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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Plunging into instability

France's political instability and economic crisis deepens as Prime Minister Michel Barnier ousted in a rare no-confidence vote

In a dramatic turn of events, French Prime Minister Michel Barnier was ousted in a no-confidence vote on December 5, 2024, marking a rare political upheaval in France's post-war history. The motion, which garnered 331 votes, united far-right and left-wing lawmakers against Barnier's government, plunging France into political instability at a critical juncture. At the core of the crisis lies the contentious 2025 budget. Facing a massive budget deficit, Barnier's government proposed a budget aimed at saving Euro 60 billion. The proposal included austerity measures that sparked widespread discontent across the political spectrum. Barnier's decision to bypass parliamentary approval for parts of the budget using special constitutional powers was a key trigger for his removal. Interestingly, both the Left and the Right united to oppose the budget. By forcing the no-confidence vote, opposition lawmakers saw an opportunity to challenge a government struggling to unite a fragmented parliament. The ouster is a significant blow to President Emmanuel Macron, who now faces daunting challenges in appointing a successor capable of navigating a polarised parliament.



Macron's leadership has been weakened, and his coalition has failed to maintain a majority, leaving his administration vulnerable to opposition maneuvers. France's political landscape is now marked by deep uncertainty. The immediate challenge is ensuring fiscal continuity, as the lack of an approved 2025 budget could further erode investor confidence. Right now Macron has limited options. Macron may try to quickly install a new leader, aiming for stability before symbolic events like the reopening of the Notre-Dame Cathedral.

However, finding someone who can secure cross-party support is a tall order. If the situation gets worse Macron could rely on emergency measures to extend the 2024 budget provisions or pass the 2025 budget by decree. However, such actions would carry significant political costs and might deepen the crisis. The turmoil comes at a precarious time for France and the European Union. With Germany grappling with its coalition government's collapse and the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, Europe's political stability is increasingly in question. France, as the EU's second-largest economy, plays a critical role in the bloc's cohesion. Domestically, the crisis is a test of resilience for Marine Le Pen, whose National Rally party supported the no-confidence motion. While Le Pen seeks to position her party as a stable alternative to Macron's government, prolonged instability could expose vulnerabilities in her leadership. France faces a soaring budget deficit, high inflation, and growing public dissatisfaction over austerity measures. The fragmented parliament reflects a divided electorate, complicating governance and increasing the likelihood of legislative deadlock. The road ahead requires deft political maneuvering to restore stability and address the systemic challenges that threaten France's economic and social fabric.

### PICTALK



Tourists on an elephant safari at the Kaziranga National Park, in Golaghat

# India's maritime legacy: Lessons from history



ANOOP SHARMA

Revisiting India's maritime legacy can drive advancements in naval strength, trade security and regional cooperation, paving the way for a strong maritime future

India has a rich maritime history dating back to the Indus Valley civilisation. People of ancient Indian empires such as Mauryas and Cholas were active seafarers who undertook long and arduous voyages for trade, cultural, religious and political causes. Various regional powers and rulers such as Marathas, Marakkars and even Mughals tried to contest the ascendancy of European naval supremacy in Indian waters. The present-day Indian Navy was born out of the Royal Indian Navy in 1947, with already meagre assets divided between India and Pakistan. As a result, the Indian Navy was initially a coastal force responsible for coastal defence and protection of maritime trade. The Indian Navy proved its mettle during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971.

The decisive and bold actions by the Navy in the 1971 war made the nation realise the potential of the silent, yet dynamic and effective element of the comprehensive national power. Commencing with the international humanitarian and disaster relief operations in the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami, the Indian Navy has significantly stepped up its operational tempo. The recent successes of the Indian Navy in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden protecting mariners of various nationalities, including Pakistanis, have been internationally appreciated. Indian Navy ships have evacuated personnel of the Indian diaspora and citizens of friendly foreign countries from conflict areas such as Lebanon (2006) and Yemen (2015).

**Ancient Indian Maritime Culture** As India strives for its rightful position on the global stage, we need to revive and study the historical and indigenous Indian maritime strategic thought. Our scriptures, treatises and literature reference the rich Indian maritime strategic culture. Other powers that arose in the Indian sub-continent such as Satavahanas, Pallavas, Pandyas, Cholas and many others continued the rich maritime traditions of the Indian civilisation well past the decline of the mighty



Mauryan empire. The adoption of a new naval ensign inspired by the spirit of Shivaji's maritime endeavours is a step in this direction that needs to be ingrained in the ethos of all maritime and naval endeavours of the nation.

**Shivaji's Maritime Endeavours:** The Marathas were the only Indian power between the 17th to early 19th centuries who successfully challenged the growing European influence in Indian waters. Shivaji, his son Sambhaji Maharaj and their able Admirals such as Mayank Bhandari, Daut Khan, Sidhoji Gujar and legendary Kanhoji Angre raised and maintained a strong Navy of over 5000 personnel comprising over 300 vessels at its peak. Noted historian Jadunath Sarkar acknowledges that "Nothing proves Shivaji's genius as a born statesman more clearly than his creation of a navy and naval bases". The Maratha naval prowess was further consolidated under Maratha Admiral Kanhoji Angre from 1699 onwards. He effectively challenged the British maritime power on the West coast from his base at Vijaydurg in Ratnagiri. His tactics of attacking the

OTHER POWERS THAT AROSE IN THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT SUCH AS SATAVAHANAS, PALLAVAS, PANDYAS, CHOLAS AND MANY OTHERS CONTINUED THE RICH MARITIME TRADITIONS OF THE INDIAN CIVILISATION WELL PAST THE DECLINE OF THE MIGHTY MAURYAN EMPIRE

deep draught British ships with shallow water crafts, utilising the shelter of shallow natural harbour and fortress with mounted heavy guns were akin to typical sea denial and littoral warfare operations practised by modern navies. Such was the Maratha naval supremacy that even a combined Anglo-Portuguese assault on Kolaba island of Mumbai in 1772 failed to dislodge the Marathas. Strategic Maritime Culture of Cholas The earliest mention of Chola's naval prowess dating back to Roman records of the 1st century AD highlights the presence of a flourishing port at Kaveripattanam and the King's fleet escorting merchant ships into the harbour. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mentions the voyage of the early Chola ship 'Colandia' from Kaveripattanam to islands in the Pacific Ocean. The maritime power of Cholas reached its peak between the 9th and 10th centuries during which the Cholas developed a strong Navy with Blue Water capabilities and established robust trade links with China and South East Asia. The seafarers of the Chola empire had exceptional navigational skills and, an understanding of the seas, monsoons, winds and

currents. They were conversant with the use of a 32-point Arab-Tamil wind compass and as many as 56 stars in the Northern Hemisphere for navigation. Despite the lack of a rudder and magnetic compass, the Cholas seafarers could traverse the distance between India and Southeast Asia in twelve to fifteen days, indicative of their Blue Water capability. The maritime endeavours of Cholas provide valuable insights for stakeholders of the contemporary Indian maritime strategy. The Indian maritime outlook for the Indian Ocean Region that has evolved from the 'Look East' to 'Act East' and the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) can draw inspiration from India's maritime legacy. Initiatives like anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, HADR missions, Sagarmala and Port Led Development, SAGAR, Atma Nirbharta and Make in India etc. have common threads with the maritime practices of Cholas. (The views expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect the position of the Indian Navy or the Pioneer. The writer is currently serving as Directing Staff at Defence Services Staff College, Wellington)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SOUTH KOREA REJECTS MARTIAL LAW

Madam — South Korea escaped the martial law imposed by President Yoon Suk Yeol on Tuesday night, within just 6 hours, for the first time since 1980, then I will not give the credit for this to the people who had gathered outside the Parliament building late at night, nor to the 190 MPs who overturned the President's crazy decision in just a few hours. The entire credit goes only to the South Korean army, who quietly watched this spectacle from a distance and did not interfere in any way. If the army wanted, it could have followed the President's orders and fired on the crowd of common people and also arrested the MPs who had reached the Parliament building. South Korea is one of the most developed and industrialised countries in the world. South Korea's economy is the 12th largest in the world and the fourth largest in Asia. No one is able to understand this decision of the President despite there being no unrest of any kind. Experts are even saying that President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife Kim Kyeon-hee must have taken such a step due to corruption charges against them. Now they will have to step down from their post themselves, or else they will be removed by bringing an impeachment motion against them in the Parliament. Just removing them will not work, but they should be put in jail. Since the founding of South Korea in 1948, several presidents have declared a military emergency. The most recent and perhaps the most infamous-occurred in 1979 after the assassination of President Park Chung-hee, a former general who had occasionally used martial law to crack down on political protests and opposition since seizing power in 1961.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

### LAX VIP SECURITY IN PUNJAB

Madam— The recent brazen assassination attempt on former Punjab CM Sukhbir Singh Badal at the Golden Temple underscores a disturbing breach in security that raises serious concerns about the state's law

## Workplace woes for women



It is sad but true that the workplace can become a problem for young working women. Though most places are safe, there are a few exceptions. India has seen over 400 cases of sexual harassment at work every year since 2018, with an average of 445 cases being reported annually, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. Over 419 cases,

or about 35 per month, were reported in the country in 2023. There could be more unreported ones. That year, Himachal Pradesh recorded the highest number of sexual harassment cases at the workplace (97), followed by Kerala (83), Maharashtra (46), and Karnataka (43).

