that his team failed to fight in the match. India will now head to Sydney for the fifth and final Test trailing 1-2 in the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The series finale begins on January 3. "It is mentally disturbing when you can't do what you have come to do," Rohit, whose own poor form has been under the scanner, told reporters after the game. "It is pretty disappointing. There are ways to win games and we fell short in finding ways to win the game here. We wanted to fight till the end and unfortunately we couldn't do it," he said in the post-match presentation ceremony. Australia were struggling at 90 for six in their second innings with the overall lead yet to touch 200 on Sunday but managed to make it a 340-run target for the visitors. Rohit admitted his team could not exploit the favourable situation. "We had Australia 90 for 6. We know things can get tough, but we want to play tough cricket from hard situations. But we were not good enough. I went back to my room and thought about what else we could have done as a team," Rohit said. "But we threw everything we

had, they fought hard, especially that last-wicket partnership, which probably cost us the game there," he added. Rohit said the team wanted to have a go at the target despite its daunting nature. "We knew 340 wasn't going to be easy. We tried to set a platform and keep wickets in hand for the last two sessions, but they bowled perfectly as well. We wanted to go for the target, but we didn't set the platform from our side," he noted. The Mumbaier lauded Nitish Kumar Reddy for making a fine hundred during the first innings, and hoped the youngster will climb the ladder. "He's coming here for the first time, these conditions can get really tough, but he showed great character, solid technique as well. "He's got everything to be successful at this level, I hope he goes from strength to strength, and he's got all the backing from the team as well," he said. The 37-year-old also patted pacer Jasprit Bumrah for leading the Indian bowling attack almost singlehandedly. "Absolutely brilliant, We've been watching him for so many years now, coming here and getting the job done. He's not a statistical person. "He just wants to play for the country and do well for the team, but unfortunately he's not got a lot of support from the other side," he added.

## Jaiswal's caught-behind dismissal sparks controversy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's incontinent dismissal sparked a controversy on the final day of the fourth Test against Australia here on Monday, as third umpire Saikat Sharfuddoula ruled him out despite no edge being registered on the Snicko. Jaiswal, who was batting on 84, miscued a hook off pacer Pat Cummins' short-pitched, down the leg delivery, and the batter was initially given not out by on-field umpire Joel Wilson after Australia appealed for a caught-behind dismissal. However, upon review, third umpire Saikat adjudged that there was a deflection off Jaiswal's gloves/bat based on the visual evidence. Saikat overruled the Snicko, which showed no spike, leading to chants of "cheater, cheater" around the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Jaiswal was ousted after playing a solid 84 off 208 deliveries. At one stage, he seemed to steer India to a draw before the visitors lost wickets in clusters in their chase of 340, eventually going down by 184 runs.



The left-hander argued with the on-field umpires over the decision before walking back. "In my view the decision was out. The third umpire did make the correct decision in the end," Former ICC Elite Panel umpire Simon Taufel told Channel 7. "With the technology protocols, we do have a hierarchy of redundancy and when the umpire sees a clear deflection off the bat there is no need to go any further and use any other form of

technology to prove the case. "The clear deflection is conclusive evidence. In this particular case what we have seen from the third umpire, is they've used a secondary form of technology, which for whatever reason hasn't shown the same conclusive evidence of audio to back up the clear deflection. "In the end the third umpire did the right thing and went back to the clear deflection and overturned the umpire field. So, in my view correct decision made," he added. This incident follows a similar controversy in the opening Test in Perth, where opener KL Rahul's dismissal sparked a debate. After on-field umpire Richard Kettleborough had ruled in Rahul's favour following Australia's appeal, the home team used DRS to challenge the decision. Third umpire Richard Illingworth had overturned the call despite not having the benefit of a split-screen view which would have given him a clearer picture of whether the Mitchell Starc delivery actually grazed the bat or the snicko responded to a hit on the pads.

## India's peerless fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah nominated for ICC Cricketer of the Year award

PTI ■ DUBAI

Operating at a level rarely seen in the game before, India's peerless fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah was on Monday nominated for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year award and also featured in the list for the best player in the Test format. Bumrah, who has left the Australian batters scrambling for survival with his incredible display of fast bowling in the ongoing five-match series Down Under, has been nominated for the top award, named after legendary West Indies all-rounder Sir Garfield Sobers, alongside England's prolific duo of Joe Root and Harry Brook, with swashbuckling

Australian batter Travis Head completing the list. Besides Bumrah, who has been at the top of his game throughout 2024, Root, Brook and Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis featured in the list for the ICC Test Cricketer of the Year award. Bumrah has been the best bowler in Test cricket in 2024 with 71 wickets from 13 matches at an average of 14.92 and a strike rate of 30.16, the best figures for any bowler. The right-arm pacer has also been the top bowler in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 30 wickets in a mere four Tests. "Having returned to the Test arena following his recovery from a recurring back injury in 2023, Bumrah dominated

the bowling charts in 2024. Featuring across 13 Tests in the calendar year, Bumrah delivered his best-ever annual tally — 71 wickets — finishing the year with more Test wickets than any of his counterparts," the ICC said on its website. "Be it the pace-conducive conditions in South Africa and Australia, or tougher conditions for quicks at home, Bumrah was equally impressive through the year. However, it was on India's tour of Australia that the pace spearhead produced his magnum opus," it added. The ICC rated Bumrah's match-defining spells at Perth, to guide India to a 295-run win, among his most memorable performances



along with his dominating show in T20 World Cup. "Bumrah nabbed 15 wickets from eight outings —

including a couple in the final against South Africa — as India went unbeaten at the 2024 T20 World Cup," the

ICC said. Head was nominated after finishing as the leading run-scorer of the T20 World Cup and being at the forefront of Australian batting in Tests. "Typifying an aggressive brand of batting, the southpaw brandished runs at a brisk rate in the shortest format, and finished among the leading run-getters at ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024. In the Test arena, Head was vital to Australia's push for defending their ICC World Test Championship title," the ICC said. England mainstay Root has been the most dominant batter in the year, amassing 1,556 runs from 17 Tests at 55.57. The 34-year-old crossed the 1,000-run mark in

a calendar year for the fifth time in his career while scoring six tons and five fifties. The game's global governing body said, "Across 17 Tests, Joe Root compiled his second-best annual run-tally in Tests — second only to his 1,708 runs from 2021. It was also the fifth instance of Root scoring over 1,000 Test runs in a calendar year." "With six Test hundreds to go alongside five half-centuries, Root was a consistent performer for England — both home and away. His impressive run with the bat saw Root amass joint-fifth highest tons in Tests (36) alongside Rahul Dravid," it added. The ICC recalled Root's

career-best 262 against Pakistan at Multan, also his sixth double century in Tests, and termed it one of his best efforts. Root's compatriot Brook is also in the list of four shortlisted players after scoring 1,100 runs from 12 Tests at 55.00 with four centuries and three fifties. Brook is fourth in the list of highest run-scorers in 2024 behind table-topper Root, India's Yashasvi Jaiswal (1,478 runs at 54.74) and England's Ben Duckett (1,149 runs at 37.06). "A quickbearer of England's quickfire brand of batting, Harry Brook emerged as a breakthrough performer in the longest format," the ICC said.