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MONEY 10
SENSEX, NIFTY EXTEND
LOSSES INTO 3RD SESSION
ON FOREIGN FUND OUTFLOWS

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Congress, BJP spar over Ambedkar legacy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A massive confrontation broke out between the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre and other ruling parties, and the Congress-led Opposition over Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar during his speech in Parliament on Tuesday, with the Congress and other opposition parties demanding resignation of the Home Minister on grounds of insulting the architect of the Constitution. The attack from virtually all opposition parties, including Congress, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Left parties and Shiv Sena-UBT, led to adjournment of both Houses of Parliament and prompted the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to come out in stout defence of Shah. The hullabaloo in Parliament also spilled on to the streets of the national Capital and places as far as Maharashtra, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, DMK chief MK Stalin, Shiv Sena-UBT chief Uddhav Thackeray and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav were among those who slammed Shah for his remarks. Addressing a Press conference,



Congress SC-ST cell workers stage a protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar in the Parliament, in Bhopal

Shah alleged that the Congress in the past has also misrepresented his and even PM Narendra Modi's comments to spread confusion and mislead people. "I condemn the Congress for twisting facts. Why did it happen? It happened because BJP leaders spoke on how the NDA governments upheld the Constitution and established with facts that the Congress is anti-Ambedkar, anti-Constitution and anti-reservation," Shah told the media. The senior BJP leader said the Congress also insulted VD Savarkar and blew to smithereens the values enshrined in the Constitution

by imposing Emergency. "When all these facts came out, the Congress used its old tricks and made an effort to mislead the society by presenting twisted facts," Shah said. Asked about Congress' demand for his resignation, the home minister said in a lighter vein that he can quit if this will make the Congress president happy but it will never solve his problems. Kharge, he added, has acted under Rahul Gandhi's pressure to be part of this "malicious" campaign against him by distorting his views on Ambedkar. Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien submitted a

notice to move a privilege motion against Shah in the Rajya Sabha where the Home Minister had said on Tuesday, evening that Congress leaders would have got a place in heaven had they chanted the name of God rather than following the fashion of repeating Ambedkar's name. In the Rajya Sabha, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijiju accused the Congress of misleading the country by using only a part of Shah's remarks made in the Rajya Sabha and asserted that the Home Minister had in very clear words mentioned how the Congress party had insulted Ambedkar. "You (Congress) cannot use an 11-12 second clip out of Shah's entire speech and mislead the nation," Rijiju said and stressed that for the BJP, Ambedkar is equivalent to God. Leader of the House JP Nadra too stood up in Shah's defence, saying that Kharge was trying to "mislead" the nation through Parliament and accused the Congress of treating Ambedkar with disdain and disrespect. Nadra rejected Kharge's claim and alleged that it was the Congress that had disrespected Ambedkar during his lifetime due to which he had resigned from the Union Cabinet. Modi asserted that the opposition party's "rotten ecosystem" and "malicious lies" cannot hide its misdeeds. Continued on page 8

13 dead, in ferry-Navy speed boat collision off Mumbai coast

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major mishap, as many as 13 persons, including an Army man, lost their lives, while more than 99 other tourist passengers on board a private ferry boat were rescued after it was hit by a speed boat belonging to the Indian Navy in the Arabian Sea, off the Gateway of India in south Mumbai on Wednesday. Confirming that the mishap took place due to a hit by a Navy vessel, a Defence spokesperson said late in the evening: "At about 1600 hours on December 18 a Navy craft undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with a passenger ferry Neel Kamal off Karanja, Mumbai. The ferry was carrying passengers from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island. The accident has reportedly led to the tragic loss of 13 lives including one Navy man and two Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) personnel onboard the Naval craft," the Defence spokesperson said. The Navy pegged the number of survivors at 99. "The survivors -- picked up by the Navy and civil craft in the area -- have been transferred to jetties and hospitals in the vicinity," the Defence spokesperson said. The private boat named "Neel Kamal" with many passengers on board was on its way from the Gateway of India to the Gharapuri Island, where there is UNESCO World Heritage Site of Elephanta Caves. The Indian Navy boat had six persons on board.



Passengers after being rescued in a joint operation by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard

Search and rescue efforts were immediately launched by the Navy in coordination with the Coast Guard and Marine Police. Four Naval helicopters, 11 Naval craft, one Coast Guard boat and three Marine Police boats are undertaking rescue efforts. Given that the collision between the two vessels was very intense, there were casualties from both the passenger boat and Navy vessel. Owing to the impact of the hit, "Neel Kamal" broke down, overturned and sank with the passengers on board thrown into the sea. Before long, the videos of the tragedy, clicked by passengers from other ferries in the vicinity, showed ghastly shots of people screaming for help, throwing their arms and legs to remain afloat or attempting to hold their near and dear ones from sinking in chilly sea waters. The mishap took place off Uran-Karanja, which falls in

the Raigad district, at around 4 pm, immediately after which a massive multi-agency Search and Rescue (S&R) operation was launched. "Accounting of all personnel is in progress along with S&R efforts in the area," the chief Navy spokesperson said. Teams of the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Mumbai Police and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority are involved in the operations. Eleven Navy boats, three Marine Police boats, one Coast Guard boat and four helicopters are involved in the S&R operations. Talking to media persons, the owner of the vessel, Rajendra Padte, said that the "Neel Kamal" had departed on its regular tourism voyage to Elephanta Islands around 3.15 pm and barely a couple of hours later the mishap was reported. He claimed that his ferry vessel had no role to play in the mishap. Continued on page 8



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

NCR's noxious numbers: AQI is over 445

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi woke up to yet another day of toxic air on Wednesday as the overall Air Quality Index (AQI) crossed a hazardous 445 (almost severe plus), landing in the 'severe' category. With a minimum temperature of 7.6 degree Celsius, dense fog enveloped the city, severely impacting visibility and making the already hazardous air quality even more dangerous. According to the Decision Support System for Air Quality Management, with 12.857 per cent transport sector is the key contributor to air pollution, followed by Industries (6.617 per cent), Road Constructions (1.85 per cent), Waste (1.23 per cent) and dust (0.913 per cent). Delhi has been experiencing toxic air quality for the past few days due to drop in wind speeds, allowing local pollutants to concentrate in the atmosphere, according to experts. On Tuesday the city's 24-hour average AQI was 433 at 4 pm, against 379 on Monday. Continued on page 8



Katra locals resume protest against ropeway project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangarsh Samiti, Katra, relaunched their agitation on Wednesday by observing a peaceful bandh in the township in protest against the proposed Rs 250 Crore ropeway project connecting Tarakote Marg to Sanjhi Chhat, which leads to the cave shrine nestled in the Trikuta Hills. To maintain the law and order situation and ensure the safety of the pilgrims the local police authorities conducted a march in the Katra town. During the day the pilgrims were seen facing hardships during the complete shutdown. The transport facilities also

remained suspended making it difficult for the pilgrims to commute from one place to another. At the end of the first round of the four-day-long protests, the Sangarsh Samiti had given an ultimatum to the Jammu and Kashmir government to concede their demands by December 15, or else they would be left with no other option but to relaunch their agitation. In the absence of any concrete assurance or dialogue between the different stakeholders, the Sangarsh Samiti decided to observe a peaceful bandh. A large rally, backed by various organisations, was held by the Samiti from the Shalimar Park to oppose the ropeway project. Continued on page 8

Outgoing US Govt relaxes H-1B visas rules

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Scores of Indian professionals seeking a career in the United States (US) are likely to benefit the most as the Government there has announced a new set of rules for H-1B visas that makes it easier for American companies to hire foreign workers with special skill sets. It also facilitates a smoother transition from F-1 student visas to H-1B visas. This positive development for highly qualified Indian professionals came late Tuesday in Washington by the outgoing Biden administration transferring power. Donald Trump will be the next president of the US after a swearing-in ceremony on January 20. The updated rule, which takes effect on January 17, 2025, will streamline the approval process, provide greater flexibility for employers to retain top talent, and strengthen the integrity and oversight of the programme. This move is likely to benefit Indians the most. In recent years, Indians have cornered a lion's share of H-1B visas. The update would also benefit Indian students on F-1 visas in the US as the new rules seek to help them transition to jobs. The rule, announced by the Department of Homeland



Security (DHS), aims to provide greater flexibility to employers and workers by modernising the definition and criteria for special positions and nonprofit and governmental research organisations that are exempt from the annual statutory limit on H-1B visas. The changes will help US Employers hire as per their business needs and remain competitive in the global marketplace, an official release said. According to the DHS, the rule also extends certain flexibilities for students on an F-1 visa seeking to change their status to H-1B to avoid disruptions in lawful status and employment authorisation for students holding F-1 visas. It also will allow US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to process applications more quickly for most individuals who had previously been approved for an H-1B visa. It will also allow H-1B visa holders with a

controlling interest in the petitioning organisation to be eligible for H-1B status subject to reasonable conditions. The latest move by the outgoing Biden administration builds on its previous efforts to ensure that the labour needs of American businesses are met to reduce undue burden on employers while adhering to all US worker protections under the law. "American businesses rely on the H-1B visa programme for the recruitment of highly-skilled talent, benefiting communities across the country," said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas. "These improvements to the programme provide employers with greater flexibility to hire global talent, boost our economic competitiveness, and allow highly skilled workers to continue to advance American innovation," he said. Continued on page 8



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Kejriwal promises free medical treatment for senior citizens, post win

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant announcement ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal has announced the Sanjeevani Scheme which promises free medical treatment in government and private hospitals for all senior citizens aged 60 and above, if his party returns to power in the National Capital. If implemented, the scheme could prove to be a game changer in the competitive political landscape and will arguably be one of its kinds in terms of the welfare measures announced by state governments or the Centre. The pre-poll announcement of the new health scheme can be seen as an effort to secure votes and drum up support for AAP which is eyeing a third consecutive term in power in the capital. Continued on page 8

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to restart? India-China talk peace

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Signalling a thaw between the frosty ties between the two countries for the last four years, India and China on Wednesday agreed for cross-border cooperation and exchanges including resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, data sharing on trans-border rivers and border trade. They agreed on the salience of stable, predictable and amicable India-China relations for regional and global peace and prosperity. Announcing this, ministry of external affairs (MEA) said in a statement here, the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives (SRs) of India and China, respectively Ajit Doval, National Security Advisor (NSA) of India, and Wang Yi, Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Minister of Foreign Affairs, was held in Beijing on Wednesday. The SRs met in accordance with the decision taken during the recent meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in Kazan for them to meet at an early date to oversee the management of peace and tranquillity in border areas and



National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi before their scheduled meeting, in Beijing

to explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question. The SRs reiterated the importance of maintaining a political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship while seeking a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable framework for settlement of the boundary question, and resolved to inject more vitality into this process. This was the first meeting of the SRs since frictions had emerged in the Western Sector of the India-China border areas in 2020. The SRs positively affirmed the implementation of the latest disengagement agreement of October 2024, resulting in patrolling and grazing in relevant areas. Continued on page 8

Had fun but it's time, says R Ashwin, announces surprise international retirement

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India's premier off-spinner R Ashwin, on Wednesday, stunned the cricketing world by bidding adieu to his international career in the middle of the ongoing Test series against Australia here despite having a "bit of punch left" in him. The 38-year-old retires from the game as the second highest wicket-taker for India in Tests with 537 scalps in 106 games, placing him only behind the great Anil Kumble (619 wickets) in the overall statistics. In the limited-overs format, being part of the 2011 World Cup and the 2013 Champions Trophy-winning teams would count among

the highlights of his career. He will continue to play club cricket, including the IPL, where he will return to compete for Chennai Super Kings next year. "Today will be the last day for me as an India cricketer in all formats," Ashwin said at the end of the drawn third Test here in a joint press conference with captain Rohit Sharma during which he declared to take any questions and left after making the announcement. The series is still alive with two more Tests to go in Melbourne and Sydney as the two teams are tied 1-1 after logging one win each. Ashwin, who would be headed back to India on Thursday, was seen having an

emotional conversation with star batter Virat Kohli in the dressing room hours before the announcement, sending social media into a frenzy. Kohli had his arm around the senior bowler's shoulder and Ashwin was seen wiping his eyes before breaking into a chuckle. Ashwin played the day-night Test in Adelaide and picked up one wicket. He not being a sure starter in the playing eleven over the course of the three Tests prompted him to think about his future in the team and eventually call time on a remarkable career. Ashwin was not just the master of his craft, he was also considered one of the brightest minds in world cricket. The Chennai-based



player, who holds an engineering degree, usually does well to hide his emotions but sitting alongside longtime teammate Rohit, Ashwin left the stage for the fear of getting overawed by the occasion. "I do feel there is a bit of punch left in me as a cricketer but I would like to showcase that in club level cricket. I have had a lot of fun. I must have created a lot of memories alongside Rohit and several of my other teammates," he said. "I have lost some of them over the last few years (in the team). We are the last bunch of OG's left in the dressing room. I would be marking this as my date of having played at this level," he said,

referring to the likes of the currently out-of-favour Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara. Ashwin played 116 ODIs for India, claiming 156 wickets, while his 65 T20 International outings yielded 72 scalps. He expressed his gratitude towards the BCCI and other senior teammates for his career which began in 2010 in the one-day format before he made his Test debut a year later. "A lot of people to thank but I would be failing in my duties if I did not thank BCCI and fellow teammates. I want to name a few of them. Most importantly Rohit, Virat, Ajinkya, Pujara who have taken those hundred catches around the bat to give me

those wickets I managed to get over the years. "Big thank you to the Australian cricket team, I have enjoyed playing against them." Ashwin also thanked the media for its support over the years. "It is an emotional moment. Please pardon me for that (not taking questions). Thanks for writing good things about me and some nasty things on occasions," said Ashwin on a lighter note as he left the room to a standing ovation. His retirement brought back memories of the 2014 series when the then captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni had quit Tests after conceding an unassailable lead to the home side. Continued on page 8

LLB student shot at by friend

Lucknow (PNS): A first-year LLB student was shot at allegedly at his friend in Aliganj (Sector Q) on Tuesday

night. Police have launched a manhunt for the accused. The bullet pierced through the victim's waist and he bled profuse-

ly. The injured student, Aryan Rana (22), reportedly told the police that he was drinking beer with his friend Himanshu Singh when an argument escalated, leading to the incident. Aryan is currently undergoing treatment at the KGMU Trauma Centre, and his condition remains critical, the police said. Aryan, who is a resident of Adarsh Colony in Jankipuram, stated that Himanshu, a resident of Purania and owner of a car washing centre, met him earlier in the day. They went to Aliganj (Sector Q), bought beer from a local shop, and moved to a secluded spot nearby. During their interaction, an argument broke out, and Himanshu allegedly shot at Aryan, leaving him injured. Aryan was initially taken to a private hospital after which police were alerted. Madiam police reached the scene and shifted Aryan to the trauma centre. CCTV footage confirmed that Aryan and Himanshu were seen together purchasing beer from a model shop in Aliganj. A police spokesman said teams have been formed to arrest the accused.

BTech student alleges gangrape

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A third-year BTech student from Noida was allegedly gang-raped in Lucknow after being invited to the city by an Instagram acquaintance, police said on Wednesday. The 25-year-old victim, originally from Gorakhpur, filed a complaint against four men at the Indiranagar police station on December 15. According to the police, the victim had been in touch with one of the accused, Satish Kashyap, a resident of Takrohi in Indiranagar, via Instagram. On December 12, Satish invited her to meet in Lucknow. Upon arriving near BBD University, the victim was picked up in an SUV by Satish, who took her on a drive to Gomti Nagar. As the outing stretched late into the evening, Satish suggested she stay the night and travel back to Noida the following morning. Trusting

him, she agreed. The victim alleged that Satish then took her to a room in Amarai village, Indiranagar, where three other men—Yusuf, Jatin, and Mannu Yadav, all residents of Indiranagar—were waiting. The four men allegedly held her at gunpoint, took turns sexually assaulting her, and threatened to kill her when she protested. The victim stated that she remained silent out of fear for her life. The following morning, on December 13, Satish dropped her near BBD University and warned her not to report the incident. Traumatized, the victim returned to Noida but later gathered the courage to file a complaint at the Indiranagar police station on December 15. Inspector Sunil Kumar Tiwari confirmed that a case has been registered and efforts are underway to locate and apprehend the accused.

Body of man reported missing found in drain

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The body of a 35-year-old man missing for two days was recovered from a drain in the Madiam area here. The deceased was the son of a retired sub-inspector, and he had left home on Sunday evening. The family members searched for him and lodged a missing report after they could not trace him. On Tuesday night, it was learned that a body had been found in the drain. The family members identified the body by the shoes and informed police. The police sent the body for a post-mortem. The family members of the deceased expressed suspicion that the youth was murdered and his body thrown into the drain. The deceased, Shashikant (35) alias Pintu, used to work as a street light installer. He was a resident of Sector-A in Aliganj. His father Ram Prakash is a retired sub-inspector. His brother Ajay Singh said that

Shashikant left the house at around 6 pm on Sunday. When he did not return home by late night, the family began searching for him. On Monday, the family filed a missing complaint at the Ram-Ram Bank police station. During this time, the family was searching for Shashikant. People from the locality informed the family that a body was lying in the drain near GSI Colony. The family reached the spot and identified the body by the shoes. They also informed the Madiam police. Inspector Shivanand Mishra said that further action will be taken based on the post-mortem report. Shashikant was said to be a liquor addict. At present, no written complaint has been received from the family, the police said. Expressing the possibility of murder, the deceased's brother said that Shashikant had a fight with some people from the neighbourhood about 15 days ago, and during the altercation,

the accused had threatened to kill Shashikant. The family members said that Shashikant never used to go towards the drain where his body was found. "He had no connection with that area either. He was killed and his body was thrown into the drain," the family speculated. Shashikant was married to Savitri, a resident of Achalganj in Unnao, but he got divorced a few days later. Meanwhile, two persons died of electrocution after coming in contact with a high-tension powerline while constructing a house in the Shamli district, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred in Gangeru village on Tuesday evening. SHO of Kandhla police station S Kumar said Munawwar (27) and Uzair (19) were working on erecting a pillar when a steel rod they were holding touched the powerline passing above the land parcel. Both were taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared them dead on arrival.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Sanjay Kumar to Sanjay Kumar Shukla. Sanjay Kumar Shukla S/o Ram Sanahi Shukla R/o C/3/24, Gulmohar Vihar Keshav Nagar Kanpur

सूचना

मेरे ड्राफ्ट बचत खाते मे मेरा नाम सुटिविश अशमान बेगम (ASHMAN BEGUM) दर्ज है जबकि मेरे आधार कार्ड में मेरा सही नाम हासिमा बेगम (HASIMA BEGUM) दर्ज है। मेरे ड्राफ्ट बचत खाते मे भी मेरा सही नाम दर्ज किया जाये। हासिमा बेगम पत्नी मो. जहीर अहमद नि.- 503/120, बरौलिया, डालीगंज, दिगुरिया, लखनऊ।

NOTICE

To be informed that the original allotment letter issued by LDA for my house number ED/531 sector Q Aliganj Lucknow has been lost some where .its use by others will be illegal.Anjali w/o manoj Kumar chaturvedi sector Q Aliganj Lucknow

NOTICE

I Khammpati Sree Ram, Resident of H.No-1-21, punukollu village, pedapadu mandal west godavari dist. andhra pradesh. have changed my name from Khammpati Sree Ram to Kambhampati Sree Ram vide affidavit No 44AA468764 dated 18/12/24 at Kanpur.