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 (PoSH Act), was enacted to safeguard women and provide mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment. In 2023, companies reported 1,160 sexual harassment complaints, the highest number in the past decade. However, only slightly more than half of these cases were resolved, according to data from the Centre for Economic Data and Analysis, Ashoka University. On average, 49 sexual harassment cases were reported every day in 2022.

Jayanthy Subramaniam | Mumbai

### CURBING CUSTODIAL CRIMES

Madam — Two recent judgements-one from the Delhi High Court and the other from a special court in Bengaluru-convicting policemen for custodial torture and death of the accused have sent a strong message on putting in place a robust mechanism to end the scourge once and for all. 687 persons died in police custody between April 1, 2018, and March 31, 2023, a damning indictment of the police.

Generally, custodial deaths go unreported but for vigilante organisations and proactive families that have a keen nose for suspecting foul play. The Supreme Court guidelines in all cases of arrest or detention are clear-cut. During custodial detentions, mandatory documentation and presence of legal counsel are compulsory. Additionally, every police station should have CCTV cameras installed in strategic points.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

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## From chaos to comfort: Reflecting on Delhi's transit transformation

Once reliant on rickety DTC buses plagued by poor service, Delhi now boasts a state-of-the-art metro network, revolutionising travel and making commuting a breeze

Can you drop me at the Dhaulakuan Metro Station in your car? I must catch the 1800 hrs train from there!, requested my colleague, Madhu Jasrai, as we were leaving the office in the Bhikaji Cama Place complex. "Sure, why not!!" I replied nonchalantly. "I have some work on the other side of town, and it is prudent to travel by the metro, instead of taking risks, and getting gridlocked in the peak traffic" she explained. I could not have agreed more. After she got off at Dhaulakuan, I resumed my journey towards Dwarka, and instinctively, my mind, always in a mad rush, raced back in time, to the days when Delhi didn't have a mass transit system. When we, the people of Delhi, had to depend entirely on the rickety, black smoke-spewing Yellow-Green DTC buses which operated at the base level of punctuality, hygiene, customer service and safety. So much so, that the monster red buses earned the well-deserved sobriquet of being a 'killer line', due to the number of fatal accidents in which they were involved. Mercifully, for a long time, my



exposure to this horrible service was limited, as I had the privilege of travelling on the school bus. Although the situation changed when I moved to college, and then university, there remained a saving grace, the University Special, which, with a monthly all-route student pass for a measly Rs 12.50 was the lifeline of students. But, despite these safeguards, it was difficult to remain isolated from the scary DTC, where the drivers behaved as if they owned Delhi roads as if it were a grand prix track. And the less said about the frequency & punctuality of the service, the better it is, as quite often, one had to wait for hours on end before an overcrowded bus appeared on the horizon, heaving like a fatigued tortoise. Expectedly, even before it came to a halt, a virtual

stampede ensued. In the melee, there was an exchange of choicest Punjabi abuses, fisticuffs, an occasional physical altercation, lucrative business for pickpockets and chain snatchers, and worst of all, a field day for eve-teasers. It was while travelling on these buses that Delhi denizens earned most of their characteristics- of being brawny, insensitive to women and disorderly. During this hullabaloo, the role of the crew was unpredictable. Sometimes they preferred to be mute spectators-watching over the fracas with the serenity of a smiling Buddha. At other times, they were grumpy, with a short fuse, and embroiled in heated arguments with harassed commuters, with hard-to-imagine ferocity. Nevertheless, once the confusion sorted, as if by divine intervention, and there was no space for more passengers-as every nook and cranny, including the windows, footrests and the rickety bars at the rear of the bus had been gobbled-the driver pressed the accelerator, to bring the bus into painful motion. Hereon, the law of the jungle took over, as rules

were flouted with impunity, without fear of the law-seats reserved for women, the elderly and the physically challenged, hardly, if ever, went to those for whom these had been earmarked. Signs of 'no smoking', 'no tobacco', 'no litter' and 'no spitting' were ignored callously, without an iota of deterrence. Hygiene, well what is that? At the end of this mayhem, those who missed boarding the bus had to wait, patiently, for their next attempt. And the wheel started moving in the same pattern, once more. This long reverie concluded when I reached home and parked the car in its slot. As I walked towards my house, I thanked the stars (not any politician or bureaucrat) for the winds of change that have blown across the face of my city, transforming it in three decades, heralding the era when state-of-the-art Metro crisscrossed Delhi like an octopus spreading its tentacles, when radio cabs whizz around, when CNG & electric buses is a common sight. Delhi's public transport system has indeed come of age. (The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)



APS MALHOTRA



## FIRST COLUMN

### SURVIVING THE TECH-DRIVEN ERA

Amid rapid technological obsolescence, the need for reinvention has never been more critical



RAVI VALLURI

It would be worthwhile to examine how organisations are structured and articulated. In the long haul organisations blessed with individuals willing to experiment, innovate and embrace technology will be the ones that survive. At the pace that technology with its variants is fashioning itself, numerous applications unravelling virtually by the minute, and the level of obsolescence and attrition of equipment is becoming extraordinarily high. In such a scenario, humans and organisations will be subsumed by various products and their variants. The human mind can no longer remain in the typewriter mode. The garden of Organisational Theory and Behaviour is dotted with eminent scholars. Three pioneers, Adam Smith, Charles Babbage and Robert Owen provided the ballast and the basic groundwork.

Adam Smith advanced the argument that countries and organisations would profit by adopting the tenets of division of labour, what is now termed as specialisation. Charles Babbage in his seminal work postulated: Through the division of labour, the time required for learning a job or skill gets drastically reduced. Right at the stage of infancy wastage of material gets minimised and diminishes. The mind is propelled to take up serious tasks upon attaining superior skills. Way back in 1789, Robert Owen at 18 went on to acquire a factory. He was a utopian, way ahead of his times. In 1825, he promulgated regulated working hours, child labour laws, public education and business involvement in various community projects – a precursor to CSR.



In today's wired world, individuals work from their dwellings. Places with the latest technology and gizmos at their disposal. Over the last decade, the entire paradigm of organisational behaviour has metamorphosed. Technology stares at organisations with peering eyes, the complexity and dynamics of structures having undergone a complete metamorphosis. Let us look at the Indian Railways. There was a time when the operating and manufacturing departments held sway in the decision-making process. Today, it is the technical departments that are the game changers. The concept of fixed work hours is history. The workforce must be alert 24x7. Thus, employees need to brush up on their skill sets to brace for the challenges of the virtual world. Let us examine the model of direct teaching through online classes – one-on-one, between the teacher and the tutee. The very paradigm may affect teaching techniques in schools and universities. Similarly, qualified doctors instruct their colleagues through Skype or other means during complex surgeries. In such a scenario, scores of organisational structures, government or those in the private sector must adapt radically in order to survive.