NOTICE

To be informed that I am Kusum Lata Upadhayay D/o Late. Dal Bahadur Singh R/o - 2/510 Vivek Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow. My house number 2/510 Vivek Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow is in the name of my late mother Maya Devi. The original allotment letter of the said building is lost. Any use made by it will be considered illegal. Kusum Lata Upadhayay 2/510 Vivek Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Ahmad Ansari to Rais Ahmad Adityanath, asking him to reclaim the land allotted for the construction of a mosque here and claiming that no substantial endeavour has been undertaken to build it. On November 9, 2019, settling a fractious issue that went back more than a century, a five-judge bench headed by the then CJI Ranjan Gogoi paved the way for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, at the site where the 16th century Babri Masjid once stood. It also ruled that an alternative five-acre plot would be found for a mosque in the holy town. The Sunni Central Waqf Board

No endeavour to build Ayodhya mosque, reclaim land: BJP leader to CM Yogi

Ayodhya (PTI): A BJP leader here has written to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, asking him to reclaim the land allotted for the construction of a mosque here and claiming that no substantial endeavour has been undertaken to build it. On November 9, 2019, settling a fractious issue that went back more than a century, a five-judge bench headed by the then CJI Ranjan Gogoi paved the way for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, at the site where the 16th century Babri Masjid once stood. It also ruled that an alternative five-acre plot would be found for a mosque in the holy town. The Sunni Central Waqf Board

later formed the Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation to build a new mosque on the land allotted by the state government in the Dhannipur area of the district. BJP leader Rajneesh Singh, in his letter to the chief minister on December 10, said that since the apex court's verdict, "no substantial endeavour has been undertaken by the Muslim community to construct the mosque". Their "intention was never to establish a mosque there but to perpetuate the discord under the pretext of a mosque", he alleged. "In compliance with the Supreme Court's order, the land allotted to Sunni Central

Waqf Board in Ayodhya is being used by the mosque's responsible persons for other purposes. The Muslim community's intention was never to construct the mosque but rather to keep the disturbance and disorder alive under the guise of a mosque. However, this has not been possible due to your leadership," Singh said in the letter to Adityanath. Asserting that "a mosque is not necessary for offering prayers anyway," he appealed to the chief minister to "issue strict instructions to the officials of the Ayodhya mosque trust to use the land in compliance with the Supreme Court orders". In case of being unable to do

so, issue directives to return the land to the government to prevent its misuse, Singh said. In a conversation with PTI, he said, "The Muslim community merely wishes to preserve Babar's legacy through this mosque and aims to manipulate Hindu sentiments in the name of Babri Masjid." When PTI contacted Athar Husain, the secretary of the Ayodhya Masjid Trust, for his reaction to the issue, he refused to comment. In 2022, Singh petitioned the Allahabad High Court, claiming that the Taj Mahal mausoleum is an ancient temple dedicated to the deity Lord Shiva and is known as the "Tejo Mahalaya".

BJP turning Baba Saheb's vision to real policies; Cong only talks, does nothing: Adityanath

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said while the BJP is turning B R Ambedkar's vision into real policies to change lives of people, the Congress continues to talk without doing anything. His remarks came amid opposition uproar in Parliament over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Ambedkar. In a post on X on Wednesday, the chief minister wrote, "While the Congress has consistently failed to empower backward communities, the BJP has been actively working towards Dr BR Ambedkar's vision of equality." Adityanath went on to add in the same post, "Through steps like expanding reservations and creating opportunities in education and government jobs, the BJP is turning Baba Saheb's vision into real policies, shaping lives. The Congress, on the other hand, continues to talk but does nothing." The Congress on Wednesday demanded the resignation of Shah for his remarks in Rajya

Sabha which it claimed were an insult to Ambedkar. It also demanded that Shah should apologise publicly and in Parliament for the remarks. Congress general secretary-in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh had shared a video snippet on X from Shah's speech in the Upper House. "Abhi ek fashion ho gaya hai — Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Itna naam agar bhagwan ka lete to saath jamnon tak swarg mil jata (It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. If they had taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven)," Shah had said, taking a swipe at the opposition. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday stoutly defended Shah from the Congress' charge that he insulted Ambedkar in his speech in the Rajya Sabha, asserting that the home minister in fact exposed the party's "dark history of insulting" the architect of the Constitution, leaving the main opposition "stung and stunned".

NOTICE

I, Askari Abbas S/O Late Dr. Ali Gauhar R/o Lucknow have lost my Registered Chain deed SI. No-5886, Book No-1 Zild No 3157, page no 681/69/70 dated 31-03-1986 before Sub Registrar Lucknow.

NOTICE

My Mother's name is wrongly printed SAPNA MISHRA in my high school (CBSE) marksheet cum certificate as per Aadhar card & pan card her name is GAYATRI therefore correct the name of my mother. Name in my marksheet of high school NITYA MISHRA D/o late GOVIND MISHRA GAYATRI VANDANA Kanpur dehat U.P 209715

NOTICE

I, Alika Zaidi W/O Askari Abbas R/o Lucknow have lost my Registered chain deed SI. No-364, Book No-1 Zild No 1313 .page no 21-32 dated 04-01-1992 before Sub Registrar Lucknow.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Javid Salmanee to Javed Ahamad, Javed Ahamad S/o Kismat Ulla R/o Vill. Mohammad Pur Wari, Afjal Pur Wari, Kaushambi

NOTICE

Name Omkar Singh unit HQ cop 1 am Geeta Singh son no. 4491982 p rank Nk - sikhih c/o 99 Apo village Jahanpur P.O. - Saniganw police station Neemgaon tehsil-Mitauli-District Kheri resident. I declare in the affidavit that my date of birth was wrongly recorded as 15-7-1956 in the service record. Whereas my date of birth is mentioned as 1-1-1964 in Aadhar Card-9307 0230 9984. Which is correct and true to my knowledge. Now this date of my birth should be considered correct. I execute this affidavit to get my actual date of birth mentioned as 1-1-1964 in the service book of my son Omkar Singh. Geeta Singh Wife Amar Singh Village Jahanpur Post-Saniganwa Police Station-Neemgaon- Tehsil- Mitauli-District- Kheri

NOTICE

To be informed that I am Sita Ram Kashyap S /o late makul kashyap, R/o - 17/206, sector-17 Indira Nagar Lucknow. The original allotment letter, original adjustment letter and original sale deed of my plot number Sector-4/39- A, sector -4, Gomti Nagar Extension have been lost. Any use made by it should be considered illegal

NOTICE

Afajal Khan (Borrower) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of House No. 83/249 (Old) and 83/317 (New) Juhu Parampurva Kanpur Nagar admesuring 58.38 Sq. Yds With DMI, Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd., and the Original sale deed dated 28/06/2003 executed by Smt. Hafjan in favour of Smt. Nazma Begum which is registered in Book No. 1 Vol. No. 2068 on pages 387 to 404 at serial no. 8095 at the office of Sub Registrar Kanpur Nagar and Original sale deed dated 22/02/1971 executed by Sri Ram Gopal Mishra in favour of Smt. Hafjan which is registered in Book No. 1 Vol. No. 2796 on pages 72 to 78 at my serial no. 1763 on 16/05/1971 at the office of Sub Registrar Kanpur Nagar are lost. If any person having any claim against the said Property can contact to me, within 07 days. Bharat Bhatnagar, Advocate Office: Room No. 14 Second Floor Mudgal Adhivakta Bhawan Civil Court Kanpur Nagar Mob. 09839034426

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Niyamat Ali Shaikh to Niyamat Ulla, Niyamat Ulla S/o Ajeet Ulla R/o Vill. Mohammad Pur Wari, Afjal Pur Wari, Kaushambi

NOTICE

We, Vivek Mishra S/O Shrawan Kumar Mishra & Shella Sharma W/O Vivek Mishra, R/O 6/743, Sector-6, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow- 22 do hereby declare that the Original Allotment letter No. 4732 Dtd 28/11/93, Possession letter No. SPS4/935 Dtd 11/01/96 and Sale Deed no. 8396 dtd 29/11/99 by UPAPV in favour of Ms Praveen W/O Mr. Ajaj Haider Zaidi is lost. The address of the property is 4/935 Vikas Nagar Lucknow, U.P. I further state that we wish to create Equitable Mortgage on the said property for loan from SBI RACPC Aliganj, Lucknow. An FIR has been lodged with the police in respect of lost Allotment Letter, Possession Letter & Sale Deed vide FIR No. 2024000987141 Dtd 18.12.2024. If Any objection can be made within 15 days of publication, kindly contact above mentioned branch of SBI

NOTICE

I Amar Singh S/O No. 4491982 p Rank Nk Name Omkar Singh unit HQ cop sikhih c/o 99 Apo Village Jahanpur P.O. I am a resident of Saniganw police station Neemgaon tehsil-Mitauli district Kheri. I declare in an affidavit that my date of birth was wrongly recorded as 6-2-1951 in the service record. Whereas my date of birth is mentioned as 1-1-1960 in Aadhar Card-9703 91106053. Feedback Which is correct and true to my knowledge. Now this date of birth should be considered correct. I execute this affidavit to get my actual date of birth mentioned as 1-1-1960 in the service book of my son Omkar Singh. Amar Singh S/O Naresht Singh Village Jahanpur Post-Saniganwa Police Station-Neemgaon-Tehsil- Mitauli-District- Kheri

CST-UP to fund varsity students' water quality monitoring project

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Final-year BTech students from the Computer Science and Engineering department of the University of Lucknow have achieved a significant milestone. Their project, 'Real-Time Water Quality Monitoring System for Enhancing Water Quality in Urban Water Bodies', has been selected for funding under the Uttar Pradesh Council of Science and Technology's (CST-UP) Student Project Grant Scheme for 2024-25. The project, led by Ranjeet Singh, includes Priyanshu Kumar, Saumya Singh, and Pragya Singh, guided by assistant professor Himanshu Pandey. Vice-Chancellor Prof Alok Kumar Rai praised the students for their dedication, technical expertise, and innovative approach. The project aims to enhance water quality using advanced technologies like real-time data collection on parameters such as temperature, BOD, turbidity, and TDS. It also incorporates garbage identification and remote sensing to analyse water body

degradation. An interactive web portal will allow NGOs and users to report water-related issues. A prototype demonstration is scheduled for April 2025 at CST-UP, Lucknow. Meanwhile, a research study on "Reducing Procrastination Among Adolescent Students" was conducted by Jaya Mishra, a research scholar at LU, under the supervision of Dr Archana Shukla. The study assessed procrastination levels and its cognitive components, such as self-esteem, irrational beliefs, and decision-making ability, among 200 adolescent students. Of these, 23 students were identified with high procrastination, low self-esteem, and poor decision-making. These students underwent 21 days of counselling based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), learning techniques like the 'just 5 minutes' method, planning rewards, grading tasks, and setting time limits. By the end of the sessions, significant improvements in procrastination levels were observed, confirmed by students and their families.

₹5-crore boost for tourism infra in city

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Tourism department is poised to enhance the tourism infrastructure in Lucknow with the development of four prominent sites, backed by a sanctioned budget of approximately Rs 5 crore, with Rs 3 crore already released. Minister of Tourism and Culture Jaiveer Singh announced the initiative on Tuesday, emphasising that Uttar Pradesh's tourism sector is experiencing rapid growth, attracting both domestic and international visitors. Lucknow, known for its rich historical, cultural, and religious heritage, has seen an influx of tourists, with 57 lakh visitors, including 13,081 foreign tourists, recorded between January and September 2024. The city's famous handicrafts, art, and cuisine continue to captivate tourists, contributing to its rising prominence as a tourist destination. To further develop the city's tourism appeal, the government has allocated Rs 2 crore for the construction of a ghat along the Sai Riverbank in Sarojininar. This development will include stairways,

solar lighting, benches, and pathways, providing a serene and enjoyable experience for visitors. Additionally, the state-protected Bada Shivala Shri Siddhnath Temple in Sadar Tehsil will undergo beautification and development with an allocation of Rs 1.02 crore, of which Rs 60 lakh has already been released. The development plan includes the construction of rest houses, signage, benches, and toilets to improve facilities for visitors. In the Lucknow North assembly constituency, the Nanakshahi Math will also be developed with a Rs 1 crore allocation, which includes Rs 60 lakh already disbursed. This project will feature solar lighting, horticulture, benches, signage, and gazebos to enhance the site's appeal to tourists. Furthermore, the Shaheed Raja Digvijay Singh Memorial in Umrigia village will undergo development with an allocation of Rs 1 crore, including Rs 55 lakh already released. The project will include railings, access roads, lighting arrangements, high-mast lights, drainage systems, a children's park, and a ghat along the Gomti river.

CITY BRIEFS



ANNUAL CONCERT

The Pre-Primary students of St Francis' College captivated the audience with their vibrant performances during the enchanting 'Annual Concert' held on Wednesday. The chief guest for the event was Donald Desouza, Chancellor and spokesperson of the Diocese of Lucknow. Thoughtfully curated by the school, the concert aimed to instill awareness and positive habits in young learners. The performances centred around important themes

such as promoting a green and clean environment, saying 'No' to plastic, the beauty of seasons, unity in diversity, patriotism, and the festive spirit of Christmas. Dressed in colourful costumes, the students danced, sang, and enacted skits with great enthusiasm, effectively spreading these vital messages. Parents, guests, and teachers were delighted by the students' energy and confidence, applauding the school's efforts to nurture values through creative expression. The event

concluded with a vote of thanks by the principal.

ATTESTATION PARADE

An attestation parade was held recently at the No. 2 Technical Training Wing of AMC Centre & College, Lucknow, for 559 recruits who successfully completed 23 weeks of Class IV Nursing Assistant training. The parade was reviewed by Brigadier Rishiraj N Verma, Commander of the No. 2 Technical Training Wing, AMC Centre & College. The newly attested sepoy were commended for their impeccable turnout and the precise conduct of the parade. They were encouraged to continue working hard, focus on quality patient care, and strive for higher professional competence. Sepoy (nursing assistant) Robin Kumar was honoured with the 'Best Recruit Trophy' for securing the first position in the course.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, KHORDHA (R&B) CIRCLE, KHORDHA
WORKS DEPARTMENT
Tender call Notice
E-mail: rbcirclekhordha@gmail.com
Bid Identification No. CCE-Khordha (R&B) Circle-22/2024-25 Memo No - 2502 Dt. 13.12.2024
The Chief Construction Engineer, Khordha (R&B) Circle, Khordha on behalf of Governor of Odisha inviting percentage rate bid in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for building works as detailed in the table below:
1. Nature of Work : Building Work
2. No of Work : 1No
3. Tender Cost : Rs. 10000.00 (On-Line)
4. Class of Contractor : B&A Class
5. Available of Bid document in the Website : From 10.00 AM of Dt.21.12.2024 up to 05.00 PM of Dt.30.12.2024 up to 5.00 PM
6. Date of opening of Bid : Dt.31.12.2024 at 1.30 AM
7. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the Website: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in> . Any Addendum / Corrigendum / Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.
Chief Construction Engineer, Khordha (R&B) Circle, Khordha
OIPR-34127/11/0024/2425

GOVT. OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE: KEONJHAR

Date: 17.12.24
1st Corrigendum Notice
Under unavoidable circumstances, the availability of tender online for bidding & opening of Technical Bids of the tender invited vide eProcurement Notice No.3497 Dtd.26.11.24/ Bid Identification No. NCB-17/ RWCKJR / 2024-25 of Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Keonjhar is hereby rescheduled as below.
Procurement Officer : Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Keonjhar
Bid Identification No. : NCB-17 / RWCKJR / 2024-25
Availability of tender Online for bidding : From 11.00 A.M. To 11.00 A.M.
From 11.00 A.M. To 5.00 P.M.
Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification : Dt.27.12.24 up to 5.00 P.M.
Date & Time of Opening of Tender in O/o C.C.E., R.W. Circle, Keonjhar. : Dt.31.12.24 up to 11.00 A.M.
Technical Bid : Will be Intimated later
Financial Bid : Will be Intimated later
All other contents remain unchanged.
Chief Construction Engineer, R.W. Circle, Keonjhar
OIPR-25177/11/0024/2425

CLASSIFIEDS
CHANGE OF NAME
I NIVEA MISHRA D/O RAKESH KUMAR MISHRA R/O 8/226-A Flat No.S-3 Navbharat Mahalaxmi Tower Aryanagar Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh-208002.changed my name to NIVEA KRISHNAD.
PD(1106)A

UP Cong chief, other leaders detained

Rai says will throw Yogi govt in 2027

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai, state incharge Avinash Pande and several other protesting leaders and workers were detained on Wednesday as they tried to leave the party office here for their planned siege of the state assembly during the ongoing winter session.