The workforce must continuously upgrade their skill set or face extinction. Perhaps emotions of warmth may be lost in the maze of technological evolution. The philosophy of an organisation, its goals and objectives and the behavioural pattern between the structure and the workforce have been stranded in a traffic jam of the kind one encounters in major cities of India like Gurugram. Stephen Hawking has in a rather depressing prognosis, predicted that life would be extinct on this planet on four grounds – nukes, global warming, man-made viruses or robots. Thus, the human mind should re-invent itself and current organisational behaviour and theories or prepare a blueprint to discover a sister planet to inhabit. Aeons ago, Aristotle wrote, "We are what we repeatedly do." This paradigm will have to change for organisations to survive.

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

# South Korea faces its gravest political crisis



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Yoon's actions threaten the democratic foundations painstakingly built over decades, echoing a legacy of authoritarianism that South Korea has fought to overcome



President Yoon Suk-yeol has plunged South Korea into a political crisis that risks echoing the darkest chapters of the nation's history. As his administration teeters on the edge of a dramatic shift, Yoon has turned to martial law, invoking emergency powers in a desperate gambit to silence political opposition and maintain control.

The implications of his actions are profound, not just for his presidency, but for South Korea's ongoing struggle with its totalitarian past, its relationship with foreign powers, and its own identity as a modern democracy. South Koreans fought so hard to build a democratic system. Under South Korea's Constitution, the president has the authority to declare martial law in the face of military threats or a national emergency. However, the reasons Yoon provided for his declaration—opposition-driven impeachment efforts, budgetary clashes, and an increasingly fractured political spectrum—hardly constitute a national crisis of the magnitude that would justify such a drastic measure.

The events surrounding Yoon's attempt to invoke emergency powers are not isolated; they represent the continuation of a deeply ingrained political pattern, where martial law is not only a tool of governance but a reminder of a nation's struggle between democracy and repression.

The debate surrounding Yoon's leadership has drawn comparisons to previous impeachments in South Korea, particularly those of Roh Moo-hyun and Park Geun-hye. Roh, in 2004, faced impeachment over election law violations, though the Constitutional Court reinstated him. Less than a decade later, Park was ousted through impeachment over a corruption scandal.

Yoon, while not yet facing the same fate, is set to have his impeachment voted on today following his controversial declaration of martial law, which lasted only six hours and was rejected by lawmakers



THE IMPLICATIONS OF HIS ACTIONS ARE PROFOUND, NOT JUST FOR HIS PRESIDENCY, BUT FOR SOUTH KOREA'S ONGOING STRUGGLE WITH ITS TOTALITARIAN PAST, ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH FOREIGN POWERS, AND ITS OWN IDENTITY AS A MODERN DEMOCRACY

ers and the public. Whether or not he survives, South Korea remains trapped in a cycle of political crises, where democratic ideals clash with despotic impulses, reflecting a historical legacy that has shaped the nation for over a century.

To understand the scope of South Korea's political turmoil, one must look at the country's history with martial law—a tool that has long been used by political elites to stifle dissent and assert control.

South Korea's 20th century is defined by foreign intervention, division, and military rule. Following Japan's brutal annexation of Korea in 1910, martial law became a key instrument of colonial repression, aimed at quelling any resistance to Japanese imperial rule. The atrocities of this period, from forced labour to the sexual enslavement of women, left deep scars on the Korean psyche.

It was a time when the very concept of Korean autonomy seemed impossible, as external powers sought to mould the country to fit their interests. The end of Japanese rule in 1945, after World War II, did not herald peace for the Korean Peninsula. Instead, Korea was divided into two zones of occupation: the Soviet-controlled North and the American-controlled South.

The subsequent Korean War (1950-1953) left the country in ruins, its political and social fabric torn apart by the conflict. In the aftermath, South Korea was deeply reliant on American military protection, a dependency that would come to define the country's geopolitical position during the Cold War. But South Korea's reliance on foreign power

came at a cost. The U.S., though a key ally, often dictated the direction of South Korean politics, using its military presence to enforce stability while limiting the country's true political autonomy. By 1953, when the armistice was signed, the U.S. had established a major military presence in South Korea, which would grow over the coming decades.

This military dominance, coupled with South Korea's internal political instability, created fertile ground for martial law to flourish as a means of maintaining control. One of the most infamous instances of martial law came in 1961 when General Park Chung-hee seized power in a military coup. Park's regime, which lasted for over a decade, was characterised by authoritarian rule, but also rapid industrialisation, transforming South Korea into one of Asia's economic powerhouses. His government used martial law to suppress political opposition and silence dissent, paving the way for further military interventions in South Korea's political life.

Even after Park's assassination in 1979, his successors continued to rely on dictatorial measures to control the populace, with the 1980 Gwangju Uprising standing as a stark reminder of the brutality of military rule. It was only after the uprisings of 1987, following widespread protests, that South Korea began its transition to a more democratic system—though martial law remained an ever-present force in the background, a reminder of the fragility of its democratic institutions. The current political crisis, however, is not just about Yoon's leadership or the fractured state of

South Korea's political structure. It is also a reflection of the country's broader struggle with its geopolitical position. As the U.S. continues to view South Korea as a critical ally in its efforts to counter China's rise, the country's internal divisions risk undermining its role as a stable partner in the region. The growing U.S. military presence over the decades, with South Korea becoming home to the largest U.S. military base in a foreign country—Camp Humphreys—has been a key feature of this relationship. The presence of 28,500 U.S. troops, the THAAD missile defence system, and the constant military drills aimed at countering the threat from North Korea and China, have turned South Korea into a crucial outpost for American interests in East Asia.

In this context, the political instability surrounding President Yoon and his administration is more than just an internal affair—it is a matter of global significance. The U.S. cannot afford to let South Korea's internal divisions spiral out of control, especially as tensions with North Korea and China continue to escalate. If South Korea cannot reconcile its internal political fractures, it risks becoming an unreliable ally in the eyes of its most important partner. This would have significant consequences, not just for South Korea, but for the broader geopolitical ramifications of NATO's eastward expansion and the "Pivot to Asia" strategy coined by former President Barack Obama, which continues to haunt Asian countries.

*(The writer is a journalist and author. Views expressed are personal)*

# Hybrid model secures ICC Champions Trophy hosting rights

## Pakistan's government approves a hybrid hosting model proposed by India, ensuring its role in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025

A pragmatic and groundbreaking decision has emerged from Pakistan's government corridors, approving its cricket board's acceptance of India's proposed hybrid model for hosting ICC events. This strategic approach, which includes matches at neutral venues such as the UAE, is a lifeline for Pakistan cricket. It ensures the preservation of Pakistan's hosting rights for the prestigious ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled from February 19 to March 9, 2025. Ultimately, cricket itself emerges as the ultimate winner. Millions of cricket enthusiasts across India and Pakistan are celebrating the International Cricket Council's (ICC) successful mediation. This reso-



K S TOMAR

lution underscores the power of sports to bridge divides. The ICC had earlier warned of revoking Pakistan's hosting rights if it rejected the hybrid model. The enduring passion of fans-united by their love for cricket—remains unfazed by territorial boundaries. Matches between India and Pakistan, steeped in rivalry and emotion, transcend sports and become spectacles of patriotism and fervour.

In a parallel development, Jay Shah has been elected as the new ICC chief, marking a pivotal moment in global cricket governance. Shah's leadership promises transformative opportunities for the ICC, leveraging his vast experience as chairman of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the world's wealthiest cricket body. His election sets the stage for significant milestones, particularly in organising high-profile tournaments like the Champions Trophy. For the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), this decision was a calculated move to avert potential isolation. Rejecting India's terms could have deprived Pakistan of the opportunity to showcase its hosting capabilities, particu-

larly given India's security concerns. The hybrid model, which splits matches between Pakistan and the UAE, provides a balanced solution. Pakistan retains its hosting rights while addressing India's apprehensions, thus averting reputational and financial losses. Accepting the hybrid model aligns with Pakistan's long-term vision for cricket. It ensures that Pakistan remains a credible host for international events and preserves the opportunity to solidify its reputation. Additionally, the agreement likely includes financial assurances from the ICC, compensating for any perceived compromises. Successful implementation could enhance Pakistan's image as a reliable cricketing



hub, following well-received tours by Australia and England. The hybrid model offers a win-win outcome, balancing security concerns with hosting ambitions. While India's matches will take place at neutral venues, Pakistan retains the opportunity to host other games on its soil. This arrangement allows local

fans to experience international cricket firsthand. Furthermore, the PCB's insistence on reciprocity for events in India until 2031 demonstrates strategic foresight, paving the way for equitable future agreements. Boycotting the Champions Trophy would have been a catastrophic misstep for Pakistan. Such a decision could have alienated the PCB from the ICC and key stakeholders, given India's significant influence in global cricket. The financial and reputational damage, coupled with diminished fan morale and strained sponsor relations, would have left lasting scars. By prioritizing long-term gains, the PCB has ensured its continued relevance on the international

cricket stage. Shah aims to introduce cricket to new markets such as the USA, China, and Africa, diversifying the audience and making the game truly global. His expertise in revenue generation could lead to record-breaking media deals, benefiting smaller boards through equitable revenue sharing. By integrating advanced technologies and data-driven strategies, Shah could modernize ICC tournaments, appealing to younger audiences and enhancing the game's global appeal. As an Indian, Shah might face allegations of favouring BCCI interests. Ensuring inclusivity and addressing member concerns will be crucial. Balancing the dominance of cricketing giants like India,