"We will throw out the Yogi government from power in 2027," Rai told reporters from a bus after police detained him amid heightened security measures in the state capital to thwart the Congress protest. The opposition party was protesting against the UP government over issues like farmer distress, unemployment, inflation, privatisation and law and order.

Barricades were set up around the Assembly premises to prevent Congress workers from reaching the protest site, while route diversions severely impacted traffic movement in the heart of the city. The police, citing curbs under Section 163 (power to issue an order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that are in place in Lucknow, did not allow party workers to move ahead from the party Mall Avenue office. The workers who came out of the office tried to break the barricades and move towards the Assembly but their bid was foiled by the heavy police force deployed there.

Rai, Pande and other leaders were seen outside the party office addressing party workers,



Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai being given water after he briefly fainted during a protest in Lucknow on Wednesday

but they were restrained by the police as they tried to head for the siege. The action continued outside the Congress office for about four hours after which the police detained the leaders. Rai slammed the BJP government over Sambhal violence. "The issues affecting farmers, unemployed youth, inflation, and the worsening law and order situation in the state are being overshadowed. The BJP seeks to create religious and caste-based divides to divert attention from their failures. Despite these hurdles, our fight will continue, and we will try to reach the Assembly," Pande told reporters. Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader Aradhana Mishra 'Mona' raised the matter in the state assembly where she alleged that the "government is

killing democracy" and stifling the voice of the people. She claimed that police were cracking down on protesters, to which Speaker Satish Mahana responded: "You have a lot of privilege (being CLP leader) but you do not have the privilege to hijack Vidhan Sabha (Assembly proceedings). You are free to go anywhere you want and I will see to it who stops you." State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna said, "What is the protest today for? It is unnecessarily spreading anarchy." Leader of Opposition and Samajwadi Party lawmaker Mata Prasad Pandey said in a democracy everybody has the right to protest and alleged that the government is adopting tactics that weaken democracy.

"When we wanted to go to Sambhal, we were not allowed to go there," Pandey added, referring to a Samajwadi Party delegation's proposed visit to the district last month after the violence in the district. Mona later said, "The Congress wants the government to answer on key issues like lawlessness, communal unrest, privatisation, unemployment, and inflation, which have reached alarming levels. "As a national party, it is not just our right but also our moral responsibility to demand accountability. However, look at what's happening — raids at our party offices, barricades, and barbed wires to stop us from peaceful protests. Is this democracy? "Even peaceful protests are now met with suppression. This

violates the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution by Babasaheb Ambedkar," she said. Security was stepped up on Wednesday with all roads leading to the Uttar Pradesh assembly premises barricaded ahead of the state Congress' assembly siege protest. A Congress worker from Lakhimpur Kheri said, "I joined the protest despite an injury to my foot, but the police forcibly put me on a bus." "We are not being allowed to march towards the assembly. This clearly shows that even peaceful demonstrations are not permitted in this democracy. The BJP government is so terrified that it cannot tolerate peaceful protests," another detained worker said.

Key bills pave way for 3 new university campuses

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly passed four bills, paving the way for the establishment of three new private universities and foreign university campuses in the state.

This initiative is set to position Uttar Pradesh as a leading educational hub in the country.

Higher Education Minister Yogendra Upadhyay said in the state assembly that reforms in the higher education sector will elevate Uttar Pradesh's image on both national and international platforms.

"With the establishment of new universities and foreign campuses, students will have the opportunity to access world-class education right in their home state. They will no longer need to go outside the state, as high-quality education will now be affordable and easily accessible here," he said. He added that until now, only institutions registered in Uttar Pradesh could establish universities within the state. However, the new amendment bill allows institutions, companies, and trusts registered in other states with a proven track record to open private universities in Uttar Pradesh.

"Foreign universities recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) will also be eligible to establish campuses in the state," he added.

This bill paves the way for new opportunities for students in Uttar Pradesh. The government's initiatives are expected to transform the state into a hub of educational excellence while fostering employment and research opportunities at both local and global levels. The reforms are not limited to the establishment of new universities but also focus on

SP MLA Atul Pradhan expelled amid uproar

Lucknow (PNS): Uproarious scenes were witnessed in the UP assembly on Wednesday, leading to the expulsion of Samajwadi Party MLA Atul Pradhan for the entire winter session. The SP members created a ruckus over the reply by Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak on the state of health services in the state and the death of infants in a fire at Jhansi Medical College Hospital during Zero Hour. The SP members tramped into the well of the House, demanding an apology from the deputy CM. Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana, who tried to pacify the agitating members, was annoyed with the actions of SP member Atul Pradhan. Perturbed by the unruly behaviour of the SP MLA, Mahana even threatened to get him disqualified from the membership of the assembly for speaking in unparliamentary language about the health minister. The speaker was so angered that he asked the marshal of the assembly to throw out SP MLA Atul Pradhan. Later, the House had to be adjourned after the uproar by the oppo-

sition, and Atul Pradhan was expelled for the entire session. The SP members were agitated over the reply of the health minister. The minister said that emergency services are not available in primary health centres (PHCs), yet they take the patients to PHCs to ensure the casualty and then mislead the people about the deterioration of public health services in Uttar Pradesh. The minister's reply agitated the SP MLAs, and Atul Pradhan used intemperate language against the minister. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Suresh Khanna, took strong objection to the language used by Pradhan and demanded the intervention of the Chair. Speaker Mahana ordered the expulsion of the SP MLA and later adjourned the House.

The assembly later approved the second supplementary budget for the current fiscal year 2024-25 without any discussion, and the House was adjourned for the day. A discussion on Maha Kumbh, which was slated for Wednesday, will now be held on Thursday.

enhancing the overall quality of education, bringing it to international standards. To make higher education more accessible and advanced, the Uttar Pradesh Private Universities Act, 2019 (Uttar Pradesh Act No. 12 of 2019) has been amended. As part of this reform, new universities such as Vidya

Vishwavidyalaya (Meerut), Vivek Vishwavidyalaya (Bijnor), and Chandigarh Vishwavidyalaya (Unnao) are set to be established. These institutions will not only provide students with access to quality education but will also drive regional development and create new employment opportunities.

Both Cong and SP are in disarray: Maurya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Wednesday took a swipe at the Congress's attempt to ghehao the state assembly and accused the opposition of internal divisions and political opportunism. Maurya claimed that both the Congress and the Samajwadi Party were in disarray and were fighting amongst themselves for credit in the wake of the recent political developments in the state.

He remarked, "Both the Congress and SP are divided. Even in the Sambhal incident, the two parties seem to be split into two factions, each blaming the other for not playing a bigger role in their supposed success." The deputy CM went on to mock the Congress-SP alliance, highlighting the tension between the two.

"The SP is claiming that their victory in the last Lok Sabha elections was due to their efforts, while the Congress is saying the same. Both want to showcase their importance. But the truth is that Uttar Pradesh is moving towards a Congress-free future, and the Samajwadi Party is on the path to extinction. In 2027, just like in 2017, the BJP will form the government with a massive majority," Maurya asserted, dismissing the opposition's protests as "holow" and without direction. Maurya's criticism also

extended to the leadership within both parties, saying that neither the Congress nor the SP have a clear leader or policy, and their demonstrations were nothing more than futile attempts to remain relevant in the political landscape of Uttar Pradesh. Maurya's remarks come at a time when SP MP Zia-ur-Rehman Barq has approached the Allahabad High Court to seek the withdrawal of the FIR filed against him in connection with the Sambhal incident, claiming he was not present during the unrest. In response, the deputy CM stated, "Anyone has the right to approach the court. But the facts remain clear - if SP leaders and their supporters, including MPs and MLAs, are found guilty in the Sambhal case, strict action will be taken against them as per the investigation."

Asked about the ghehao, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak said that it has only been planned to grab media headlines and that the Congress has no connection with the people. "The Congress is surrounded by misdeeds and its workers are directionless," Pathak said.

"The state is progressing rapidly with its all-round development after 2017. The people of the state believe that the government has worked to bring Uttar Pradesh to the number one position in the nation. Law and order have improved," he claimed.

Cong worker dies during protest

Lucknow (PNS): A Congress worker died during the party's protest near the Uttar Pradesh assembly on Wednesday, with its UP unit chief Ajay Rai claiming that he died due to "police brutality".

Police said 28-year-old Prabhat Pandey, a native of Gorakhpur, was brought dead to the hospital from Congress office. "Prabhat Pandey was brought to the Civil Hospital in Hazratganj in an unconscious condition from the Congress office. The doctors declared him brought dead," DCP (Central Lucknow) Raveena Tyagi said. "Prima facie, according to doctors, there was no visible injury mark on his body. Apart from this, a post-mortem would be done by a panel and the process would be video-graphed."

Accordingly further legal proceedings would be carried out," Tyagi added. Uttar Pradesh Congress Chief Ajay Rai, in a post on X, said, "Today, while going to ghehao the assembly, our young colleague Prabhat Pandey ji passed away due to police brutality."

"This incident is extremely sad and condemnable. Our Congress family is hurt and angry by this accident. We will not tolerate this incident at all."

"The Yogi government should give financial assistance of Rs 1 crore to the family of the deceased and a government job to one member of the family as compensation," Rai added.

The opposition party was protesting against the UP government over issues like farmer distress, unemployment, inflation, privatisation and law and order. Barricades were set up around the UP assembly premises to prevent Congress workers from reaching the protest site, while route diversions severely impacted traffic movement in the heart of the city.

The police citing curbs under Section 163 (power to issue an order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that are in place in Lucknow, did not allow party workers to move ahead from the party Mall Avenue office.

Maha Kumbh 2025 : Control room designed by Bollywood art director

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In preparation for Maha Kumbh 2025, a state-of-the-art control room has been set up in Prayagraj to serve as the nerve centre of the grand religious event. This facility, designed with the creative expertise of Bollywood's art director and architect Pawan Pandey, will play a pivotal role in ensuring the seamless operation of the fair. Top officials will strategise and oversee every aspect of the event from this control room, which is well-equipped to monitor every inch of the fairgrounds. The conference hall within the control room will host key meetings for managing the fair's arrangements, both before and during the event. Acting on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's instructions, preparations for the world's largest fair are progressing rapidly. Special media blocks are also being set up within the control room to facilitate real-time dissemination of information to the public, ensuring widespread coverage of the event.

According to Additional Fair Officer of Mahakumbh Nagar Vivek Chaturvedi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is enthusiastic about the event. "The chief minister envisions showcasing Maha Kumbh as an example to the world, highlighting why Uttar Pradesh is known as 'Uttam Pradesh'," he remarked. To enhance the beauty of Maha Kumbh, teams of renowned artists from across the country are bringing the walls of Mahakumbh Nagar to life with vibrant and creative artwork.

He also shared that the control room will host VIP meetings to ensure proper arrangements for devotees. Additionally, a conference hall and dedicated media blocks are being set up to provide timely and accurate information to crores of people.

Mumbai-based art director Pawan Pandey, known for his work in films and reality shows, has completed the construction of the control room well ahead of schedule. The control room is designed to ensure maximum security and efficiency. Decorated with artwork inspired by Prayagraj's iconic temples and religious sites, the facility is equipped to accommodate a team of over 100 officials who will monitor every activity during the Maha Kumbh.

Senior fair officials will oversee the entire event from this control room and provide real-time updates to the chief minister. The facility includes specialised cabins for officials to manage various operations, including security, administrative tasks, medical services, and water supply monitoring. To ensure a smooth experience for devotees from across India and abroad, strategies will be planned from this centre. A conference hall has been set up for departmental coordination, and dedicated media blocks are being created to provide accurate and timely updates to the public. Designed in an L-shape for convenience, the control room offers state-of-the-art amenities for officials and staff, making it a high-tech nerve centre for managing the world's largest religious gathering.

Three streams of Ganga merged at Sangam

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Three streams of the Ganga river were merged at the Sangam area here by the Irrigation department of Uttar Pradesh to create better bathing facilities for millions of devotees expected to attend the Maha Kumbh in 2025, officials said on Wednesday.

Approximately 22 hectares of additional space have been created which will allow a large number of devotees to bathe simultaneously at a central location, officials added. Previously, the Ganga had changed its course, splitting into three streams between Shastri Bridge and Sangam Nose. This split impacted the river's purity and complicated the organisation of the Maha Kumbh, officials said.

The division not only reduced the mela area but also disrupted arrangements for the pilgrims, they said. Now, with the efforts of the irrigation department, the river's original course has been restored and it is flowing cohesively as a single stream, they added. The department developed a strategic plan to ensure a grand Maha Kumbh experience, centralising bathing facilities for the anticipated 40 crore devotees at one location instead of spreading them across multiple spots.

The department drew a parallel to the mythological story of Bhagirath, who brought the sacred river to

Earth through rigorous penance for the salvation of his ancestors, "To turn the plan into reality, the expertise of IIT-Guwahati's team was sought. Based on their survey report, three massive dredging machines were deployed to streamline and expand the flow of Ganga in the Sangam area," they said. Initially, the swift current and high water levels of the river posed significant challenges. Stabilizing the dredging machines in the strong flow and merging the two side streams with the central stream proved especially difficult, officials said. To tackle these issues, the dredgers were strategically positioned at various points near Shastri Bridge.

However, the powerful current repeatedly destabilised the heavy dredgers, causing discharge pipes to bend and making it difficult to control the equipment, they added. The team then used large anchors, pontoon bridges and thick ropes secured to the riverbanks to stabilise the machines, they said.

After relentless efforts, the three streams of Ganga river were successfully unified into a single flow which made the Sangam area more spacious and better organised than ever before, officials said.

To level the additional 22 hectares of space, five lakh metric tonnes of sand were arranged, ensuring a well-prepared and accessible fairground for the upcoming Maha Kumbh, officials added.

Akhilesh Yadav hits out at BJP for promoting survey of mosques

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday lashed out at the ruling BJP for promoting the survey of mosques, saying this campaign is a big threat to communal harmony.

"In flagrant violation of the constitutional provisions, the BJP is aiding and abetting the survey of ancient structures/mosques instead of focusing the attention of the government on the welfare of the poor and disadvantaged sections of society," the SP chief said in a statement on Wednesday.

He added, "Whatever the BJP may claim, they do not follow the Constitution given by Dr BR Ambedkar, and this is vindicated by its arbitrary conduct in the Lok Sabha and state assembly, where it stonewalls the questions raised by the opposition parties." Yadav stated that Babasaheb Ambedkar is revered by the marginalised sections of society. His remarks come amid a political slugfest over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent comments on Ambedkar. "Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar is like God to many deprived sections of society. He is worshipped

in every house and village. The BJP is nervous about the growing influence of the PDA, and that is why such statements are being made from time to time," said Yadav. He also alleged that similar language is being used in the UP assembly. "Such language is being used in the UP assembly as well. As a result, the Vidhan Sabha is not functioning properly," the SP chief said. Shah had earlier criticised the Congress, accusing the party of exploiting Ambedkar's name for political gain, calling it a "fashion" for them to do so. "If they had taken the name of

God as many times as they take Ambedkar's, they would have attained heaven for seven lifetimes," Shah remarked. Congress and opposition block INDIA leaders had responded sharply, accusing the BJP of being against the Constitution and Ambedkar's ideology. "This goes against the Constitution. They have been saying from the start that they want to change the Constitution. They oppose Ambedkar and his ideology. Their sole aim is to dismantle the Constitution and undo Ambedkar ji's work. The entire country is aware of this," Yadav said.

लखनऊ विकास प्राधिकरण
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सार्वजनिक सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को को सूचित किया जाता है कि प्राधिकरण की आवासीय/व्यवसायिक रेंट/नजूल/इ-मूवमेन्ट-दूरदूत योजनाओं के निम्नलिखित आवेदकों द्वारा उनके नाम के सामने अंकित सम्पत्ति का हस्तानांतरण/नामांकरण किए जाने हेतु प्राधिकरण में प्रार्थना पत्र प्रस्तुत किया गया है:-

क्र.सं.	मूल आवेदी का नाम	भवन/सूखण्ड संख्या	योजना का नाम	मूव दिनांक	मूल आवेदी के उत्तराधिकारी अथवा आवेदक का नाम	उत्तराधिकारी के पत्र में अनापत्ति कर्ताओं के नाम	मूल आवेदी से (नोटक) का सम्बन्ध
1	श्री मिट्टन लाल (मृतक)	सूखण्ड सं.- शी-7	सेक्टर-एफ, अलीगंज योजना, लखनऊ	24.11.2024	1. श्री मनोज गर्ग	वसीयतनामा के आधार पर	पुत्र पुत्र
2	स्व. श्रीमती प्रतिमा त्रिपाठी (मृतक)	EWS भवन सं.- 6/78A	सेक्टर-6, गोमती नगर विस्तार, लखनऊ	21.07.2016	श्री आशुतोष त्रिपाठी श्री शौर्य त्रिपाठी	-	पति पुत्र
3	स्व. सुखदा देवी	सम्पत्ति सूखण्ड सं.- SS-75 सेक्टर-एन	अलीगंज योजना	02.03.2023	1. श्री नन्द किशोर सिंह-पुत्र	-	पुत्र
4	श्रीमती कृष्णा चौधे	भवन सं.- एल-3/68	विनय खण्ड, गोमती नगर योजना	15.04.2024	श्री रितेश कुमार चौधे श्री निखिलेश कुमार चौधे	श्री ददन चौधे श्रीमती अर्चना दूधे	पुत्र पुत्र पति पुत्री
5	स्व. श्रीमती ज्योत्सना सिंह एवं स्व. कमलेश कुमार सिंह (मृतक)	भवन सं.- एल.एम.पी.-8	सेक्टर-सी, अलीगंज योजना, लखनऊ	28.10.2016 02.12.2022	1. श्री आदित्य सिंह 2. श्रीमती शान्मयी सिंह	-	पुत्र पुत्री

उपर्युक्त नामानांतरण के आवेदन के सम्बन्ध में यदि किसी भी व्यक्ति को कोई आपत्ति हो तो वह साक्ष्य सहित प्रकाशन तिथि से 30 दिनों के अन्दर अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के कार्यालय में प्राप्त करा दे। निश्चित तिथि तक कोई आपत्ति प्राप्त न होने पर प्राधिकरण अगिलेखों में कॉलम-6 पर लिखित व्यक्ति का नाम दर्ज कर लिया जायेगा तथा उसके बाद किसी आपत्ति पर विचार नहीं किया जायेगा।

सचिव

Guv: Work being done towards health security of women

...inaugurates 'Sabal Kashi' programme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Governor Anandiben Patel on Wednesday attended the Jeevan Raksha HPV Vaccine Abhiyan programme as the chief guest in a camp organised under the Cervical Cancer Awareness Programme at Kasturba Gandhi Residential Girls School (city area) located in Shivpur here. On the occasion, 100 girls were vaccinated for free against HPV. Under the campaign, 100 per cent vaccination of girls aged 9 to 14 years of all schools in the district will be done in the next 15 days. A total of 80,000 girls of the district will be vaccinated. The vaccination will be done twice at an interval of six months. The Governor also inaugurated the 'Sabal Kashi' programme by pressing the button. She expressed happiness while addressing the people and said that the government's focus is on the uplift of women as work is being done towards the health security of women. Referring to the work done in this field during the Gujarat government, she talked about the efforts made for the treatment of congenital defor-



Governor Anandiben Patel talking to girls before inaugurating the 'Sabal Kashi' programme at a Shivpur school in Varanasi on Wednesday.

mities and cleft lips. She said how this campaign was started by vaccinating the girls of the people living in the Raj Bhawan who were between 9 to 14 years of age. She told how major companies are spending their CSR in such uplift programmes. "Everyone's attention should be towards daughters/women so that we can empower them and reduce our future expenses by 50 per cent", she said, asking women to take care of themselves. "Only when your health is good, you will be able to take care of your children. We have to give up the thinking of son-daughter, we have to give up the discrimination between son and daughter, only then will they earn you a

name in the future. Recognise the strength that is in the daughter", she said. The Governor appealed to everyone to connect the girls living around them with this vaccination campaign. She also asked the society to spend generously in such a way that the lives of girls can be kept healthy. She inspired doctors and youth to do research, just like our scientists made the corona vaccine. Anandiben also praised the work being done by the Prime Minister in the field of research and the expenses being made for the same. In the end, she also praised the officers working for social service. Zila Panchayat Poonam

Maurya welcomed the guests and called it an important day to secure the future of daughters. She said after vaccination cervical cancer in women can be reduced by 90 per cent. She also praised the Yuva Unstoppable organisation and the Governor for the programmes being run continuously in view of women. Director of Yuva Unstoppable organisation Rishi Kumar presented complete information regarding free life saving HPV vaccination. He said 80,000 girls aged 9 to 14 will be vaccinated twice at a gap of six months. In the programme, the Governor started the 'Sabal Kashi' programme by pressing the button. She gave certificates to 10 girls who were vaccinated. The certificates were also distributed by the Governor to those who were identified and treated for congenital deformities and were corrected. At the end District Magistrate S Rajalingam expressed gratitude to the Governor for constantly paying attention to Varanasi and how the work of health of girls, uplift of Anganwadi centres etc is being continuously carried out under her guidance. He also praised the Chief Development Officer (CDO) and his entire team. Divisional Commissioner Kaushal Raj Sharma, CDO Himanshu Nagpal and other senior officers were also present.

Anandiben stresses need for education of rural women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Governor Anandiben Patel said that the role of an educated and cultured woman is important in envisioning a prosperous society. It is they who influence freedom and humanity. "India is a country of ideal women. Be it Gargi or Maitreyi of ancient times or the woman scientist of today who participated in the successful flight of our second Mangalyaan (Mars Orbiter), or the first citizen of India, our President", she said, while addressing the joint convocation of various colleges run by Maharaj Kashiraj Dharmakarya Nidhi at Maharani Gulab Kunwar Women's Post Graduate College, Pindra, on Wednesday. It was a joint convocation of Maharani Gulab Kunwar Women's Post Graduate College, (Pindra), Maharani Banaras Women's Post Graduate College (Ramnagar) and Maharaj Balwant Singh Post Graduate College (Gangapur), all affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth (MGKV), Varanasi. The Governor said the aim of human life is to acquire knowledge through education and progress through education. She started her address by saying that education is an important part of personality development. She gave meaningful speech while shedding light on



Governor/Chancellor Anandiben Patel along with gold medal winners at a joint convocation of three colleges at Pindra in Varanasi on Wednesday.

topics like the Indian knowledge system, Indian culture, religion, yoga etc. In her presidential address, the Governor/Chancellor said that students can get government jobs on the basis of merit and talent. "Students who do not get government jobs can do business by taking advantage of government schemes through their skills and technology", she said, stressing on the need for rural women to be educated and also praised the work done by the three colleges in educating women. The joint convocation started with the educational delegation. Chancellor/Governor of Uttar Pradesh Anandiben Patel, President of Maharaj Kashiraj Dharmakarya Nidhi Maharaj (Dr) Anant Narayan Singh,

chief guest / Vice-Chancellor of Karnataka Sanskrit University (Bengaluru) Prof S Ahilya, MGKV V-C Prof Anand Kumar Tyagi, Registrar Dr Sunita Pandey, principals of all the three colleges, members of the Management Committee and the Academic Council were present. First of all, after the national anthem, the guests garlanded the picture of Maa Saraswati and the former Kashi Naresh (Dr) Vibhuti Narayan Singh. Thereafter, according to the Sanatan tradition, after the Vedic Mangalacharan, Maharaj Anant Narayan Singh presented bouquets to the guests on the stage. MGKV Registrar called the principals of the colleges to present the graduate and post graduate degree

recipients of the three colleges. The principals presented all the degree holders of their respective colleges. After this, the MGKV V-C Prof Tyagi gave certificates to all the degree holders. Then the college secretary invited the gold medal winners and the V-C presented the Maharani Jayanti Kunwar Smriti Gold Medal to Preeti, Sifat Parveen and Vaishali for obtaining the highest marks. In his address, Prof Tyagi motivated the students to strive for employment after education. He asked the students to make a plan to achieve their goal. Thereafter, Prof Dharmendra Kumar Mishra, Manager, Management Committee proposed the vote of thanks. Principal of Maharaj Balwant Singh Postgraduate College (Gangapur) Prof Purushottam Singh and others were also present. The programme was conducted by Dr Rahul Gupta and Mangalacharan was presented by Dr Abhishek Akrani. A total of 160 students were awarded degrees in the joint convocation, in which 40 students of Maharani Gulab Kunwar Women's Postgraduate College and a total of 60 students of Maharani Banaras Women's Postgraduate College and 60 students of Maharaj Balwant Singh Postgraduate College, Gangapur were awarded degrees.

Test run from Motijheel to Kanpur Central stn completed successfully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

For the first time, the Kanpur Metro train successfully completed a test run from Motijheel to Kanpur Central station on Tuesday. The test run was conducted on both the upline and downline tracks. Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC) Sushil Kumar, Director (Works & Infrastructure) CP Singh, Director (Rolling Stock) Naveen Kumar along with other senior officials were present on the occasion. This marks a major step forward in preparations for the extension of passenger services from IIT to Kanpur Central set to launch in January 2025. Regular trial runs on this route will commence soon with work at all stations from Motijheel to Kanpur Central progressing at a rapid pace. The Kanpur Metro, which is presently operated on the elevated viaduct, will soon begin running in the underground tunnel, carrying passengers to its underground stations for the first time. In July of this year a test run was conducted on the upline extending to the Nayaganj underground station and in October the down-line was tested. On Tuesday

after the installation of tracks, third rail systems, signals and other necessary infrastructure on both lines up to Kanpur Central, the metro train was taken to Central Station for a test run. During this test run, various systems, including tracks and power supply, were tested. Additionally, the third rail installed parallel to the metro track, was charged for the first time up to Central Station. During the Kanpur Metro train's test run, the train operated at low speed in Automatic Train Protection (ATP) mode. As part of the signaling map verification test, the software locations of equipment along the track—such as the TRA signal and axle counter—were cross-checked with their actual positions. Based on the results of this process, the software will be upgraded in the coming days. Following this, high-speed tests of the train will also be conducted. The Kanpur Metro currently operates on the priority corridor from IIT to Motijheel which includes a total of nine elevated stations. With the extension of the metro route to Kanpur Central in January 2025, five additional stations—Chunnignj, Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha, Nayaganj and Kanpur Central—will be inte-

grated into the network. These stations will be underground meaning the metro will operate below ground within the city. Located in some of the busiest and most commercially important areas of the city, this extension will significantly reduce travel time and energy consumption. The metro's convenient and affordable service is expected to have a highly positive impact on the city's economy. Managing Director Sushil Kumar congratulated all employees and city residents on this significant occasion. He said that Kanpur Metro has achieved remarkable milestones in the city's history, successfully overcoming various challenges during its construction. "Our underground metro route, passing through the busiest areas of the city, will make urban travel much smoother and more convenient," he said. During the test run various systems, including tracks and power supply, were tested. The data collected will be analysed to enhance operations. He also noted that the finishing work on stations up to Kanpur Central will soon be completed and in the new year, the people of Kanpur will be gifted with the metro service from IIT to Kanpur Central.

Workshop to promote Hindi in govt work

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A workshop was organised at National Sugar Institute (NSI) on Tuesday with the aim of promoting Hindi in government work. More than 45 officers and employees of the institute participated in it. After garlanding the portrait Maa Veenapani and lighting the lamp, the programme was inaugurated by Director, Prof Seema Paroha. Prof Paroha said, "the need of the hour is that we should give Hindi language its dignified place. At the time of the making of the Constitution, for ease of work in the office a provision was made for the use of English along with Hindi for some time, but even after a such a long time of independence, there has been no change in the situation. The habit of doing official work in English can be seen in every office. The knowledge of English is not bad, but it should be used where appropriate. It is essential to encourage work in Hindi, especially in Hindi speaking areas, only then we will be able to achieve our goal of implementing Hindi in official work".

She said it is a matter of pride for the institute, its employees and the entire Kanpur that for the first time, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Official Language has announced to give the third prize to it for excellent work in Hindi. The key speaker in the programme was Assistant Director (Official Language) Malika Dwivedi who threw light on the word power of Hindi, correct use of words, synonyms of words, word strength etc. Dwivedi said words have their own world, they also progress and decline. Linguistics is an important subject for knowledge, which should be studied by everyone. Among the participants officers Vinay Kumar, Mihir Mandal, Dr Sudhanshu Mohan and Daya Shankar Mishra put forward their doubts before the guest, which were resolved by her. Senior officers Shailendra Kumar Trivedi, Sanjay Chauhan, Ashok Kumar Garg, Anup Kumar Kanojia, Dr Ashok Kumar Yadav, Dr Anant Lakshmi Ranganathan, Virendra Kumar and Akhilesh Kumar Pandey were present.

Varanasi has made unique contribution in enrichment of Hindi language: GM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The half-yearly meeting of City Rajbhasha Implementation Committee was organised on Wednesday under the aegis of Rajbhasha department of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW). The meeting was chaired by president of the committee and General Manager (GM) of BLW Naresh Pal Singh. Addressing the meeting, Singh said, "Varanasi has made a unique contribution in the enrichment of Hindi language. We should prove the significance of public service by working in the language of the people. Technical writing and original thinking in Hindi is very important for the creation of a developed India. All offices should share their technical knowledge in Hindi and publish it in the e-magazine of the committee 'Banaras Darpan'". During the meeting, the grand launch of the e-magazine 'Banaras Darpan' was done. On the occasion the offices that made excellent contribution in the implementation were honoured. BLW, Hydrological Observation Circle, Regional Silk Technology Institute,



BLW GM NP Singh presenting Rajbhasha shield to a government organisation in Varanasi on Wednesday.

Meteorological Office, PM Shri Kendriya Vidyalaya, Central Higher Institute of Tibetan Studies, ECGC Limited, Airports Authority of India and Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited were honoured with shields and certificates. Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) Vineet Kumar Srivastava emphasised the need to pay more attention to seminars and promotion of Hindi for the progress of the Rajbhasha. Chief Rajbhasha Officer (CRO) and vice-president of

the committee Praveen Kumar welcomed all the representatives and informed about the creative efforts being made for the effective implementation of the Rajbhasha Policy. The meeting was conducted by Senior Rajbhasha Officer Dr Sanjay Kumar Singh, who apprised the committee of the progress made on all points under the annual programme. In the meeting, representatives of various government offices, autonomous organisations and corporations discussed and expressed commitment towards the overall development of official language Hindi.

Rare mediastinal tumour removed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The collaborative work of paediatric surgeon, paediatrician and anaesthetist led to successful surgery of a one-year old-boy with rare mediastinal tumour via VATS (video assisted thoroscopic surgery) in Sir Sunderlal Hospital in Banaras Hindu University (SSH-BHU). This was the first case of VATS for removal of anterior mediastinal tumour in an infant in Purvanchal. Anterior mediastinal tumours are masses located in anterior part of thoracic cavity close to the heart. Three important factors in the management of mediastinal mass are age, presenting symptoms and position in mediastinum. Large

tumour of size approximately 10 x 9 cm abutting heart, collapsing left lung was operated in paediatric surgery OT. The case was referred from Prayagraj to a higher centre for surgery. The boy was referred to SSH-BHU with a large thoracic mass, such that child had difficulty in breathing because the tumour was compressing the lung and heart. Child was evaluated by an expert team of paediatricians under Prof Vineeta Gupta and Dr Priyanka Agarwal. After detailed discussion, the child was prepared for VATS (key-hole surgery for chest). The surgical team was led by Prof Sarita Chowdhary, Dr Kanika Sharma (Associate Professor) under guidance of Prof SP Sharma. Dr Ajit and Dr

Bhanu Murthy (senior resident) assisted in the case. Suresh (Nursing officer) and other OT technicians played important role in surgery. Surgery was performed recently. The anaesthesia team was led by Prof RB Singh, Dr Amrita (Associate professor), Dr Pratima (Assistant professor) and Dr Steffi and Dr Babli (senior resident). After two hours of procedure, the tumour could be safely removed in completion. "The child was shifted to the ward, and has been doing well in the ward. The child is breathing comfortably and feeding well. The child is prepared for discharge. The parents of child are very satisfied seeing their child playing comfortably", claimed BHU doctors.

Students provided fresh perspective on interviews

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, BHU, organised a guest lecture on 'The art of interview and resume building' by Joint President & HR Head, Hindalco Industries Limited (Specialty Aluminas & Chemicals) Shishir Misra at HN Tripathi Hall, FSS-BHU recently. It offered students actionable insights, practical advice and a fresh perspective on interviews, personal branding, and long-term career growth. Misra stressed the critical role of domain expertise and situation-based skills in interviews. On career preparedness he emphasised preparing for the next 25-30 years of

career growth, focusing on bridging the gap between how one perceives oneself and how others perceive them. On networking and alumni support, Misra encouraged students to collaborate with peers and leverage alumni networks for practical advice, career guidance and interview preparedness. On continuous improvement, he said consistent efforts, even small ones, yield significant results over time. Misra shared tips on creating a positive and lasting impression during interviews. Having interviewed over 27,000 candidates, he highlighted that interviewers assess not just domain knowledge but also adaptability and response to various scenarios.

UP Board exam: Tender application date extended for monitoring question papers through AI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The UP Board has invited tenders to monitor the question papers in the strong rooms through Artificial Intelligence (AI) during the High School and Intermediate examinations of the year 2025. Board Secretary Bhagwati Singh has extended the date of application to participate in the tender till December 21. The board examination will be conducted at 8,140 centres in the state. The UP Board is preparing to monitor the question papers kept in the strong rooms of these centres through AI. For this tenders were sought from agencies providing

AI facilities till December 6. On the demand of some companies the date for receiving applications was extended to December 16. The tender was to be opened on Tuesday to finalise the agency, but the date for applying has been extended again to December 21 and the tender will be opened on December 23. After that, the agency will be finalised after conducting technical and financial tests. After this, a state level control room will be set up at UP Board headquarters Prayagraj and camp office Lucknow and networking system will be installed for monitoring through AI in the strong

rooms of all examination centres. The board examination is to be held from February 24 to March 12. ROAD MISHAP: A 20-year-old youth was killed while another was injured in a road accident near Naugwa Tail under Kaundhiara police station area. The police sent the body for post-mortem examination. According to the police they were returning home on the bike when it suddenly collided with a tree on the side of the road near Naugwa Tail. The deceased was identified as Sachin Bind of Sukhu Ka Pura village under Ghurpur police station. He was the youngest of three brothers and one sister.

MoU to improve maternal & child health

Kanpur (PNS): The Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU), Kanpur, on Wednesday signed a significant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the global organisation Vitamin Angels (VAI) dedicated to improving maternal and child health through nutritional interventions. This collaboration marks a vital step towards eradicating maternal anaemia and promoting community health, aligning with the Government of India's Anaemia Mukht Bharat program. Under this partnership, CSJMU will play a pivotal role in academic,

research and community awareness activities focusing on maternal nutrition and anaemia prevention. To achieve this, VAI has anchored Project AMMA in three blocks of Kanpur. The project aims to enhance community awareness, promote iron-folic acid supplements and improve coordination among government departments such as Health, Women and Child Development, Panchayati Raj, and Education. Addressing mediapersons, V-C Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak said, "This partnership strengthens the univer-

sity's commitment to public health. Through collaborative research, fieldwork and student participation, we aim to make a significant contribution to improving maternal health in the region." Dr Ashutosh Mishra, Senior Regional Technical Director and Programme Director for Asia at Vitamin Angels, said, "This MoU

establishes a strong link between academic excellence and practical health interventions. Together, we will address critical health issues like anaemia with innovative strategies and empower the healthcare system." Prof Sandeep Kumar Singh said, "We are preparing students to contribute effectively to public health while gaining practical experience. Bridging classroom knowledge with real-world applications is our primary objective." SEWAGE SYSTEM: Dozens of residents of C Block, Govind

Nagar, are up in arms against the local Jal Kal Vibhag authorities for turning a blind eye to their pathetic sewage system. They met the GM, Jal Kal Vibhag, Anand Kumar Tripathi and handed over a memorandum to him who assured them of resolving their problem soon. RK Mishra, who led the delegation, said he had also lodged a complaint on the IGRS portal for early solution of the problem. CHAMPIONSHIP: The two-day Shanti Devi Memorial Inter-school U-14 Futsal Championship 2024 will be organised at TSH on December 20 and 21.