England, and Australia with the development of smaller nations will be a key test of Shah's leadership. The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 holds immense promise under Jay Shah's leadership, with the potential to set benchmarks in competitiveness, innovation, and fan engagement. Pakistan's pragmatic decision to embrace the hybrid model ensures its pivotal role in this journey, preserving its cricketing ambitions while fostering international collaboration. Together, these developments signify a new era for the sport, uniting fans and nations under the banner of cricket.

*(Writer is strategic affairs columnist and senior political analyst; views are personal)*

# Congress responds to BJP's traitor barb with RSS, tukde-tukde gang taunt



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for accusing Rahul Gandhi of conspiring to destabilise India and calling him a traitor, saying the truth is that BJP-RSS is the "biggest tukde-tukde" gang of this country and is spreading the "poison of communalism". The Opposition party said the truth is that the work of destabilising the economy is being done by the people of BJP. The BJP on Thursday had claimed a link between Rahul Gandhi and international forces, including an investigative media platform, trying to destabilise India and that the Congress leader was a "traitor of the highest order". Patra claimed that billionaire investor George Soros and

some US-based agencies, investigative media platform Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and Gandhi occupy three sides of a "dangerous" triangle trying to destabilise India and stoke public disaffection for a regime change. "I have no hesitation in saying he (Gandhi) is a traitor of the highest order," he said. Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters, Congress spokesperson Ragini Nayak said, "A very unfortunate incident happened yesterday. The Congress is the oldest party in the country. Former president of the party, five-time elected MP, leader of the opposition of this country, grandson of a martyred Prime Minister, a man whose family's sacrifice has irrigating the soil of the country. How did the BJP dare to call Rahul Gandhi

a traitor? The people of the country want to know where do you get so much shamelessness from?" Accusing the BJP of spreading the "poison of communalism, violence and hatred", Nayak cited slogans by BJP leaders such as 'batenge toh katenge'. "In such a situation, Rahul Gandhi ji undertook tours from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and from Manipur to Maharashtra, the aim of which was to unite India with love. A person who understands the struggles of all sections of society like labourers, farmers, cobblers, carpenters, drivers etc. And finds solutions to them. A person who raises the voice of Dalits, backward people, women, fights for their rights... These people call that person a traitor," she said. Nayak alleged that the truth is that BJP-RSS is the "biggest

tukde-tukde gang" of this country. She said Rahul Gandhi has always raised public issues and will continue to do so, asserting that the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha is not afraid of the BJP's threats and allegations. "When the country's food providers say - we will not tolerate black laws, we will protest, then for BJP it becomes a part of international conspiracy and funding. When Sonam Wangchuk comes from Ladakh with his companions and puts forward his demands, he becomes a part of an international conspiracy," she said. Manipur has been burning for one and a half years, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not go there because that too is a part of the international conspiracy, Nayak said. "If you ask Modi questions on inflation and unemployment,

you are a traitor. If the youth ask for employment, they will be beaten with lathis because they are also part of the conspiracy. Modi Ji, if there is so much international conspiracy going on in the country, then why don't you fire Amit Shah Ji?" she said. BJP people say that the Congress party is working to destabilise the country's economy but the truth is that the work of destabilising the economy is done by the people of BJP, she said. "When demonetisation and wrong GST were implemented in the country, former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh had warned Narendra Modi, he had said that if you go ahead with demonetisation then GDP will fall. Then Narendra Modi ji had made fun of him, but today the whole truth is in front of the country," she said.

# Opposition marches in Parliament in protest against Adani issue



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Wearing black masks with "Modi, Adani bhai-bhai" printed on them and holding a copy of the Constitution, several Opposition MPs led by the Congress held a protest march inside the Parliament complex on the Adani issue on Friday. The protest saw several leaders from some of the INDIA bloc parties marching and raising slogans against the Adani group, its owner Gautam Adani and the government. MPs from the Rashtriya Janta Dal, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the Left parties joined the protest.

The Trinamool Congress and the Samajwadi Party, which have so far stayed away from any denunciation of Adani, stayed away from Friday's protest as well. The decision has been seen by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a "division" in the opposition bloc. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadrawere among those who led the agitation. Priyanka later alleged that the government was scared of holding a discussion on the Adani issue and wondered why it was so. "They don't have the courage to discuss the Adani issue (in Parliament). Why is there a

problem in discussion... Discussion happens in democracy only, they are afraid of it as well," she said. On Thursday, the opposition MPs protested outside the Makar Dwar of Parliament wearing black jackets with "Modi, Adani Ek Hai" and "Adani Safe Hai" stickers on them. They also raised slogans on the Parliament premises to demand a joint parliamentary probe into the Adani issue. The Congress and several other opposition parties have been demanding a probe by a Joint Parliamentary Committee into the Adani Group, following the indictment of Adani and other company officials in a US court.

## Verify docs of government job candidates in six months: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court (SC) has directed police officials of all the states to check and verify documents pertaining to the character, antecedents, nationality, genuineness produced by the candidates selected for government jobs within six months from the date of their appointment. In an order passed on December 5, a bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and R Mahadevan said appointments to government jobs would be regularised only after verification of the credentials of the candidates. The top court passed the direction while setting aside the termination of an ophthalmic assistant two months prior to the date of retirement. The petitioner joined service on March 6, 1985, but the verification report was communicated by the police to the department on July 7, 2010, only two months prior to the date

of retirement. "The given factual matrix would also compel this court to issue a direction to the police official(s) of all the states to complete the enquiry and file report as regards the character, antecedents, nationality, genuineness of the documents produced by the candidates selected for appointment to the government service, etc., within a stipulated time provided in the statute/GO, or in any event, not later than six months from the date of their appointment," the top court said. The bench went on, "It is made clear that only upon verification of the credentials of the candidates, their appointments will have to be regularised so as to avoid further complications, as in the case on hand." Supreme Court was hearing a plea filed by Basudev Dutta challenging an order of the Calcutta High Court which set aside direction passed by the West Bengal State Administrative Tribunal.

## Past governments didn't pay attention to Northeast: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that previous governments weighed development to votes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the progress of the North East was not given much emphasis earlier due to fewer population and votes in the region. Inaugurating the Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav here to celebrate the vibrancy of the northeast, he said the government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first to create a dedicated ministry for the region and also earmarked 20 per cent budget of every Ministry for its development. "In the last decade, we have seen a wonderful journey of the development of the northeast but it was not easy. We have taken every possible step to connect the northeastern states with India's growth story.



"For a long time, we have seen how development was weighed against votes. Northeastern states had less votes and low seats so previous governments did not pay attention to the development of the region," he said. Modi said he strongly believes that the coming days are of eastern India and the northeast. Like Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru, cities of the region such as Guwahati, Shillong, Imphal, Itanagar and Aizawl will be new beacons of growth, the prime minister said.

With its vibrant culture and dynamic people, the northeast holds immense potential to propel India's growth, he said. The prime minister said during the last decade his government tried to reduce the feeling among people about the gap of Delhi and 'Dil' with the northeast. Union Ministers made 700 visits to the North East in the last decade and his government was connecting the region with the trinity of emotion, economy and ecology, he said. The first-ever Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav is being celebrated from December 6 to 8 at the Bharat Mandapam here. This festival aims to showcase the beauty, diversity, and promise of the eight states of northeastern states -- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim. Together they are known as the 'Ashtalakshmi'.

## C-section deliveries linked to income, private healthcare: study



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Over one-fifth of deliveries in India are via caesarean section (C-section), with significant regional and socioeconomic disparities, according to a study published in The Lancet Regional Health-Southeast Asia. While this figure may indicate some level of adequate national access to healthcare, it may not capture disparities between different regions or social groups, which the study points out. The study published in The Lancet Regional Health-Southeast Asia journal also revealed that caesarean delivery rates were at least twice as high among the wealthiest groups compared to the poorest in nearly 70 per cent of states. Statewise, C-section rates vary greatly across India, with Telangana having a very high

rate of 60.7%, and Nagaland a much lower one at 5.2%. This regional discrepancy suggests differing levels of healthcare access, infrastructure, and perhaps cultural factors that influence birthing choices. While C-section rates are higher in private healthcare facilities, wealthier individuals are more likely to undergo the procedure, even in private settings. The study also highlights varying rates across states, cultural influences, and the role of access to healthcare, suggesting that economic, social, and regional factors all play a crucial role in shaping delivery choices. A caesarean delivery is performed by surgically cutting through a pregnant woman's abdomen and uterus. Researchers, including those from The George Institute for Global Health in New Delhi, analysed live birth data of over 7.2 lakh women aged 15-49

years across 28 states and eight union territories, collected during the fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (2019-2021). "India's caesarean delivery rate of 21.5 per cent suggests adequate national access but may mask significant disparities," the authors wrote. Caesarean, or C-section, delivery rates across states were found to substantially vary, "ranging from 5.2 per cent in Nagaland to 60.7 per cent in Telangana". Facilities performing caesarean deliveries were higher among private health care centres, compared to public centres across all wealth groups, the authors found. However, within private facilities too, wealth disparities were found to exist, with fewer C-section deliveries among the least wealthy and more among the wealthier sections.

"The study concluded that both high-income and low-income individuals in India are more likely to receive caesarean deliveries in private rather than public facilities," the authors noted. Arunachal Pradesh had a relatively low C-section delivery rate of 14.5 per cent and showed low inequality, while southern states like Tamil Nadu and Telangana exhibited high rates of C-section delivery with lower inequality. The variation could be attributed to factors such as improved access to healthcare, higher literacy rates, and a stronger Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the authors suggested. In Bihar, where much of the population belongs to lower wealth groups, there was a higher preference for vaginal deliveries due to their affordability and shorter recovery times, even when medical professionals recommended a C-section.

## Indira peace prize for ex prez of Chile

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2024 will be conferred on former Chile president and prominent human rights voice Michelle Bachelet, the international jury for the award chaired by former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon announced on Friday. "President Michelle Bachelet is one of the world's most prominent voices for human rights, peace, and equality. In her various roles... she has spoken strongly for gender equality and the rights of the most vulnerable sections of the population at home and across the world," a statement issued award trust said.





S Korea's governing party head supports suspending Yoon's powers, making impeachment more likely

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's governing party Chief expressed support Friday for suspending the constitutional powers of President Yoon Suk Yeol for imposing martial law this week, in a bombshell reversal that makes Yoon's impeachment more likely.

During a party meeting, PPP leader Han Dong-hun stressed the need to suspend Yoon's presidential duties and power swiftly, saying he poses a "significant risk of extreme actions, like reattempting to impose martial law, which could potentially put the Republic of Korea and its citizens in great danger."

opposition leader Lee Jae-myung and National Assembly speaker Woo Won Shik, said Kim Byung-kee, one of the lawmakers who attended the meeting, Kim said Hong told lawmakers he ignored Yoon's orders.

Workers' Union, one of the country's biggest umbrella labor groups, have started hourly strikes since Thursday to protest Yoon. The union said its members will start on indefinite strikes beginning on Dec. 11 if Yoon was still in office then.

Joint Chiefs of Staff will absolutely not accept it," Kim said. Kim became the acting defense minister after Yoon's office on Thursday accepted the resignation of Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun, who has been hit with a travel ban and faces an investigation over his role in Yoon's imposition of martial law.

Taiwan's leader calls on China to refrain from threats

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te called on China to "open its arms rather than raise its fists" as he wrapped up his first overseas tour since taking office in May. His remarks at a press conference Friday in Palau, a Pacific Island nation, came in response to widespread speculation that China will hold military drills around Taiwan in response to his trip.

government in Taiwan, an island of 23 million people about 160 kilometers off China's east coast. China's long-ruling Communist Party says that self-governing Taiwan is part of China and must come under its control at some point. Lai's trip to the Pacific, which included US stops in Hawaii and Guam, took him into the heart of a maritime region where China is jockeying with the United States and its allies for influence and control. He also visited the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau, three of the 12 countries that have diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

Remarks in response to widespread speculation that China will hold military drills around Taiwan in response President Lai Ching-te to his Pacific Island trip.

gather together, democratic countries must unite to ensure global and regional stability and development," he said. Lai spoke by phone with US congressional leaders while in Guam, in a demonstration of American support for Taiwan. Lai's two stops in US territory angered China, which opposes US arms sales and military assistance to Taiwan. Washington is the main supplier of weapons for Taiwan's defence.

Biden at tree lighting says his holiday wish is for US to continue to seek light, liberty and love

AP ■ WASHINGTON

As he presided over his final Christmas tree lighting at the White House, President Joe Biden on Thursday said his wish for the nation now, and always, was that "we continue to seek the light of liberty and love, kindness and compassion, dignity and decency."

So, Biden did the honors himself, counting down from five before the tree light up a cheery bright green from the tip-top to the bottom of the tree. He wished the crowd a Merry Christmas before stepping down to take his seat for musical performances.



President Joe Biden speaks during a ceremony to light the National Christmas Tree on the Ellipse near the White House in Washington, AP/PTI

House rejects Democratic efforts to force release of Matt Gaetz's ethics report

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The House shut down Democrats' efforts Thursday to release the long-awaited ethics report into former Rep. Matt Gaetz, pushing the fate of any resolution to the yearslong investigation of sexual misconduct allegations into further uncertainty.

While ethics reports have previously been released after a member's resignation, it is extremely rare. Shortly before the votes took place, Rep. Sean Casten, D-Ill., who introduced one of the bills to force the release, said that if Republicans reject the release, they will have "succeeded in sweeping credible allegations of sexual misconduct under the rug."

Republicans and five Democrats who mostly work in secret as they investigate allegations of misconduct against lawmakers. The status of the Gaetz investigation became an open question last month when he abruptly resigned from Congress after Trump's announcement that he wanted his ally in the Cabinet.

Biden considers preemptive pardons for officials, allies before Trump takes office

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is weighing whether to issue sweeping pardons for officials and allies who the White House fears could be unjustly targeted by President-elect Donald Trump's administration, a preemptive move that would be a novel and risky use of the president's extraordinary constitutional power.

als who have drawn the ire of the incoming president and his allies. Some fearful former officials have reached out to the Biden White House preemptively seeking some sort of protection from the future Trump administration, one of the people said. It follows Biden's decision to pardon his son Hunter — not just for his convictions on federal gun and tax violations, but for any potential federal offense committed over an 11-year period, as the president feared that Trump allies would seek to prosecute his son for other offenses.

never materialized before he left office nearly four years ago. Gerald Ford granted a "full, free, and absolute pardon" in 1974 to his predecessor, Richard Nixon, over the Watergate scandal. He believed a potential trial would "cause prolonged and divisive debate over the propriety of exposing to further punishment and degradation a man who has already paid the unprecedented penalty of relinquishing the highest elective office of the United States," as written in the pardon proclamation.

zeroed in on former Rep Liz Cheney, a conservative Republican who campaigned for Harris and helped investigate Jan 6, and he promoted a social media post that suggested he wanted military tribunals for supposed treason. Kash Patel, whom Trump has announced as his nominee to be director of the FBI, has listed dozens of former government officials he wanted to "come after."