Picnic camp organised for kids

Prayagraj (PNS): A picnic camp was organised for the children of Tender Feet School and Shishu Grih by North Central Railway Women Welfare Organisation (NCRWFO) headquarters, Prayagraj, at the stadium located at Railgaon, Subedarganj here on Wednesday. The president of the organisation, Chetna Joshi extended best wishes to all the children participating in the picnic camp. A programme related to sports activities was organised for the children. In it all the children of the school and Shishu Grih participated in various types of sports activities. Children participated in the programme in large numbers with zeal and

enthusiasm. On this occasion gifts were given to all the children by the president of the organisation Chetna Joshi. The principal of Tender Feet School as well as all the teachers and staff of Shishu Grih were present. Secretary Richa Verma, including other office-bearers Supriya Sinha, Madhuri Singh, Rakhi Jain, Alka Garg, Sadhna Kumar, Sunita Bharti, Vasudha Gupta and Yusra Yusuf were present.



BJP, Congress name nominees for simultaneous poll panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP is considering the names of its seasoned MPs Ravi Shankar Prasad and Nishikant Dubey as nominees for the parliamentary panel that will scrutinise simultaneous poll bills, while Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Manish Tewari are set to be among the Congress representatives, sources said. Sukhdeo Bhagat and Randeep Surjewala are the Congress' other choices for the joint committee of Parliament. Kalyan Banerjee and Saket Gokhale of the Trinamool Congress, Shrikant Shinde of the Shiv Sena, Sanjay Jha of the JD(U), and T M Selvaganapathi and P Wilson of the DMK are expected to be part of the panel which may have 31 members - 21 from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha. Sources said Anurag Thakur and P P Chaudhary are also being considered as the probable BJP choices for the panel in which the saffron party and its allies will be in a majority due

to their numerical superiority in Parliament. The two 'One Nation One Election' (ONOE) bills, including one requiring an amendment in the Constitution, that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday after a fiery debate. Opposition parties dubbed the draft laws -- a Constitution amendment bill and an ordinary bill -- as an attack on the federal structure, a charge rejected by the government. Speaking to reporters on the Parliament premises, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi had termed the bills "anti-constitutional". "It is against the federalism of our nation. We are opposing the bill," she had said. The BJP and its allies such as the TDP, JD(U) and Shiv Sena have stoutly defended the bills, saying frequent elections are an obstruction to development programmes and simultaneous polls will boost them by cutting down on election expenditure.

First Ganges river dolphin tagged in Assam



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ganges River Dolphin, a national aquatic animal has been tagged for the first time in Assam, marking a historic achievement for wildlife conservation of the freshwater species in the state. The tagging was part of a collaborative project between the Union Ministry of Environment and the National CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority), with support from the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII). The project was executed in partnership with the Assam Forest Department and Aaranyak, a wildlife NGO based in Assam. Bhupender Yadav, the Union Cabinet Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change shared the information on his official X handle and stated, "Happy to share the news of the first-ever tagging of Ganges River Dolphin in Assam—a historic milestone for the species and India!" "This MoEFCC and National CAMPA-funded project, led by the Wildlife Institute of India (@wii_india) in collaboration with Assam Forest Dept and Aaranyak, will deepen our understanding of conserving our National Aquatic Animal," he further stated. The Ganges River Dolphin, once widely distributed across the major river systems of the

Indian subcontinent, has seen its population decline significantly in recent years. These tagging efforts have proven crucial in understanding the movement, behavior, and habitat preferences of these vulnerable species, aiding in their protection and management. "This data will be crucial for analysing the movement patterns of dolphins in response to changes in water flow within this carefully regulated river system. It will also offer insights into their habitat selection and behavioral preferences which is crucial for its conservation in the face of mounting environmental pressures," explained Syed Ainul Hussain, a WII scientist and an expert in aquatic wildlife. In January 2022, experts from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), in collaboration with the Sindh Wildlife Department, successfully tagged three dolphins in Pakistan with satellite transmitters. This marked the first time such technology was applied to any river dolphin species in Asia. Satellite tagging of river dolphins was first pioneered in South America, where approximately 50 Amazon river dolphins have been successfully tagged. This initiative has provided essential data for the conservation of these dolphins and their habitats. Additionally, a Yangtze finless porpoise, the only species of freshwater porpoise, was tagged in China, marking a significant contribution to the study of freshwater species.

Gagan Gill and Easterine Kire among 21 recipients of Sahitya Akademi Awards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Hindi poet Gagan Gill and English writer Easterine Kire are among the 21 recipients of the annual Sahitya Akademi Awards, the organisation announced on Wednesday. Recommended by jury members in 21 languages, the awards recognise works in different categories including novels, short stories, poetry, essays and plays. Gill was selected for her book on poetry "Main Jab Tak Aai Bahar", Kire made it to the coveted list for her novel "Spirit Nights". The winning list includes eight poetry books, three novels, two short stories, three essays, three works of literary criticism, one play and one research. Sohan Kaul will receive the award for her Kashmiri novel "Psychiatric Ward", while Paul

Kaur has been selected for her Punjabi book on poetry "Sun Gunvanta Sun Budhivanta: Ithaasnama Punjab". Other recipients of award in poetry include K Jayakumar (Malayalam), Haobam Satyabati Devi (Manipur), Dileep Jhaveri (Gujarati), Sameer Tanti (Assamese), Mukut Maniraj (Rajasthani) and Dipak Kumar Sharma (Sanskrit). Apart from Kire and Kaul, Aron Raja also made it to the winning list in the novels genre for his fiction book "Swrni Thakhal" in Bodo. Yuva Baral's "Chhichimira" (Nepali) and Hundraj Balwani's "Purzo" (Sindhi) were the picks in the short stories section. Mukesh Thali (Konkani), Mahendra Malangia (Maitihili) and Baisnabh Charan Samai (Odia) will receive the award for their essays, while AR Venkatachalapathy (Tamil), recognised for his research and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and farmers during a meeting in Delhi.

Sharad Pawar meets PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

NCP-SP chief Sharad Pawar met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, weeks after the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) was trounced in the assembly elections in Maharashtra by the BJP-led Mahayuti.

Pawar met the prime minister in his office in Parliament House along with two farmers from Phaltan in western Maharashtra and presented him with a box of pomegranates from their farm. Pawar had recently written to the prime minister, inviting him to inaugurate the 98th Marathi Sahitya Sammelan

scheduled to be held at Talkatora Stadium in the national capital in February. "I did not broach the topic of Sahitya Sammelan," Pawar said after the meeting with the prime minister. In a social media post, the Prime Minister's Office said Sharad Pawar, along with a group of farmers, met the

Prime Minister on Wednesday. It also posted pictures of the NCP-SP chief presenting pomegranates to PM Modi. In the Maharashtra assembly elections last month, the Congress-NCP(SP)-Shiv Sena(UBT) alliance -- MVA -- faced a humiliating defeat at the hands of BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP's Mahatuti alliance.

SJE ministry report slams allocation failures in tribal welfare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel has taken exception to the Government's failure to allocate funds under the Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) scheme during 2022-23 in states like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand which have significant tribal populations. The parliamentary panel report on Social Justice and Empowerment for demand for grants by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in its report tabled in Lok Sabha questioned how planned developmental projects could proceed effectively in the absence of financial resources, particularly in states with large tribal populations. It highlighted that the budgetary allocation for the PVTG scheme had been substantially reduced during the 2020-21 to 2022-23 period while no funds were released to states such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, despite the large tribal populations in these regions. The committee also flagged systemic inefficiencies, including delayed submission of utilization certificates by states and procedural bottlenecks that have hampered progress in previous years.

Panel meets to select next NHRC chairperson

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi met here on Wednesday to select the next chairperson of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), sources said. They also said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi attended the meeting as leaders of the opposition in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha respec-

tively. The post of NHRC chairperson has been vacant since Justice (retd) Arun Kumar Mishra completed his tenure on June 1. A former judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Mishra served as the eighth chairperson of the rights panel and was appointed to its top post in June 2021. According to the law governing NHRC, while the committee which selects the NHRC chief is headed by the prime minister, it has the Lok Sabha

Speaker, home minister, leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha and deputy chairperson of Rajya Sabha as its members. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, a member of the NHRC, became its acting chairperson after Justice Mishra demitted office. A former chief justice of India or a retired judge of the top court is appointed as NHRC chairperson by the president on the recommendation of the selection committee.



The report also pointed out 74 sanitation workers out of 1,035 sanitation workers who died while cleaning the sewer and septic tanks are yet to be paid compensation.

Report highlights gaps in SC protection, welfare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid growing demand by the Opposition for a national caste census, a Parliamentary panel has expressed concerns over the failure of several states to set up the necessary systems to effectively address atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs). The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment headed by Member of Parliament PC Mohan in its report tabled in Lok Sabha on Wednesday took exception to the persistent systemic gaps in the implementation of laws designed to protect SCs from violence and discrimination. The report pointed out that despite the availability of central government funds, many states have not effectively utilised these resources or established proper mechanisms to enforce the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The report also emphasised broader challenges in the implementation of welfare schemes under the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment. Significant allocations under key programmes like the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SCs and the National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)

remained underutilised, with bottlenecks such as incomplete documentation, errors in Aadhaar seeding and delays in states releasing their share of funds. States like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Odisha were singled out for consistently lagging in fund utilisation and achieving implementation targets. Many eligible beneficiaries, it noted, remain unaware of their entitlements due to inadequate publicity. To address these issues, the panel recommended stricter monitoring, greater accountability, and more coordinated efforts between central and state governments. It also called for expanding outreach and awareness about welfare programs, especially in marginalized communities, and ensuring better implementation of schemes like SMILE (for transgender persons and beggars) and SHREYAS (for SC students in higher education). The report also pointed out 74 sanitation workers out of 1,035 sanitation workers who died while cleaning the sewer and septic tanks are yet to be paid compensation despite Supreme Court Judgement of 2014 which directed that the State Governments/UTs must ensure payment of compensation of Rs 10.00 lakh to the family of a victim in case of death of a worker while cleaning sewer/septic tank.

Jaishankar, Gideon Sa'ar talk amid ceasefire talks between Hamas-Israel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

S Jaishankar, minister of external affairs, on Wednesday held a phone conversation with his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa'ar amid signs of a possible ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. There have been flurry of diplomatic engagements in the last few days for the proposed ceasefire and hostage release deal after months of deadlock in the negotiations between the two sides. Around 95 hostages are reportedly in the custody of Hamas in Gaza. "Pleased to speak to FM @gidonsaar of Israel today. Appreciate his briefing on the ongoing developments in the region. Also discussed our bilateral relations and efforts to strengthen them," Jaishankar said in a social media post.

"Look forward to meeting in person," he said. The two foreign ministers were understood to have also discussed the situation in Syria following the collapse of President Bashar Assad's regime 11 days back. Rebel forces overthrew Assad's authoritarian government on December eight after capturing several other prominent cities and towns. Assad fled to Russia after the rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) took control of Damascus, marking the end of his family's 50-year rule. In its reaction, India pitched for a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process in that country. "We underline the need for all parties to work towards preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on December nine.

SC terms low pension for retired judges pitiable

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday lamented the meagre pension, ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000, being given to some retired High Court judges and termed it "pitiable". The top court asked the authorities to have a "humane approach" instead of adopting a "legal approach". A bench of Justices BR Gavai and KV Viswanathan was dealing with a batch of pleas raising the issue of different pension being payable to retired High Court judges. One of the key reasons was that the High Court judges, who have been elevated from District judiciary, were covered under the New Pension Scheme. While those, who have been elevated to the High Court from the Bar, were the beneficiaries of the Old Pension Scheme leading to the mismatch in the pension payable to two sets of high court judges. "You cannot have a legal approach in every matter. Sometimes, you need to have a humane approach," observed the Bench. "It is pitiable," the bench said, noting some retired High



Court judges were getting pension between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15,000. Attorney General R Venkataramani mentioned the matter before the bench and requested for a hearing in January, 2025. The AG said said the government would try to resolve the issue. "It is better you persuade them that our intervention should be avoided," the bench observed. It said the matter would not be decided on individual cases and whatever the top court might lay down would be applicable to all the High Court judges. The bench posted the hearing on January 8, 2025. While hearing a separate plea in March, the SC said there cannot be any discrimination in

Mamata demands Shah's resignation for Ambedkar jibe

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, launched a scathing attack on Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday, accusing him of making derogatory remarks against Dr BR Ambedkar inside Parliament. Banerjee demanded an apology from Shah and called for his resignation. In a rare show of solidarity with the Congress party, Banerjee condemned Shah's comments, asserting that the BJP leader had exposed the party's true nature. "The mask has fallen! As Parliament reflects on 75 glorious years of the Constitution, Home Minister Amit Shah chose to tarnish this occasion with derogatory remarks against Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, that too inside the temple of democracy," Banerjee wrote on X, adding that Shah should apologise to the nation for his comments. "Amit Shah's remarks are an insult to the millions who look up to Babasaheb for guidance and inspiration. But what else can you expect from a party that has internalised hate and bigotry?" Banerjee continued, reminding that Ambedkar is the "Father of the Constitution." She further pointed out that Shah's alleged remark was not just an attack on Ambedkar, but on all members of the Constitution Drafting Committee, which represented India's unity in diversity. Banerjee's attack on Shah came hours after her nephew and TMC General Secretary, Abhishek Banerjee, slammed the BJP for what he called a "shameless attempt to destroy" India's federal and democratic Constitution by pushing the controversial One-Nation-One-Election bill. Abhishek Banerjee criticised Shah's remarks, calling them a "display of BJP's casteist and anti-Dalit mindset." He warned that if the BJP had achieved their goal of 400 seats, they would have rewritten history to erase Dr Ambedkar's

contributions. "If this is how they behave after being reduced to 240 seats, imagine the damage they would have inflicted," he said. Mamata Banerjee also demanded Shah's resignation, accusing him of disrespecting Ambedkar and the Constitution. "He has insulted Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Constitution. His ideology of Manusmriti and the RSS makes it clear that he does not respect Ambedkar or the Constitution. We condemn this and demand his resignation. All parties should demand his resignation. He should apologise to the country. If he keeps talking like this, the entire country will rise up because people will not tolerate Ambedkar's insult," Banerjee stated. Shah's controversial remark came during a discussion in the Rajya Sabha, where he criticised Congress' alleged Dalit politics, suggesting that if Congress had invoked the name of God as often as they invoked Ambedkar, they would have attained heaven. "It has become a fashion—Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar," Shah had remarked, adding that if they had taken the name of God as often, they would have earned "seven lifetimes of heaven." Parallely, Abhishek Banerjee condemned the BJP's attempt to impose the One-Nation-One-Election formula, accusing the party of attacking the federal structure of the Constitution. He called the bill an "unashamed attack on democracy," asserting that it seeks to rob the people of their fundamental right to vote regularly. "The right to vote regularly holds governments accountable and prevents unchecked power," he wrote. Abhishek vowed that West Bengal would fiercely oppose the bill, stating, "This is not just a bill; it is a direct assault on the very foundation of our democracy, built through the sacrifices of our founding fathers. Bengal will not sit silently. We will fight tooth and nail to protect the soul of India and crush this anti-democratic agenda."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Not again!

Delhi air quality once again plummets to unbreathable 'severe' category despite GRAP IV

You may not be a smoker but you are still smoking 10 cigarettes a day if you happen to be in Delhi. This is what the doctors have to say about Delhi pollution. The capital witnessed a sharp decline in air quality on Wednesday, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) crossing the 400 mark and entering the 'severe' category once again. This alarming situation unfolded despite the implementation of Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which entails stringent anti-pollution measures. Monitoring Stations Report Severe-Plus AQI Out of the 37 monitoring stations listed on the Sameer app. These figures highlight the widespread and acute nature of air pollution across the city. GRAP, a tiered system of air quality management, categorises air quality into four stages based on AQI levels: Stage I (Poor, AQI 201-300) Stage II (Very Poor, AQI 301-400) Stage III (Severe, AQI 401-450) Stage IV (Severe Plus, AQI above 450) Under Stage IV, measures such as a complete ban on construction and demolition activities, including

public infrastructure projects and the prohibition of diesel trucks carrying non-essential items entering Delhi are enforced. Offices—public, municipal and private—are advised to reduce staff attendance to 50 per cent, with the rest working from home. Additional measures like the closure of colleges, non-essential businesses and odd-even vehicular restrictions are considered during such extreme conditions. Despite these restrictions, Delhi's air quality has continued to deteriorate, raising questions about the efficacy and enforcement of these measures.

However, experts feel that it is more due to metrological conditions and not a failure of GRAP. They attribute

the sudden spike in pollution levels to unfavourable meteorological conditions, particularly a significant drop in wind speeds. The stagnation allows local pollutants to accumulate, exacerbating the already critical air quality. During winters, Delhi's air pollution crisis is compounded by a combination of factors. Vehicle emissions is a primary contributor to the city's air pollution. Besides vehicular pollution, paddy straw burning adds to the pollution burden. Factories emit significant quantities of pollutants. But right now it is the dip in temperatures. During winters heavy air traps pollutants near the ground, creating a thick layer of smog. The hazardous air quality in Delhi poses severe health risks to its residents. Prolonged exposure can lead to respiratory ailments, cardiovascular issues and other chronic conditions. Vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions, are at the highest risk. This is not the first time Delhi's air quality has entered the severe-plus category this season. In November, similar conditions led to the imposition of GRAP Stage IV. The recurrence of severe pollution highlights the cyclical nature of Delhi's air quality crisis, driven by a mix of local and regional factors. Unfortunately, authorities lack a comprehensive plan to address the issue, relying instead on knee-jerk reactions and ineffective quick fixes.