Canada said Thursday it is outlawing another 324 firearm varieties — guns the public safety minister said belong on the battlefield, not in the hands of hunters or sport shooters. Ottawa also said it is working with the government of Ukraine to see how the guns can be donated to support the fight against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Canada expands list of firearms outlawed, proposes to donate guns to Ukraine

AP ■ OTTAWA (ONTARIO)

Canada said Thursday it is outlawing another 324 firearm varieties — guns the public safety minister said belong on the battlefield, not in the hands of hunters or sport shooters. Ottawa also said it is working with the government of Ukraine to see how the guns can be donated to support the fight against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Gaza ceasefire talks resume

AP ■ ISTANBUL

A Hamas official said Thursday that international mediators have resumed negotiating with the militant group and Israel over a ceasefire in Gaza, and that he was hopeful a deal to end the 14-month war was within reach. Ceasefire negotiations were halted last month when Qatar suspended talks with mediators from Egypt and the United States because of frustration over a lack of progress between Israel and Hamas. But there has been a "re-activation" of efforts in recent days to end the fighting, release hostages from Gaza and free Palestinian prisoners in Israel, according to Bassem Naim, an official in Hamas' political bureau who spoke with The Associated Press in Turkey. Another official familiar with the talks confirmed the return of Qatari mediators.

range allowing it to reach all of Europe. Lavrov said that Russia has issued a warning to the U.S. about the Oreshnik launch 30 minutes before it happened using an automated system used to exchange such advance notices. He said that "we hate even to think about war with the United States, which will take nuclear character," but he warned that any potential exchange of nuclear strikes between Russia and NATO allies in Europe will inevitably escalate into a wider conflict in which the US will be targeted. "To speak about limited exchange of nuclear strikes is an invitation to disaster, which we don't want to have," Lavrov said.

Russia will use 'all means' to defend its interests: Lavrov

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia's top diplomat said in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson released Friday that Moscow doesn't want a war with the United States but will use "all means" to defend its interests. Sergey Lavrov argued that while Russia and the US are officially not at war, Washington's permission for Ukraine to use American longer-range missiles for strikes on Russian territory marked a dangerous escalation.

is that we will be ready to do anything to defend our legitimate interests," he said. "The United States, and the allies of the United States who also provide these long-range weapons to the Kiev regime, they must understand that we would be ready to use any means not to allow them to succeed in what they call strategic defeat of Russia." Russian President Vladimir Putin has described the Nov 21 attack with Oreshnik as a response to Ukrainian strikes on Russian military facilities in Bryansk and Kursk regions with Western-supplied weapons. He has declared that in the case of new attacks on Russia with Western longer-range weapons, Russia could use Oreshnik to hit the government district in Kyiv.

Asked about his view of Donald Trump, Lavrov described him as "a very strong person, a person who wants results, who doesn't like procrastination on anything."

# GDP slowdown in Q2 not systemic, Q3 to compensate for moderation: FM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GDP slowdown in September quarter was not "systemic" and the economic activity in third quarter, with better public expenditure, is likely to compensate for the moderation, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Friday. India recorded a 7-quarter low GDP growth of 5.4 per cent in July-September FY25. In the first quarter, the growth was 6.7 per cent. "It is not a systemic slowdown. It is more of absence of activity on public expenditure, capital expenditure and so on...I expect Q3 to make up for all these," Sitharaman said at an event here. So, growth number is something which is not necessarily going to get badly affected, she added. "We need to push up on many other factors," she said adding India would continue to be the fastest-growing economy next year and thereafter. Growth momentum was low in the first quarter due to general election and reduction in capital expenditure. This has had a bearing on the second quarter as well.



In the first half, the government spent only 37.3 per cent of its capital expenditure target of Rs 11.11 lakh crore for FY25. The minister's comments came moments after the Reserve Bank of India sharply slashed its growth projection to 6.6 per cent for the current fiscal from 7.2 per cent earlier. Other factors affecting growth include plateauing global demand that affected export growth, Sitharaman said.

"Purchasing power of Indians is improving, but within India, you also have concerns of wages saturating. We are quite seized of these factors which might have a play on India's own consumption," she said. The finance ministry, in its Economic Survey for FY24, had estimated a GDP growth of 6.5-7 per cent for the current fiscal year. "We have a Prime Minister who looks at opportunities in each of the

challenges. During Covid-19, the challenge was seen as an opportunity for bringing in reforms. Five mini budgets were presented at that time, each of them giving relief, support and handholding on one hand and on the other making sure that small and overlooked pending reforms were taken," she said. Being the voice of the Global South for some time now, India will carry forward its role that everyone saw during India's G20 Presidency, she added. Every time Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes up an issue of global importance, he does consult the Global South and takes their concerns forward. Referring to the India-Japan relations, she said the two countries shared strong business ties. "Between India and Japan, other than just the governments, what needs to be sustained is the people-to-people and business-to-business interest. Despite some ups and downs, relationship between countries remains strong and at a stable level when people-to-people and business-to-business contacts are safe, strong and deepened," she said.

## RBI to allow small finance banks to extend credit lines through UPI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday proposed to allow small finance banks to extend pre-sanctioned credit lines through Unified Payments Interface (UPI). UPI is an instant real-time payment system developed by NPCI for transactions through mobile phones. In September 2023, the scope of UPI was expanded by enabling pre-sanctioned credit lines to be linked through UPI and used as a funding account by commercial banks excluding Payments Banks, Small Finance Banks (SFBs) and Regional Rural Banks. Credit line on UPI has the potential to make available low-ticket, low-tenor products to "new-to-credit" customers, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said. SFBs leverage a high-tech, low-cost model to reach the last-mile customer and can play an enabling role in expanding the reach of credit on UPI, he said.



"It is, therefore, proposed to permit SFBs to extend pre-sanctioned credit lines through the UPI. Necessary guidelines will be issued shortly," he said while unveiling the latest bi-monthly monetary policy. The Governor also said that the Reserve Bank has been deploying traditional as well as new-age communication techniques as a key part of its toolkit to ensure transparency and greater impact of its decisions, explain the rationale behind its decisions, and disseminate various awareness messages to a wider audience. The Reserve Bank has been expanding the scope of its public awareness activities including through social media over the last few years. In continuation of this endeavour, the Reserve Bank proposes to launch podcasts for wider dissemination of information that is of interest to the general public, Das said.

## RBI raises FY25 inflation estimate to 4.8 per cent



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday raised the inflation projection for current fiscal year to 4.8 per cent from 4.5 per cent with Governor Shaktikanta Das saying lingering food price pressures are likely to keep headline inflation elevated in the December quarter. Consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation increased sharply in September and October 2024 led by an unanticipated increase in food prices. Core inflation, though at subdued levels, also registered a pick-up in October. Fuel group remained in deflation for the 14th consecutive month in October. "In the near term, despite some softening, lingering food price pressures are likely to keep headline inflation elevated in Q3," Das said while unveiling the December 2024 monetary policy. RBI said CPI inflation for 2024-25 is projected at 4.8 per cent, with Q3 at 5.7 per cent, and Q4 at 4.5 per cent.

CPI or retail inflation for Q1:2025-26 is projected at 4.6 per cent, and Q2 at 4 per cent. In the October policy, the central bank had estimated the inflation at 4.5 per cent for the fiscal ending March 2025. "Going ahead, a good rabi season would be critical to the softening of the food inflation pressures. Early indications point to adequate soil moisture content and reservoir levels, conducive for rabi sowing," the Governor said. CPI headline inflation increased from average 3.6 per cent during July-August to 5.5 per cent in September and further to 6.2 per cent in October 2024, which was the highest in more than a year, since September 2023. He further said the estimates of a record kharif production should bring relief to the elevated prices of rice and tur dal. Vegetable prices are also expected to see a seasonal winter correction. On the upside, Das said the evolving trajectory of domestic edible oil prices, following the hike in import duties and rise in their global prices, need to

be closely monitored. "The near-term inflation and growth outcomes in India have turned somewhat adverse since the October policy. The medium-term prognosis on inflation suggests further alignment with the target, while growth is expected to pick up its momentum," Das said. He further said persistent high inflation reduces the purchasing power of consumers and adversely affects both consumption and investment demand. The overall implication of these factors for growth is negative. "Therefore, price stability is essential for sustained growth. On the other hand, a growth slowdown - if it lingers beyond a point - may need policy support," Das said. The Governor noted that high inflation reduces the disposable income in the hands of consumers and dents private consumption, which negatively impacts the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. The increasing incidence of adverse weather events, heightened geopolitical uncertainties and financial market volatility pose upside risks to inflation, he added. Das also said the last mile of disinflation is turning out to be prolonged and arduous, both for advanced and emerging market economies (EMEs). The government has tasked the RBI to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on the either side.