PICTALK



Visitors click photographs of the frozen Drung waterfall, in Baramulla

Year 2025: Prophecies, politics and progress

From hosting grand spiritual and political events to navigating economic growth and political turbulence, 2025 is poised to be a year of transformation and change



KALYANI SHANKAR

What does the crystal ball reveal about the upcoming year 2025? The predictions are a mixed bag. Nostradamus, the famous French astrologer and seer, has made significant predictions regarding global affairs and India's future for 2025. The 16th-century seer has predicted significant events that have shaped our world, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the moon landing, lending credibility and a sense of awe to his predictions. People today are trying to interpret the 16th-century seer's prophecy, impressed by his historical accuracy. Nostradamus has predicted that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war may end in 2025.

He warned that both nations could face climate change and floods. According to the New York Post, Turkey and France could significantly facilitate the peace process between Ukraine and Russia. Nostradamus also foretold an 'ancient plague' in England in 2025, indicating a resurgence of a historical disease and the resolution of Brazil's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and various natural disasters. Additionally, Nostradamus has predicted that the earth may be hit by an asteroid. He said 'From the cosmos, a fireball will rise, a harbinger of fate,' could engage us in potential future events with profound and concerning implications.

As for India's future, the year begins with the 2025 Republic Day parade. The theme is 'Swarim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas'. It is yet to be finalised who will be the chief guest. On the religious side, the next Maha Kumbh Mela will be held in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, from January 13, 2025, to February 26, 2025. The Mela is a grand and holy spiritual gathering every 12 years at a rotating location. Millions of pilgrims rush to the venue to take the holy bath. In 2025, India will likely see fast economic growth, social challenges and new technology. The government is making sig-



IN 2025, INDIA WILL LIKELY SEE FAST ECONOMIC GROWTH, SOCIAL CHALLENGES, AND NEW TECHNOLOGY. THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

nificant improvements in technology education and renewable energy. These efforts and chances for economic development give a positive outlook for India's future prosperity. India is becoming more critical globally by working closely with other major economies in trade, defence, and climate efforts. This shows India's growing political power. At the domestic level, a critical issue facing the Opposition coalition, INDIA, is its cohesion. Already, some tensions have emerged. The Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have distanced themselves from the alliance. The AAP plans to contest the Delhi Assembly elections independently.

The cracks within were visible in the latest Haryana, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand Assembly polls. While the Congress has done poorly in Haryana and Maharashtra, it is in coalition in Jharkhand with the JMM. The partners in the coalition are unhappy about the Congress's dismal performance. They are watching how Congress performs in the upcoming Delhi and Bihar polls scheduled for 2025.

The upcoming Assembly polls will indicate the future

of political realignment. Delhi will hold Assembly elections in February, with the BJP looking to unseat Aam Admi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

The AAP has faced many challenges, including corruption allegations against several leaders in the recent past. As a tactic, the AAP has appointed Athishi as a temporary chief minister for the polls. The AAP and Congress were partners in the Lok Sabha elections. While AAP performed reasonably well, the Congress got no seats.

Bihar will also have elections this year. It is politically a critical state. The ruling NDA, led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, may face intense competition from the Mahagathbandhan, headed by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav. The BJP and the JD(U) are working to retain the state.

Two political organisations—the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the CPI—will celebrate their birth centenary. The RSS will complete 100 years in September, while the CPI will begin its centenary celebrations in December this year. With its ups and downs, the RSS has strongly influenced Indian

politics and society now making it hard for future governments to weaken their power. At the same time, communist parties have less impact now, as right-wing parties are becoming more popular. On international affairs, India will hold the Quad Summit, originally scheduled to be held in New Delhi this September, which was relocated to New York due to a scheduling conflict among the attending leaders. Now, India will host the QUAD summit in 2025.

The US President Trump will likely visit New Delhi for the summit, further revealing India's position in international affairs. Another important visit is that of Russian President Putin, in the first half of next year. The Kremlin has said it will set a date early next year. It will be Putin's first visit since the Ukraine conflict began.

Overall 2025 will be a mixed year for India. The economy is progressing well, and foreign relations are stable, but the political situation remains unclear. By next year, Congress could recover, or the BJP and the regional satraps would have a further hold on the electorate.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISTRACTING FORM ISSUES

Madam—The introduction of 'One Nation One election' bill is a conscious attempt to waste the precious time of the parliament, and it is definitely timed to divert the attention of all from crucial issues like Manipur, serious allegations over Adani Group's misconducts, inflation, declining growth rates, the stunningly widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, and the fast deteriorating relationship with many countries. The ruling dispensation, in spite of being aware of a lack of enough strength to get this amendment bill through, tabling it in the parliament displays the intention behind its introduction. Moreover, the reasons counted upon to place this bill do not sound either logical or rational. Losing majority support and deciding to refer the bill to the Joint Parliament Committee is a preplanned act deliberately meant to divert the course. It has already been explained by many quarters that the very idea of this proposal runs against democratic norms, as the demands of the people vary from a state and central government and are altogether different from local bodies. The narratives of national parties are sure to sway over the elections of state assemblies and the local bodies. The claims about expenditure do not deserve to be considered. Claims of hurdles to development programmes are not correct, as the restrictions are only for the launching of new projects during the notified period. Above all, the inability of the Election Commission to hold such a huge project is visible from the time schedule it keeps up to hold elections. Therefore it is not good to waste huge resources and take away the time of parliament sessions.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIANS

Madam—Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi carrying a bag to Parliament that has 'Palestine' emblazoned on it proves that she is most concerned about the war, where the innocent people in Palestine are dying because of the deadly war. She has right-

Goa Liberation Day



Goa's Liberation Day is celebrated on December 19 and has its importance in the history of Goa. This is the day when Goa got her freedom from the dominant rule of the Portuguese with the help of the Indian armed forces and the navy. The Liberation of Goa was rather a historic event. The fight for Goa's freedom was dual—inside Goa and outside Goa—which was performed by the Indian government.

ly raised her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressed solidarity with Palestinians. She has rightly said that it is the moral responsibility of every right-thinking individual, including all those Israeli citizens who do not believe in hatred and violence and every government in the world, to condemn the Israeli government's genocide actions and force them to stop. On her first day speech in Parliament, she raised the issues of Bangladesh and Modi's government's failure to negotiate with Bangladesh.

In her 32-minute speech, she talked about key issues like the BJP's alleged attempt to change the constitution, the growing monopoly of the Adani Group, atrocities on women, incidents of violence in Sambhal and Manipur, and the demand for a nationwide caste census. She has also met the victims of the Unnao rape case, the father of the Hathras rape case, and the Sambhal violence victims. She has also raised the iconic frame of India's greatest military victory, a painting of the Pakistan army signing the instrument of surrender in Dhaka on December 16, 1971. We

Towards the end of 1961, after various unsuccessful talks, the Indian government deployed armed forces.

On December 17, 1961, more than 30,000 Indian ground troops with the help of the Indian Air Force and the army conquered the 3,000-member ill-prepared Portuguese navy. There were a few more armed acts following that. The rest of the Portuguese colonies of Daman and Diu were also overpowered. The complete build-up of the Portuguese colonies shaped the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu. The total army operation—'Operation Vijay'—was performed almost without any violence. Finally, the Portuguese Governor General Vassalo da Silva freed Goa on December 18. After three days of the operations, on December 19, 1961, Goa, at last, became a part of India. The day is observed with a lot of celebrations in Goa.

Jubel D'Cruz | Mumbai

deserve more leaders like Priyanka Gandhi.

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

DILJIT WANTS BETTER CONCERT INFRA

Madam—Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh recently announced during his performance in Chandigarh that he would not hold any concerts in India until the government improves the country's concert infrastructure. India boasts a large number of talented singers who represent the nation globally and deliver phenomenal performances in international concerts. However, within their own country, they face inadequate concert infrastructure and a lack of basic facilities. This is concerning, as well-organised concerts could serve as a significant source of revenue and provide livelihoods to thousands. It is high time that the government recognises the potential of the music industry and invests in developing world-class infrastructure to support artists and their audiences.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Preparations underway in Prayagraj for Mahakumbh 2025

Prime Minister Modi visits the Triveni Sangam, offers prayers and reviews the arrangements for the world's largest spiritual gathering

Year 2025 is going to witness the largest religious gathering of humanity at Prayagraj - Mahakumbh. The preparations are already in full swing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached the holy city of Prayagraj, the land of pilgrimage, to oversee preparations for the grand Mahakumbh. This becomes even more significant at the confluence of three holy rivers—Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. At this Triveni Sangam, the auspicious gathering of saints and sages during Mahakumbh elevates it into a grand event. The significance of Mahakumbh lies in its occurrence every 12 years, an event described in depth in our religious texts and Puranas.

According to the estimates of government of Uttar Pradesh, over 45 crore people will attend the Mahakumbh Mela 2025. This makes it the world's largest religious gathering. Though everybody would like to take a dip at Sangam, but there are other centre of attractions too. Among the ancient temples of Prayagraj, the Nag Vasuki Temple holds a special place.



Worship of serpents or Nagas has been integral to Sanatan Dharma since ancient times. Among these, Vasuki, considered the king of serpents, is an essential figure. Vasuki Nag is also depicted as Lord Shiva's necklace. According to the legend of Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), Vasuki Nag was used as the rope during the churning of the ocean by gods and demons, with Mount Mandarachal serving as the churning rod. Vasuki Nag's body was injured during this process, and on Lord Vishnu's advice, he rested at Prayag and bathed at the Triveni Sangam to heal. It is believed that a visit to the Nag Vasuki Temple after a holy dip at Sangam completes the spiritual journey. This temple, located in the Daraganj area of Prayagraj

along the Ganga River, has its roots in ancient mythology. A story mentions that King Divodas of Kashi performed penance to bring Lord Shiva to Varanasi, and Vasuki Nag was requested to stay in Prayagraj by the deities. Vasuki Nag agreed, stipulating that devotees must visit him after bathing at Sangam and worship him on Nag Panchami. The temple was subsequently established under divine guidance.

Preparations for Mahakumbh 2025: The grand Mahakumbh, to be held from January 13 (Pausha Purnima) to February 26 (Maha Shivratri) next year, is being meticulously planned. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth Rs 5,500 crores aimed at improving pilgrim amenities and strengthening the

city's infrastructure.

Key projects include:

1. Doubling and electrification of the Varanasi-Madhosingh-Prayagraj rail section, including a new rail bridge over the Ganga.
2. Construction of underpasses and overpasses to ease traffic.
3. Development of nine new ghats, 3,000 additional trains, 300 parks, and the planting of 300,000 trees over 4,000 hectares.

While in Prayagraj PM Modi not only saw the preparation first hand but also performed rituals at the Sangam, prayed at the Akshay Vat tree, visited the reclining Hanuman Temple, and offered prayers at the Saraswati Koop. He also toured the Mahakumbh exhibition site. The Mahakumbh is expected to draw millions of pilgrims to the Sangam, where it is believed that a dip in the holy waters cleanses one of sins and leads to spiritual liberation (moksha). Apart from bathing rituals, devotees participate in prayers, discourses by saints, and spiritual enlightenment sessions.

(The writer is a freelance journalist; views are personal)



BINOD TAKIAWALA



FIRST COLUMN

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

By embracing spiritual self-reflection and cultivating positivity, we can rise above turmoil



RAJYOGI BRAHM KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Nowadays there seems to be a crisis, disappointment and conflict of duality at every step of life. How do we deal with this? How do we prevent the self from becoming pessimistic or disheartened? Today the great modern disease of human consciousness is all about looking outward to find means to derive happiness without examining the inner self, values, attitudes and motives; relying and depending more on the external signals and hoping for the best. However, in practicality, life cannot be created with such hopes, as there are no shortcuts to achieving happiness. In today's world, no individual and nothing can create a permanent state of wellbeing within us, as it is our prerogative and responsibility. The external factors can contribute, guide and inspire us but ultimately our life is what we make out of it.

True happiness or a lack of it does not come from external things but from what is inside oneself. For example, money is not the means to happiness nor is it the cause of one's unhappiness. In reality, it is our attitudes and values that determine the use or misuse of external instruments, whether that is money, a person, an event or an object. A life that has value and is worthy of living is only possible when there is a reflective examination through which there can be illuminating change. So, to reorientate our consciousness, we would require a consciousness based on self-knowledge i.e. the knowledge of the spiritual self which creates self-respect and positivity, enabling us to gain the right perspective on life which in turn would help us to deal with any kind of negativity in a balanced and less painful way. Accordingly, with positivity, we



experience inner strength to cope with external issues affecting the sense of balance in our lives. When we are more positive towards ourselves, obviously we express the same attitude towards others and in all situations. Inner strength also comes when we interact with others in such a way that love, peace and happiness are honestly expressed and experienced.

The pivotal point is "honesty" because there cannot be a sense of fulfillment through falsehood, imitation or duality expressed through attitude. Hence the need of the hour is to live a life based on "Eternal Spiritual Principles" that would allow us to keep a positive attitude towards the self and others, thereby making our life joyful rather than conflicting or a bundle of confusion. Spirituality is not a system or technique of worship or ritual, it is in essence, knowing how to lead a life and through this knowing there is happiness. A spiritual person has found that spark of eternal reference within, which gives him or her not only deep contentment but also a sense of purpose. The first prerequisite for spirituality is a life that functions appropriately and thinks and cares about one's self in the most decent way. Thinking and caring about one's self inappropriately creates too much dependence on others, too many needs, too many demands, too much possessiveness.

So the right way to proceed is to first examine oneself and then acknowledge the positive and the negative traits within us. By doing so, we get the courage to change whatever needs to be transformed without any kind of fear and, without pretence. The basis of successful change for betterment is to understand the attitudes, feelings and motives that drive us for the change by accepting the original positivity of the self, the immortal goodness of the soul. It is this goodness of the self that forms the foundation of our dignity as human beings. The expression of this original goodness in our life is what is called 'divinity' which makes us truly human. So let us awaken the expression of the divine within us to live a fulfilling joyful life amidst all the chaos & crisis around.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Education: From Kothari Commission to NEP-2020



J S RAJPUT

The educators and policymakers are called upon to transcend ideological divides and lead India toward inclusive progress and innovation



The most comprehensive initiative in education in post-independence India was the report of the National Commission on Education, usually referred to as the Kothari Commission. It submitted its report entitled "Education for National Development" on June 29, 1968. The first two sentences say it all: "The destiny of India is now being shaped in its classrooms. This, we believe, is no rhetoric." It was this report that led to the first national education policy of 1968. For the first time, science and mathematics became compulsory for both boys and girls up to tenth standard! Yes, it was generally believed that only boys could handle the tough subjects of science and mathematics, and girls could opt for lighter options of spinning weaving, home science; and the like! The compulsory study of science and math was resisted and opposed as being unjust and unfair to girls! This one change transformed the lives of millions of girls and has brought global accolades to the Indian advancements in the world of science, technology, ICT and space research. Policies once formulated and formalised deserve support in vigilant implementation, persistent monitoring, and scrutiny based on their relevance 'in the great enterprise of national reconstruction'. India today has great challenges ahead, both national as well as global. It has the manpower and enough experience to confront these successfully. In the third decade of the 21st century, it's the quality of education and skill acquisition that would equip India shall remain its prime contributory tool against every challenge. The content and process of education shall have to specifically equip itself against nurtured negativity, increasing mutual distrust and ballooning bitterness in public life. Solutions shall certainly not emerge from those that thrive only on negativity and are ill-equipped to see light and positivity around them.



THE CONTENT AND PROCESS OF EDUCATION SHALL HAVE TO SPECIFICALLY EQUIP ITSELF AGAINST NURTURED NEGATIVITY, INCREASING MUTUAL DISTRUST, AND BALLOONING BITTERNESS IN PUBLIC LIFE

Who must come forward and accept responsibility to normalise such an unacceptable socio-cultural environment? Why not ask the Gandhi ji? Once, before independence, one Dr Mote posed a query to Mahatma Gandhi: what he thought was the greatest problem facing his country! The expected answer could have been, in those days, related to slavery, poverty, illiteracy, ill health, or in the social context. While narrating it in his Gandhi Katha, Narayan Desai tells the audience: that the answer was the 'callousness of the intellectuals'. Narayan Desai Goes ahead: "Give it a thought. If we stand by and watch the poor blaming their poverty on fate, Gandhi is relevant today. If we can see the callousness of the intellectuals, then Gandhi is relevant today. What are the problems according to intellectuals? 'Why X or Y has become Vice-Chancellor and not me! They think only of this and are unaware of other social issues'. Their concerns for critical social, cultural, social cohesion and religious amity are minimal. One's obvious inference would be that solutions to major national concerns shall - and must - emerge from institutions and the educated and the learned responsible for attaining their stated objectives. It includes the dilapidated structures running Sarkari schools, much sought-after private schools, and the universities. This shortfall is a national security concern, as cyberattacks transcend corporate interests, threatening essential services and critical infrastructure. Initiatives like the Cyber Challenge 2024, a joint effort by the Delhi Police and CyberPeace Foundation, offer hope. This programme engages developers, engineers, and cybersecurity experts to

professors of the universities, and researchers working in institutions of science, technology, psychology, social sciences and every other area. One wishes each one of them recalls the assessment of Gandhi shuns away the dreaded callousness and strives to create centres of dialogue and discussions on improving the life and living standards of our people, particularly the 'last man in the line' who was so dear to the Mahatma! At first glance, the existing climate makes such a transformation rather impossible! Despite all the odds, sincere attempts must be launched to create institutional think tanks with open boundaries that provide for healthy academic, scholarly and intellectual deliberations, not constrained but individual ideological affiliations. For an academic, who shapes the lives of numerous individuals, it is the well-being of others that must precede his own! And this is no rhetoric or a cliché in the Indian context and culture. For a broad-minded person, this becomes a must, an integral part of his thought and action and hence, an achievable premise. This is the main task of every teacher preparation institution, from where it shall percolate to schools via teachers trained there, and then to the establishment and the society. After the education policies of 1968, 1986 and 1992, and a gap of around three decades, another policy formulation comes before the nation in the shape of the National Education Policy; NEP-2020. It has been under implementation for the last four years. Having

been associated with the implementation and also policy formulations, one could venture to infer that the NEP-2020 was prepared with unprecedented enthusiasm from teachers, scholars academics institutions, organisations and individuals. As the process was long overdue and rightly very extensive, it inspired active participation from practically every section of society. Unfortunately, its implementation stands hampered in certain states on grounds that may not necessarily be academic. India has a developed well-knit interactive system of the national and state-level bodies and institutions that have learnt over the years how to arrive at a national consensus in the sectors of education and teacher education. This institutional strength of consultation, collaboration and cohesion need not be diluted in cases where the union and state governments belong to different ideological affiliations. Intellectuals in education and research must convincingly internalize that they are making the future of individuals and creating the future of India. No one else is destined and better placed than them to reconstruct India. The moment each one of them expands his horizons, thinks holistically, and takes a long-term view, the road ahead would emerge very clearly; how to proceed individually and also collectively to seed the intellectual callousness and lead the nation on the right path. (Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. He is Atal fellow with the PMML, New Delhi; views expressed are personal)

Guarding digital India: The urgent need for cybersecurity in a rapidly evolving digital space

India has the potential to lead the world in cybersecurity innovation, but achieving this requires more than technological solutions

In the fast-evolving digital landscape of India, a silent battle is being fought—not with traditional weapons but through malicious code, complex algorithms, and increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks. As the country embraces its "Digital India" initiative, the rise of cyber threats demands immediate attention. Protecting the digital future requires strong cybersecurity frameworks, skilled professionals, and widespread public awareness. The call for "Digital Guards" or "Cyber Warriors" has never been more urgent. The scale of the digital threat is staggering. The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) recorded 53,117 security incidents in 2017. By October



VINAY PATHAK

2023, this number soared to an alarming 1.32 million—a twentyfold increase that underscores critical national vulnerabilities. Globally, the situation is no less concerning. Operations like INTERPOL and AFRIPOL's 2024 Operation Serengeti, which arrested over 1,000 cybercriminals across 19 African nations, underscore the scale of the problem. These operations identified over 35,000 victims and uncovered

financial losses nearing \$193 million, demonstrating the global reach and devastating impact of cybercrime. Phishing remains a primary weapon for cybercriminals, accounting for 22 per cent of all incidents. These attacks manipulate victims into revealing sensitive information or downloading malicious software. Credential theft, responsible for 16 per cent of incidents, further exposes individuals and organisations to system breaches, financial fraud, and corporate espionage. Emerging threats like mobile app malware are amplifying risks. For instance, 15 SpyLoan malware apps on Google Play, downloaded over 8 million times, went beyond data theft to harass and extort victims, underscoring cybercriminals'

growing ingenuity. The economic toll of these attacks is devastating. About 65 per cent of Indian enterprises have been forced to pay ransoms to recover critical data, with average demands reaching \$4.8 million. Recovery costs add another \$1.35 million per incident, straining even large corporations. Smaller businesses, lacking resources for robust cybersecurity measures, are particularly vulnerable. This systemic vulnerability has been termed the "cybersecurity poverty line", where approximately 60 per cent of Indian companies lack the infrastructure and expertise to defend themselves against cyber threats. High-traffic online shopping periods, such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday, are prime



targets for cybercriminals. During these events, fraudsters employ phishing scams, fake e-commerce websites, and malware to exploit consumers and businesses alike. Recent high-profile incidents highlight these vulnerabilities. In November 2024, a ransomware attack on Blue Yonder disrupted Starbucks' operations, forcing a return to manual processes. Similarly, McLeod Russel's system com-

promise sent shockwaves through the corporate sector, emphasising the interconnectedness of digital systems and the widespread disruptions that a single attack can cause. India's cybersecurity preparedness is worryingly insufficient. Only 4 per cent of Indian enterprises have robust infrastructure capable of withstanding advanced attacks. This shortfall is a national security concern, as cyberattacks transcend corporate interests, threatening essential services and critical infrastructure. Initiatives like the Cyber Challenge 2024, a joint effort by the Delhi Police and CyberPeace Foundation, offer hope. This programme engages developers, engineers, and cybersecurity experts to

craft innovative solutions using cutting-edge technologies such as AI, blockchain, and quantum computing. Collaboration with institutions like DRDO, MeITY, and the National Forensic Science University underscores the comprehensive approach needed to address these challenges. Experts emphasise that cybersecurity must move beyond being an IT department's responsibility to become a core component of every organisation's strategy. This shift involves continuous employee training, regular security audits, investments in advanced technologies, and fostering a culture of vigilance. Drawing inspiration from global models like the European Union's GDPR, India could implement strin-

gent cybersecurity standards, offering subsidies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to invest in security measures and penalising negligence in cyber protection. As digital transformation accelerates across sectors such as finance, healthcare, education, and government services, robust cybersecurity is no longer optional—it is a fundamental necessity. The path forward demands a collaborative effort. Government agencies, private enterprises, educational institutions, and cybersecurity professionals must unite to build a resilient digital ecosystem. (The writer is Assistant Professor Indian Institute of Information Technology sonapat Haryana; views are personal)

NDMC approves key proposals aimed at improving urban infrastructure

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Wednesday approved several key proposals aimed at improving urban infrastructure and enhancing services for citizens including the establishment of the Urban Art & Culture Forum and the introduction of an Intelligent Integrated Parking System during the Council Meeting. The Council, presided over by New Delhi BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj, with NDMC Chairperson Keshav Chandra and Vice-Chairperson Kuljeet Singh Chahal, approved the formation of the Urban Art & Culture Forum. This body will advise on promoting culture, performing arts, and visual arts across the NDMC area, enhancing public spaces with art installations, and fostering community participation. "The initiative aligns with Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on preserving India's cultural heritage, combining Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi —development with legacy," Chahal said. In tandem, the Council also approved the launch of an Intelligent Integrated Parking System, designed to streamline parking management across 152 locations in New Delhi. This initiative sup-



ports Prime Minister Modi's Smart India vision by reducing urban congestion and improving mobility through high-tech solutions. "The Council accorded the approval for inviting RFP for selection of Agency to Design, Develop, Supply, Implement, Operate and Maintain "Intelligent Integrated Parking System" including revision of parking charges in NDMC area. The RFP will be issued for Single clusters having 152 parking sites/ locations for a term of 10 years including 3 months of implementation period," a statement by the council said. It added that the Agency shall run the parking lots in market areas at least from 8:00 hours to 24:00 hours, for non-market areas from 8:00

hours to 23:00 hours. "NDMC reserves the right to ask the Agency to run any parking lots beyond 23:00 hours in non-market areas and beyond 24:00 hours in market areas as per requirement," it said. Chahal also said that Kejrival's seat remains vacant in these meetings, and to date, he has not taken an oath as a member of the council. "This, he said, reflects poorly on the accountability of the Delhi government," he said. Other key decisions included the hiring of 28 Tata Nexon electric vehicles for official use, upgrades to public toilets and garbage stations, procurement of water tankers to bolster the water supply system, and the approval of recruitment rules for health-care visitors.

Elderly couple dies as fire breaks out at their house in southwest Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

An elderly couple died after a fire broke out at their home in southwest Delhi's Safdarjung Enclave on Wednesday morning. According to the police on Thursday, the deceased have been identified as 80 year old Govind Ram Nagpal and his 78 year old wife Sheela Nagpal. Govind was a retired employee of Kelvinator and his wife was a retired employee of Vidhya Niketan. According to a Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official, they received a call regarding a fire at 6:02 am from Safdarjung Enclave. The fire was on the second floor of a house. "Three fire tenders were rushed to the site. The fire was in domestic articles and two casualties were found," DFS chief Atul Garg said. Garg said that the matter was immediately informed to the police and the couple was transferred to a nearby hospital, where doctors pronounced them dead. Vinay Kumar, station officer, DFS, said, "When we entered the house, we found the people in separate rooms. I was told that Sheela Nagpal was bedridden and she could not move out of her room. Her husband was also trapped in another room." "Within 10 minutes, the fire



was brought under control but there was a lot of smoke inside due to which the duo choked to death, apparently," he added. A police officer said both husband and wife were retired. He said their son Vineet Nagpal resides in the US and their daughter lives in Paschim Vihar. The officer said crime and Forensic Science Laboratory teams were called in and legal action has been initiated under BNSS section 194 (police to enquire and report on suicide). The bodies have been shifted to a mortuary for post-mortem examination, the officer said. A neighbour said she spotted

smoke coming out of the house while she was out for her morning walk. "I immediately informed the police. Auntie was unwell and she could not walk. The couple mostly stayed indoors," she said. The police said the residents of the ground floor and the first floor exited the house after spotting the fire on the second floor. The officer said the cause of the fire is suspected to be an electrical short-circuit in the kitchen but a probe was underway. "The couple lived alone in the house but had not registered themselves in the Delhi Police Senior Citizen cell," the officer added.

Kejrival led AAP leaders stage massive protest near BJP headquarters



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Scores of AAP leaders and party workers, led by its convenor Arvind Kejriwal, on Wednesday staged a massive protest near the BJP headquarters over Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged remarks on Dr B R Ambedkar, describing it as an insult to the architect of the country's Constitution. During the sit-in protest, Kejriwal condemned Shah's alleged remarks, claiming it has hurt the sentiments of crores of people across the nation. Sharpening his attack, he claimed that it was not just

an insult of Dr Ambedkar, but every underprivileged citizen and believer in equality. "Dr Ambedkar is the voice of the oppressed and the cornerstone of India's democracy," he said and further slammed the BJP for allegedly attacking the values that the architect of Constitution stood for. The AAP has sought an apology from Shah and also demanded strict action against the BJP leader. Kejriwal, attacking the BJP, claimed that the saffron party has made its position clear that it is against Ambedkar and the Constitution he gave to the country.

Kejrival promises free medical treatment for senior citizens, post...

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The Sanjeevani Scheme came days after Kejriwal announced the launch of the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna to give monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in the city and promised to raise it to Rs 2,100 after the elections. It is being seen as counter to the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre's Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), which provides financial protection for secondary and tertiary healthcare to economically vulnerable families. Kejriwal's announcement comes after the face-off between the opposition BJP and the ruling AAP over non-implementation of the Centre's Aayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY). Seven BJP MPs moved the Delhi High Court seeking directions to the Delhi government to implement

the scheme. It seems apart from other freebies, these two freebies announced by the AAP to counter the anti incumbency factor which has been dented by the corruption charges. "Today, I am announcing Sanjeevani Yojana for the senior citizens. In this, people above the age of 60 years will get free healthcare," Kejriwal said. We will introduce this scheme after Delhi Assembly elections, he added. "There will be no upper limit on the cost of treatment. Registration for this will start in a day or two... AAP workers will come to your home for registration. They will give you a card, keep it safe. It is now our duty to take care of you. You people have worked hard to take the country forward," the former Delhi Chief Minister said. Named Sanjeevani, the new scheme will focus on health

and financial assistance for elderly people in the national capital. The only eligibility criteria announced so far is the age limit. The AAP has released the names of its candidates for all 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly. AAP is seeking a third consecutive full term in Delhi, following its landslide victory in 2020, where it won 62 out of 70 seats. The upcoming elections will serve as a test of the party's governance model. The AAP and its leaders have ramped up their outreach to women and elderly voters ahead of the February 2025 Assembly elections. The term of the current assembly in Delhi expires on February 23, 2025. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP and Congress on Wednesday lashed out at the Kejriwal's announcement calling him 'a merchant of false dreams' and stated that the scheme

is an 'election scheme' ahead of the state assembly polls. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva stated that AAP chief's announcement today regarding free treatment for those above 60 years of age is yet another election gimmick. "Before the last Lok Sabha elections and again last week, Kejriwal announced a women samman allowance. During election campaigns, he even collected forms from women and announced this scheme in the 2024-25 budget. However, till now, not a single woman has received a penny," he said. Further, Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav said that Kejriwal should first improve the pathetic condition of Government hospitals and the handful of Mohalla Clinics before making such announcements, which are mere election stunts with no intention to fulfil them.

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to restart?...

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Both SRs underlined the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas to promote overall development of the India-China bilateral relationship. They emphasised the need to ensure peaceful conditions on the ground so that issues on the border do not hold back the normal development of bilateral relations.

Drawing on the learnings from the events of 2020, they discussed various measures to maintain peace and tranquillity on the border and advance effective border management. They decided to use, coordinate and guide the relevant diplomatic and military mechanisms towards this purpose. The SRs exchanged views on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. They provided positive directions for cross-border

cooperation and exchanges, including resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, data sharing on trans-border rivers and border trade. They agreed on the salience of stable, predictable and amicable India-China relations for regional and global peace and prosperity. Doval called on Vice President Han Zheng, and invited Wang Yi to visit India at a mutually convenient date to hold the next round of SR meeting.

13 dead, in ferry-Navy speed boat...

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"An Indian Navy speedboat first encircled my boat, then zoomed off, and returned again at high speed and rammed into 'Neelkamal'. All the tourists were wearing life-jackets which are now compulsory. More than a dozen other boats are engaged in the rescue operations," Padte said.

NCR's noxious numbers: AQI...

From page 1

Of the 36 monitoring stations in the city, 32 recorded AQI in the 'severe plus' category, while the readings surpassing 480 at several locations, creating an extremely hazardous environment for residents. The remaining stations reported 'severe' air quality. The worst affected areas were Jahangirpuri (466), Anand Vihar (465) and Bawana (465). Severe AQI levels were also observed in key areas including Rohini (462), Lajpat Nagar (461), Ashok Vihar (456), and Punjabi Bagh (452), all of which reported readings over 400. The pollution levels have spiked in the last few days due to low wind speeds which are not enough to clear the pollutants and low temperatures, with the minimum temperature remaining below 5 degrees Celsius for the past two days. The last time the AQI exceeded this level was on November 19, when it reached 460. The air quality is expected to remain in the severe range on Thursday. However, the meteorological department has issued

a yellow alert for moderate to dense fog over the next three days. This spike in pollution is due to a significant drop in wind speed, which allowed local pollutants to concentrate in the atmosphere, trapping pollutants close to the ground. The PM2.5 concentration is currently 59.1 times the World Health Organization (WHO) annual PM2.5 guideline value as top experts warn that India's toxic air will have a bigger impact on public health than the Covid-19 pandemic. According to IQAir, a Swiss air quality index, pollution in parts of Delhi surpassed the 550 mark on Wednesday morning, far exceeding even the "hazardous" level of 300. At 12.30 pm, IQAir real time data showed AQI stood at 890 at Vivek Vihar, 874 at Anand Vihar, 786 at ITO, 746 at Sonia Vihar, 707 at Burari Crossing, 702 at Punjabi Bagh, 680 at Rohini and 503 at DTU. As visibility across the region was significantly reduced, low-visibility procedures were implemented at Delhi airport after visibility dropped

to 50 meters at 6.30 am. Safdarjung airport recorded lowest visibility 50m during 6.30 am hours to 7 am, which improved thereafter becoming 100m at 7.30 am. Palam airport recorded lowest visibility 300 m between 6 am to 9.30 am which improved thereafter becoming 400m at 10 am. The maximum temperature settled 23 degrees Celsius, slightly above the season's average, but the evening felt colder than expected. The minimum temperature earlier in the day was recorded at 7.6 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season's normal. Neighbouring regions in NCR also faced poor air quality, with AQI levels in Haryana's Faridabad at 263, Gurugram at 392 and Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad at 390, Greater Noida at 330, and Noida at 364. A cold wave has hit India, leaving several states grappling with extreme cold conditions as temperatures drop to freezing levels. Among the worst-affected regions are Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Punjab, Telangana, Odisha and Haryana.

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Had fun but it's time, says R Ashwin...

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Ashwin's decision may seem like a bolt from the blue but Rohit revealed that he had a chat with the champion spinner on the sidelines of the Perth Test. "...This was on his mind and there are obviously a lot of things that went behind it. I am pretty sure Ash will be able to answer that but he understands what the team is thinking," Rohit said. "When I arrived in Perth, this was a chat we had and I somehow convinced him to stay for that pink ball Test match and then after that it just happened so that he felt that if I am not needed right now in the series, I am better off saying goodbye to the

game," the India captain added. India played Washington Sundar ahead of Ashwin in Perth before the veteran returned for the pink ball Test. Ravindra Jadeja played in the Brisbane Test. "It's important when a player like him who has had so many moments with the Indian team and he has been a truly big match winner for us, he is allowed to make those decisions on his own and if it was now, so be it," added Rohit. The BCCI was also quick to congratulate Ashwin on a special career. "A name synonymous with mastery, wizardry, brilliance, and innovation," said the BCCI in its tribute post on X.

Katra locals resume protest against...

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Carrying placards and wearing black armbands, protestors raised slogans against the shrine board and the project. "The Sangharsh Samiti is fighting for our rights as the board is out to snatch the bread and butter of over 60,000 families. Everyone - hoteliers, shopkeepers, pony operators, labourers and transporters - has come out to the streets against the ropeway project. We want the project to be shelved," Bhupinder Singh Jamwal, president of the Vaishno Devi Trek Mazdoor Union, told reporters. Last month, the Shri Mata

Vaishno Devi Shrine Board decided to install the ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children and others who find it difficult to climb the 13-km-long track to the cave shrine. The leaders of the group announced that five of its members would observe a hunger strike to press for a written assurance from the lieutenant governor or the home minister that the ropeway project would be scrapped. Former minister Jugal Kishore Sharma, who also joined the rally, said the government had failed to fulfill its commitment to resolve the issue by December 15.

Outgoing US Govt relaxes H-1B visas rules

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"The H-1B programme was created by Congress in 1990, and there's no question it needed to be modernised to support our nation's growing economy," said USCIS Director Ur M. Jaddou. The changes made in the final rule will ensure that US employers can hire highly skilled workers they need to grow and innovate while enhancing the integrity of the programme, he said. The DHS said the rule also strengthens the programme's integrity by codifying USCIS' authority to conduct

inspections and impose penalties for failure to comply; requiring that the employer must establish that it has a bona fide position in a speciality occupation available for the worker as of the requested start date. It clarifies that the Labor Condition Application must support and properly correspond with the H-1B petition; and requires that the petitioner have a legal presence and be subject to legal processes in the courts of the United States. In order to implement the rule, a new edition of Form I-

129, Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, will be required for all petitions beginning January 17, 2025, which is the rule's effective date. The H-1B visa annual cap is set at 85,000. And for this financial year, the USCIS has announced that they have reached the annual quota. Of these 85,000 H-1B visas, 65,000 are for regular cap and the rest of 20,000 are for the US advanced degree or master's degree. But many non-profits are exempt from that cap. H-1B visa holders are primarily from India. In 2023,

Indians made up 72.3% of the 386,000 H-1B visas issued. US companies depend on H-1B visas to hire hundreds of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. H-1B visa applications often exceed the annual cap, and visas are awarded through a lottery system. This means many eligible applicants are denied simply due to chance. However, cap-exempt organisations, such as certain non-profits and government research institutions, can apply for H-1B visas year-round without being limited by the annual cap.