## Air India Express on expansion mode

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Air India Express, the budget-carrier arm of Air India, is embarking on a significant expansion by increasing its fleet size and introducing new routes, as passenger growth remains robust. The airline, however, has deferred plans to launch direct flights between Kolkata and Dhaka, citing the ongoing political crisis in Bangladesh. "You would recall we had announced our operational plan for Dhaka, which is a new and significant market for us. But because of the situation there, we have deferred those plans," Alok Singh, Managing Director of Air India Express, said. "As soon as the conditions are right, we will resume those plans," he said. The airline had initially planned to launch the Dhaka services in September with six weekly flights. Despite the deferment, Singh said the airline remains committed to expanding its presence in the eastern sector. He said its international service flights to and from Kathmandu would begin with the summer schedule, starting the end of March 2025. Singh, speaking to reporters here, also said the airline sees strong growth potential, as daily passenger movement in India in November crossed the 5,00,000 mark. In order to tap the growth, it aims to increase the fleet size to over 100 aircraft by March 2025, up from the existing 90. Over the next three years, the fleet size is expected to grow



to about 175, Singh said. He also highlighted that Air India Express is part of the Air India Group, which has announced plans to acquire 470 aircraft at the group level in the next few years. Singh said the airline's network expansion would focus on short-haul routes within a 5.5-6 hour range, and on connecting metro cities with tier-II and tier-III destinations, to tap emerging opportunities. Air India Express currently operates 24 daily flights from Kolkata, which will increase by 10 in the summer schedule. The additions will include new routes and frequency enhancements to existing services. The airline also plans to increase its night halt capacity in Kolkata from seven aircraft to nine. Speaking about enhanced connectivity in the northeast, Singh said the airline will introduce a new flight connecting Dimapur with Kolkata. Patna is another destination for expansion, the top company official said. He said Air India Express will continue to strengthen its

presence in the Gulf and Middle East regions, while expanding into Southeast Asia. New destinations such as Bangkok, Singapore, Vietnam and Colombo are also under consideration. Singh said flights to Vietnam could start in the next financial year or the following year. The airline is also exploring opportunities in the CIS countries. Weekly flight frequencies in Kolkata and Bagdogra have increased by 37 per cent, rising from 168 last winter to over 230, he said. New direct routes from Kolkata include Port Blair, Indore, and Agartala, while new routes from Bagdogra include Hyderabad and Chennai. Air India Express operates over 400 daily flights, connecting 36 domestic and 15 international destinations. Its fleet comprises 90 aircraft, including 61 Boeing 737s and 29 Airbus A320s. The airline's market share in Kolkata stands at 12 per cent, and 24 per cent when combined with parent company Air India.

## Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra to hike vehicle prices from January

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India and Mahindra & Mahindra on Friday announced plans to hike vehicle prices from January in order to offset the impact of rising input costs and operational expenses. Maruti Suzuki, the country's largest carmaker, will hike prices of its model range by up to 4 per cent from January. Mahindra & Mahindra is increasing prices of its SUV models and commercial vehicles by up to 3 per cent. Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing said that in light of rising input costs and operational expenses, the company has planned to increase the prices of its cars from January 2025. The price increase is expected to be up to 4 per cent and will vary depending on the model, it added. "While the company continuously strives to optimise costs and minimise the impact on its customers, some portion of the increased cost may need to be passed on to the market," it stated. Maruti Suzuki sells a range of models, ranging from Alto hatchback to Invicto multi-utility vehicles, in the domestic market. Mahindra & Mahindra said it will hike prices of its SUVs and commercial vehicles by up to 3 per cent from January next year. The adjustment is in response to the rising costs due to



inflation and increased commodity prices, Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) said in a statement. The automaker has made efforts to absorb as much of these additional costs as possible however, a portion of this increase will need to be passed on to customers, it added. The extent of the price increase across different SUVs and commercial vehicles will be upto 3 per cent, the auto major stated. Similarly, JSW MG Motor India said it will also increase prices of its entire model range by up to 3 per cent from next month. The price increase is a result of continuously rising input costs and other external factors, the automaker said in a statement. "Our dedication to quality, innovation and sustainability remains a priority and drives us to improve our offerings continuously. In doing so, minor price adjustments are inevitable to offset the rising input costs," JSW MG Motor India Chief Commercial Officer Satinder Bajwa Singh said.



## India's forex reserves jump USD 1.51 bln to USD 658.091 bln

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves increased by USD 1.51 billion to USD 658.091 billion for the week ended November 29, the RBI said on Friday. The overall reserves had dropped by USD 1.31 billion to USD 656.582 billion in the previous reporting week. The kitty has witnessed a declining trend in the recent past and had dropped by a record USD 17.761 billion in the week prior to the last. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. For the week ended November 29, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves,

increased by USD 2.061 billion to USD 568.852 billion, the data released on Friday showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves decreased by USD 595 million to USD 66.979 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by USD 22 million to USD 18.007 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was also up by USD 22 million to USD 4.254 billion in the reporting week, the central bank data showed.

## Sebi revamps investor charter to boost transparency, grievance redressal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Friday unveiled an updated investor charter aimed to enhance investor protection, market transparency, and trust and confidence among investors. The updated charter has emphasised on ensuring confidentiality of investor information and providing the right to exit at fair and reasonable terms from the securities market related products or services. "Further, Sebi has strengthened the grievance redressal mechanism and alternative dispute resolution mechanism with the launch of SCORES 2.0 and SMART Online Dispute Resolution," the regulator said in a statement. In SCORES 2.0, investor complaints are taken up directly with Sebi registered intermediaries/regulators entities and the designated bodies for first level review, with the markets watchdog taking up all complaints at the stage of Second Level Review. SMART ODR portal facilitates online conciliation and online arbitration for resolution of disputes arising



in the Indian securities market. The revamped charter aims to enable investors to better understand the risks associated with market investments while ensuring their fair treatment in a timely and efficient manner. The regulator has urged investors to exercise diligence by engaging only with Sebi-recognised market infrastructure institutions and intermediaries. Investors are also encouraged to keep their contact and Know Your Customer (KYC) details up to date and address grievances within prescribed timelines. In line with its mission, the

markets watchdog has committed to streamline procedures to facilitate ease of investment while adopting innovative and digital solutions to modernise the securities market. The updated charter also details best practices for investors, such as maintaining transaction records, knowing the risks and fees associated with investments, and familiarizing themselves with the grievance redressal mechanisms. Further, the regulator advised against practices like making cash payments beyond prescribed limits or sharing sensitive account details.



## Cargo traffic at major ports drops 4.95 per cent in Nov

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Cargo traffic at the country's major ports declined 4.95 per cent to 67.53 million tonnes in November, from 71.05 million tonnes in the same period a year ago, according to an industry body. Among these, JNPA and Deendayal ports reported positive growth, while cargo traffic at the remaining 10 major facilities saw a year-on-year drop, the Indian Ports Association (IPA) said in a statement. India has 12 major ports under the control of the central government. These include Deendayal Port (erstwhile Kandla), Mumbai Port, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA), Mormugao Port, New Mangalore Port, Cochin Port,

Chennai Port, Kamarajar Port (earlier Ennore), VO Chidambarnar Port, Visakhapatnam Port, Paradip Port and Kolkata Port, which also includes Haldia. The cargo traffic at the premier container port JNPA grew 12.34 per cent during the month under review whereas Deendayal Port witnessed a 10.10 per cent growth year-on-year in November, IPA said. Cargo traffic at Mormugao Port declined 29.64 per cent last month, from last year and New Mangalore Port reported a 19 per cent year-on-year drop in cargo traffic, it stated. Other major ports, including Chennai, Visakhapatnam, and Mumbai, also saw a decline in cargo traffic in November over the same month last year, as per IPA.

## Semiconductor chip import increased 18.5 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The semiconductor imports in India rose 18.5 per cent to Rs 1.71 lakh crore in 2023-24, Parliament was informed on Friday. According to data shared by the Minister of State for Electronics and IT Jitin Prasada, India imported 18.43 billion semiconductor chips in FY24. Citing the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics (DGCIIS) portal, he said that in 2022-23, 14.64 billion chips were imported into the country at a valuation of Rs 1.297 lakh crore. In 2021-22, the country imported 17.89 billion chipsets worth Rs 1.071 lakh crore, according to the data. The Indian government has initiated programmes like the Semicon India to lessen reliance on imports by fostering domestic production and attracting foreign investments. The Semicon India programme has an outlay of Rs 76,000 crore for the development of the semiconductor and display manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

Australia 86-1 in reply to India's 180 at stumps

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Australia reached 86 for 1 in their first innings after dismissing India for 180 at the end of the opening day of the pink-ball Test here on Friday. Nathan McSweeney and Marnus Labuschagne were at the crease on 38 and 20 respectively when the stumps were drawn after 33 overs of play in Australia's first innings. The home side trail by 94 runs. Opener Usman Khawaja was the lone Australia batter out for 13 off the bowling of Jasprit Bumrah. Earlier, India were all out for 180 at dinner after playing 44.12 overs as the visitors lost four and six wickets in the first and second sessions of the day respectively after opting to



bat. Nitish Reddy top-scored for India with 42 off 54 balls, while KL Rahul and Shubman

Gill contributed 37 and 31 respectively. Yashasvi Jaiswal (0), Virat Kohli (7) and captain Rohit

Sharma (3) fell cheaply while Rishabh Pant and Ravichandran Ashwin contributed 21 and 22 respectively. Pacer Mitchell Starc was the wrecker-in-chief for Australia as he took six Indian wickets for 48 runs. India made three changes with captain Rohit, Gill and Ashwin returning to the playing XI after missing the first Test which India won by 295 runs. Devdutt Padikkal, Dhruv Jurel and Washington Sundar made way for them. Brief Scores: India: 180 all out in 44.1 overs (Nitish Reddy 42, KL Rahul 37, Shubman Gill 31; Mitchell Starc 6/48). Australia: 86 for 1 in 33 overs (Nathan McSweeney 38 not out, Marnus Labuschagne 20 not out; Jasprit Bumrah 1/13).

World Chess: Gukesh, Liren eye breakthrough after series of draws

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Half a dozen draws and some missed opportunities later, sprightly challenger D Gukesh and resolute defending champion Ding Liren would be desperate for a breakthrough when they clash in the 10th game of the World Chess Championship here on Saturday. Gukesh has explored several winning lines but the advantage has not translated into victories for the Indian, and with just five more classical games left to be played in the USD 2.5 million prize money championship, the 18-year-old would look to break the deadlock and hope to take a decisive lead after a day's rest on Friday. The draw on Thursday, which was the seventh of the match and sixth on the trot, has left both players on an identical score of 4.5 points each, still three shy of the championship-winning tally. The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game while Gukesh had emerged victorious in the third. All other games have ended in draws. If history is anything to go by, the reigning champion wins the match if the scores are tied 4-4 after



eight games which was the case here too. The Chennai-born Indian knows that he will have to punch hard against his gritty Chinese opponent, who has a habit of coming up with well-disguised tricks when the chips are down. World number one and five-times world champion Magnus Carlsen minced no words while doing a recap of the ninth game and said that the time was running out for Gukesh. "I think we have finally arrived at a moment when Gukesh is not a favourite in this match anymore, it's as pure a 50-50 match as it comes," said Carlsen. If the deadlock is not broken after 14 rounds, Gukesh could

well surrender the initiative to his Chinese opponent when the games are played under the faster time control to determine the winner. Liren is said to have an advantage in short games. Gukesh, one of the architects of India's maiden Chess Olympiad title triumph recently, said after the draw in the ninth game on Thursday that he would like to improve his performance in critical moments. "...Hopefully, at some point when I do the right things, I believe that the results will come," he had said. The youngest-ever challenger to the crown was guilty of letting go a very promising position to settle for a draw in the marathon seventh game,

something which would have rattled him. But he didn't allow the morale to sag in the eighth game. He declined a draw initially through repetition which would have ended the game earlier, thus showing his intent to win at all cost. In the ninth game, the Indian got an opportunity to exert some pressure on his 20th turn but Liren surprised him. Gukesh could be slightly disadvantaged in the remaining five games as Liren will have white thrice, but the Indian said there was not much difference having black or white pieces. "Nowadays there is not much difference between white and black, because of the computers... All the lines that were considered dubious, the computers make them work. Now it's an equal game with both colours, so I wouldn't say it's a huge advantage," Gukesh had said on Thursday. "It is still the same, the approach... We just try to play good chess. In the last few games I have managed to play very good chess and for me the main thing will be go there with the same energy, play the same level of chess and slightly improve on some critical moments."

Messi and Inter Miami to open Club World Cup against Egyptian club Al Ahly

AP ■ MIAMI



three opponents in the newly expanded event. The tournament will be held in the U.S. From June 15 to July 13, using 12 stadiums in 11 different cities. The final will be at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, the same stadium that will play host to the 2026 World Cup final. Among the powerhouse clubs in the field: Manchester City, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, PSG, Chelsea, Borussia Dortmund and Inter Milan. There's also the four highest-ranked teams from South America: Flamengo, Palmeiras, River Plate and Fluminense. And Messi's team, as a representative of the host nation, gets the distinction of playing the first match. It'll happen at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. "It's about inclusivity, it's about bringing clubs from all over the world, the 32 best clubs and

advancing to a knockout bracket of 16. Europe got 12 spots and South America six to lead the field, while Africa, Asia and North America all got four — with Inter Miami essentially a fifth from North America since it has host status. Oceania got one spot. "There is no rule that said the MLS Cup winner needs to be in the Club World Cup," MLS Commissioner Don Garber said. "I have no interest in anything other than what I think is going to be best for the showcase, best for our league. I am supportive of the decision that FIFA made and I'm excited to put Miami and Seattle in a global media deal and be shown around the world." Mas said Inter Miami getting the privilege of playing the opening match of the tournament at home is "a testament to our community, the soccer culture that's here." Group A: Palmeiras, Porto, Al Ahly, Inter Miami. Group B: Paris Saint-Germain, Atletico Madrid, Botafogo, Seattle. Group C: Bayern Munich, Auckland City, Boca Juniors, Benfica. Group D: Flamengo, ES Tunis, Chelsea, Leon. Group E: River Plate, Urawa, Monterrey, Inter Milan. Group F: Fluminense, Borussia Dortmund, Ulsan, Mamelodi Sundowns. Group G: Manchester City, Wydad, Al Ain, Juventus.

Shammi Silva takes over ACC presidency role from Jay Shah

PTI ■ DUBAI

Sri Lanka's Shammi Silva has taken over as the president of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), succeeding India's Jay Shah, who recently became the

chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC). Shah had vacated the position after three terms as ACC President. It won't be Silva's maiden role with the ACC, having previously functioned as

the chairman of the organisation's Finance & Marketing Committee. "It is a great honour to lead the Asian Cricket Council. Cricket is the heartbeat of Asia, and I look forward to working closely

with all member nations to elevate the game, provide opportunities for emerging talent, and strengthen the bonds that unite us through this beautiful sport," said Silva in a statement.



NHPC Office Complex, Sector-33, Faridabad - 121003 (CIN: L40101HR1975GOI032564) SCHEDULE. [To be published in pursuance of Clause (7) of Regulation 23 of Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (Conduct of Business) Regulations, 2023]. 1. The Petitioner above-named has filed a petition before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, New Delhi for determination of tariff for Salal Power Station, Tanakpur Power Station, Chamera - I Power Station, Uri - I Power Station, Chamera - II Power Station, Dhauliganga Power Station, Chamera - III Power Station and Parbati - III Power Station. 2. The beneficiaries of the generating station are states of: i) PSPCL - Punjab, ii) BRPL, BYPL & TPDDL - Delhi, iii) UPCL - Uttarakhand, iv) HPSEB - Himachal Pradesh, v) HPPC - Haryana, vi) Engg. Dept. - UT Chandigarh, vii) UPPCL - Uttar Pradesh, viii) JVVNL, JdVNL & AVVNL - Rajasthan, ix) PDD - J&K.

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