Congress is anti-Ambedkar, anti-reservation, anti-Constitution...

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"They are clearly stung and stunned by the facts he presented, which is why they are now indulging in theatrics. Sadly, for them, people know the truth," Modi said in a series of posts on social media. When it comes to Ambedkar, his government's respect and reverence are absolute, the PM asserted. Shah's Cabinet colleagues,

including Rajnath Singh, Ashwini Vaishnaw and Kiren Rijji, rallied to his defence and launched a fresh onslaught on the main opposition party for its alleged insults of the architect of the Constitution. He said his government has worked tirelessly to fulfil Ambedkar's vision over the last decade. For decades, Modi said, there was a pending issue involving land for "Chaitya

Bhoomi", where Ambedkar was cremated. "Not only did our Government resolve the issue, I have gone to pray there as well," he added. Kharge said if Prime Minister Narendra Modi had any respect for Ambedkar, he should sack the home minister today itself in case he does not quit on his own. West Bengal Chief Minister Banerjee alleged that Shah's remarks displayed BJP's "casteist and anti-Dalit

mindset". Accusing Shah of disrespecting the architect of the Constitution, Kharge said the home minister should apologise to the nation for the "insult" he caused to Ambedkar during his speech in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. He also warned that if Shah is not removed from the Cabinet, people will take to the street. They are ready to give up their lives for Babasaheb, he said. Leader of Opposition in the

Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the country will not tolerate Babasaheb Ambedkar's insult and demanded that Home Minister Amit Shah should apologise for his remarks in the Rajya Sabha. Replying to a debate in Rajya Sabha on 75 years of the Constitution, Home Minister Shah Tuesday slammed the Congress for making it a "fashion" to take Ambedkar's name for "voter bank politics", triggering

criticism by the Congress and other opposition parties. He said that during the two-day debate on the Constitution, BJP MPs tried to show the Congress and the Gandhi-Nehru family in bad light. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin said, "Only those who commit more sins should be concerned about 'punya' (Good deeds). Those who are concerned about the country, its people and the protection of

the Constitution will only utter the name of Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar and they will have to utter only his name." Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray claimed Amit Shah's remarks on Ambedkar show the BJP's "arrogance" and demanded that the PM take action against him. Addressing a Press conference in Mumbai, the former CM accused the BJP of insulting icons and

revered figures of Maharashtra, including Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Dr Ambedkar. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati accused the BJP and Congress of exploiting BR Ambedkar's name for political gains while failing to genuinely respect or honour his contributions. Mayawati alleged that these parties have not done enough for Dalits and other marginalised communities.

Trump says India charges lot of tariff, threatens to impose reciprocal tax

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump has said that India charges "a lot" of tariff, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products.

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"Reciprocal. If they tax us, we tax them the same amount. They tax us. We tax them. And they tax us. Almost in all cases, they're taxing us, and we haven't been taxing them," Trump told reporters on Monday.

He made the remarks while responding to a question on a potential trade agreement with China. Trump said India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"The word reciprocal is important because if somebody charges us — India, we don't have to talk about our own — if India charges us 100 per cent, do we charge them nothing for the same?" Trump said.

"You know, they send in a bicycle and we send them a bicycle. They charge us 100 and 200. India charges a lot. Brazil charges a lot. If they want to charge us,



that's fine, but we're going to charge them the same thing," Trump said at a news conference at Mar-a-Lago. Responding to a question, his Commerce Secretary pick Howard Lutnick said "reciprocity" is something that is going to be a key topic for the Trump administration. "How you treat us is how you should expect to be treated," he said. During his election campaign in October, Trump has

claimed that India imposes the highest tariffs on foreign products. But they do it with a smile. "Perhaps the most important element of my plan to make America extraordinarily wealthy again is reciprocity. It's a word that's very important in my plan because we generally don't charge tariffs. I started that process, it was so great, with the vans and the small trucks, etc," Trump had said Thursday in October.

In 2019, Trump has repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on American products.

He has criticised India's "big tariffs" on American paper products and the iconic Harley-Davidson bikes. The US is the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at USD 77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at USD 42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

During April-October this fiscal, the country's exports to America rose by 6.31 per cent to USD 47.24 billion, while imports grew by 2.46 per cent to USD 26 billion.

Between FY 2020 and FY 2024, India's merchandise exports to America rose by 46 per cent from USD 53.1 billion to USD 77.5 billion.

Imports from the US also grew to USD 42.2 billion last fiscal from USD 35.8 billion in 2019-20. On the other hand, trade in services between the two nations expanded 30.3 per cent from USD 54.1 billion in 2018 to an estimated USD 70.5 billion in 2024.

India is also a key destination for American businesses such as professional, scientific, and technical services, manufacturing, and IT. Washington is the third largest investor. India received USD 66.7 billion of FDI inflow between April 2000 and June 2024.

'Confident of weathering challenges to India-US ties arising from indictments'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The outgoing Biden administration on Tuesday exuded confidence that India and the US will be able to "weather" the challenges to their relationship that arose after two recent indictments — one related to a Sikh separatist and the other to an Indian billionaire. "I'm confident that we will be able to weather this appropriately," a senior administration official said responding to a question that the two indictments cast a shadow on the India-US relationship.

In a New York court, the US Department of Justice has accused an Indian official of

being involved in a plan to kill a Sikh separatist leader Gurbat Singh Pannun. The other indictment charges Indian billionaire Gautam Adani of corruption. "Many people say that that kind of casts a shadow on the relationship and it raises questions about trust (between India and US) once again," the official was asked. "I would just simply say the relationship is increasingly complex, increasingly diverse and increasingly deep. It is the case that invariably, we will reach occasions of challenges on both sides, and the key is how we deal with those," said the official. "I can just assure you that

we've had the deepest possible appropriate consultation between the two sides, and I'm confident that we will be able to weather this appropriately," said the official.

A second senior administration official described the indictments as regulatory and law enforcement issues that are best left to the agencies directly involved to speak to. "It wouldn't be appropriate for us to comment from either the White House or the State Department," the official said. "But we stand by and strongly believe in the view ... that this relationship is in a very strong position," said the second administration official.



President Joe Biden and grandson Beau walk to Marine One to depart from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington. AP/PTI

Leaving India-US ties in a very good place, expect continuity in Trump era: Biden admin

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The outgoing Biden administration said it was leaving the India-US relationship "in a very strong place", and exuded confidence that it will continue to have bipartisan support during the Donald Trump presidency as well.

"We continue to be very ambitious about the US-India relationship. We've had very high-level engagement over the course of the last several months with the QUAD summit in Delaware, and we are anticipating a high-level engagement in the last few weeks of the Biden administration," Kurt Campbell, Deputy Secretary of State, told reporters during a conference call here on Tuesday.

Campbell joined by Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer and Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Mohan Kwatra, were in Houston on Tuesday to meet with astronauts from the Indian Space Research Organisation who are training at NASA's Johnson Space Center to execute a joint effort to the

International Space Station in partnership with NASA next year.

"We are quite confident that we'll be handing the bilateral relationship off to the incoming Trump team at its strongest possible apex, with key support from stakeholders in the industry, in technology, in finance and defence. As we were here today, it was inspirational to see the manifestations of engagement between the United States and India in critical endeavours associated with space," Campbell said.

Observing that the US-India partnership is an "anchor of stability", not only in the Indo-Pacific, but increasingly for the world, Finer said from southeast Asia to Africa, the two countries can play a leading role in building prosperity, driving development and contributing to security.

"To a large degree, there has been bipartisan consensus on the importance of this relationship. Over the last two decades, different administrations in Washington and New Delhi have helped strengthen our cooperation. While no

relationship is without challenges, we believe that we are leaving this partnership in a very strong place as we prepare to pass the baton to the incoming team," Finer said.

Responding to a question, a senior administration official exuded confidence that the India-US relationship will have the same speed and scale with bipartisan support from both sides as has been the case under the several previous administrations. The same goes for QUAD as well, the official said. "The QUAD originated in the George W Bush administration. It was continued on at the foreign ministry level and through other venues in the Trump administration. We have engaged closely with the incoming team, and I think there is substantial interest in continuing the QUAD given its remarkable achievements in such a short period of time," a senior administration official said.

"We all recognise that a driving force, increasingly in all areas of QUAD endeavour, is the ambition of India. They've made clear in a variety of state-

ments and engagements with the incoming team their desire to continue there. I do not think the ambition, though, for the US-India relationship stops there. You are going to see a variety of areas of continuing activity," the official said.

The official described the progress made by India and US in various fields, including space. "I expect technology work will continue at a pace. We are engaging more in the Indo-Pacific. We are sharing information and intelligence on matters of critical concern, including along the line of actual control. We are also very much focused on increasing our cooperation and collaboration in the Indian Ocean. These are new avenues for important dialogue," said the official.

"My expectation is that this work will continue and that it will receive broad support in a bipartisan manner, not only in Congress, but frankly, it is one of the arenas of engagement that is broadly supported across the Indo-Pacific as well," said the official.

A second senior adminis-

tration official said that the Biden Administration has found the QUAD to be an extremely valuable format, including at the head-of-state level, befitting relationships that are as consequential as those among the four countries involved.

"That said, the US-India relationship is bigger than any particular format. It's really much more about common interests, and the interests that we've described .. and that we have worked on together over the last four years, from technology cooperation to an increasing defence relationship, to our broader economic engagement to increasing collaboration on global and regional issues, is going to be unbound by any particular administration, frankly, in either country."

"We expect a degree of continuity here that may not be the case across the whole set of issues we face. But that has been the case for the US-India relationship, and we have no reason to believe that won't continue," said the second senior administration official.

Sunita Williams' return delayed till late March

AP ■ CAPE CANAVERAL

NASA's two stuck astronauts just got their space mission extended again. That means they won't be back on Earth until spring, 10 months after rocketing into orbit on Boeing's Starliner capsule.

NASA announced the latest delay in Indian-origin Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore's homecoming on Tuesday. The two test pilots planned on being away just a week or so when they blasted off June 5 on Boeing's first astronaut flight to the International Space Station. Their mission grew from eight days to eight months after NASA decided to send the company's problem-plagued Starliner capsule back empty in September.

Now the pair won't return until the end of March or even April because of a delay in launching their replacements, according to NASA.

A fresh crew needs to launch before Wilmore and Williams can return and the next mission has been bumped more than a month, according to the space agency. NASA's next crew of four was supposed to launch in February, followed by Wilmore and Williams' return home by the end of that month alongside two other astronauts. But SpaceX needs more time to prepare the brand new capsule for liftoff. That launch is now scheduled for no earlier than late March.

NASA said it considered using a different SpaceX capsule to fly up the replacement crew in order to keep the flights on schedule. But it decided the best option was to wait for the new capsule to transport the next crew.

NASA prefers to have overlapping crews at the space station for a smoother transition, according to officials. Most space station missions last six months, with a few reaching a full year.

Hundreds of N Korean troops killed in Ukrainian battles

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A couple hundred North Korean troops fighting alongside Russian forces against Ukraine have been killed or wounded during battle in the Kursk border region, a senior military official said Tuesday.

The official didn't provide details on exactly how many have been killed, but said the North Korean forces don't appear to be battle-hardened, which contributes to the number of casualties they've had. The official was providing the first significant estimate of North Korean casualties, which comes several weeks after Ukraine announced that North Korea had sent 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia to help it in the almost 3-year war.

The White House and Pentagon on Monday confirmed that the North Korean forces have been battling on the front lines in largely infantry positions. They have been fighting with Russian units and, in some cases, independently around Kursk.

The casualty disclosure comes as the Biden administration is pressing to

send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes over. But a senior defense official told reporters Tuesday that the Defense Department may not be able to send all of the remaining USD 5.6 billion in Pentagon weapons and equipment stocks intended for Ukraine before Jan. 20, when Trump is sworn in. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide a US assessment of the war.

According to the Pentagon, there is about USD 1.2 billion remaining in longer-term funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which is used to pay for weapons contracts that would not be delivered for a year or more. The official said the administration anticipates releasing all that money by the end of this year.

The USD 5.6 billion is in presidential drawdown authority (PDA), which allows the Pentagon to take weapons off the shelves and send them quickly to Ukraine. That is a substantial amount of money, the defense official said, and while the US will continue to

provide weapons to Ukraine until Jan. 20, there may well be funds remaining that will be available for the incoming Trump administration to spend. Trump has talked about getting some type of negotiated settlement between Ukraine and Russia, creating some unease about whether he will provide Ukraine all the weapons funding approved by Congress.

Ukrainian and Russian forces have been in a fierce battle around Kursk, and the official said Russia has been able to take back about 20% of the territory gained there by Kyiv. They said it will be possible for Ukraine to hold ground there for some time, but it will depend on how the rest of the fight is going, including the long-range strikes that Kyiv has been launching.

The officials said it's not clear if Moscow has asked Pyongyang for additional forces, but acknowledged that Russia continues to lose as many as 1,200 troops a day in casualties — including both dead and wounded. But so far, Russia has been able to generate enough forces to replace them.

B'desh HC commutes ULFA leader's death sentence

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladeshi High Court on Wednesday commuted the death sentence of ULFA leader Paresh Barua to life imprisonment and acquitted a former junior minister and five others in a 2004 case of attempted smuggling of weapons to the separatist outfit in northeast India.

A total of 10 truckloads of weapons were seized in April 2004 despite alleged efforts of certain "influential quarters" for its safe passage to United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) hideouts in northeastern India through Chattogram, which was then spelled as 'Chittagong'.

The seized weapons included over 27,000 grenades, 150 rocket launchers, over 11 lakh ammunition, 1,100 sub machine guns and 11.41 million bullets.

The two-member High Court bench commuted the punishment of ULFA leader Paresh Barua, who was sentenced to death after a trial in absentia — now assumed to be living in China — and sentenced him to life imprisonment, said a government attorney at the bench. The High Court bench comprising Justice Mostafa Zaman Islam and Justice Nasrin Akhtar acquitted former state minister for home Lutuzzaman Babar and six others, who were handed down capital punishment following the death reference hearing, he added.

The five others to escape the gallows are former director general of forces Intelligence (DGFI) retired major general Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury, former managing director of a state-run fertilizer plant (CUFL) Mohsin Talukder, its general manager Enamul

Hoque, former additional secretary of industries ministry Nurul Amin and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Motiur Rahman Nizami.

The plant site was said to have been used for trans-shipment of weapons for ULFA.

Former chief of Bangladesh's National Security Intelligence ex-brigadier general Abdur Rahim, a former DGFI director as well, was also sentenced to death but he died a normal death in prison as the appeal and death hearing process was underway.

Nizami, a former minister in the past Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-Jamaat alliance government, however, was hanged several years ago on charges of crimes against humanity during Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War siding with the Pakistani troops while his party was opposed to the country's independence.

Battered by regional tensions and energy crisis, Iran's rial hits record low

AP ■ TEHRAN

The Iranian rial on Wednesday fell its lowest level in history, losing more than 10% of its value since Donald Trump won the US presidential election in November and signalling new challenges for Tehran as it remains locked in the wars raging in the Middle East. The rial traded at 777,000 rials to the dollar, traders in Tehran said, down from 703,000 rials on the day Trump won.

In an interview with state television Tuesday night, Central Bank Gov. Mohammad Reza Farzin said that the supply of foreign currency would increase and the exchange rate would be stabilised. He said that \$220 million had been injected into the currency market.

The currency plunged as Iran ordered the closure of schools, universities, and government offices on Wednesday due to a worsening

energy crisis exacerbated by harsh winter conditions. The crisis follows a summer of blackouts and is now compounded by severe cold, snow and air pollution.

Despite Iran's vast natural gas and oil reserves, years of underinvestment and sanctions have left the energy sector ill-prepared for seasonal surges, leading to rolling blackouts and gas shortages. In 2015, during Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, the rial was at 32,000 to \$1. On July 30, the day that Iran's reformist President



Masoud Pezeshkian was sworn in and began his term, the rate was 584,000 to \$1. Trump unilaterally withdrew

America from the accord in 2018, sparking years of tensions between the countries that persist today.

The rial traded at 70 for \$1. Iran remains deeply involved in the Middle East conflicts that have roiled the region, with its allies battered — including the militant groups and fighters of its self-described "axis of resistance," such as Palestinian Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

Tensions still remain high between the nations, 45 years after the 1979 US Embassy takeover and the 444-day hostage crisis that followed. Before the revolution, the rial traded at 70 for \$1.

Iran remains deeply involved in the Middle East conflicts that have roiled the region, with its allies battered — including the militant groups and fighters of its self-described "axis of resistance," such as Palestinian Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

Sensex, Nifty extend losses into 3rd session on foreign fund outflows

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed on the back foot for the third straight session on Wednesday as investors offloaded utility, capital goods and metal stocks amid foreign fund outflows. Besides, investor sentiment remained subdued ahead of the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, traders said. The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 502.25 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 80,182.20, taking its downtrend to the third day. During the day, it tanked 634.38 points or 0.78 per cent to 80,050.07. As many as 2,563 stocks declined while 1,442 advanced and 94 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty declined 137.15 points or 0.56 per cent to 24,198.85.

"The near-term market construct has turned weak, with FIIs turning sellers on rallies. Yesterday's massive FII sell figure of Rs 6,410 crore in the cash market indicates that more selling is in store on market bounces.

"The focus of global markets today will be the Fed decision expected tonight. A 25 bps rate cut is priced in by the market. So, the attention will be on the Fed commentary," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Power Grid, NTPC, Adani Ports, JSW Steel, ICICI Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finance were the main laggards. In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra and HCL Technologies were the gainers.

"Nifty fell for the third consecutive session, losing 137



points amid selling pressure ahead of the US Fed's interest rate decision later on Wednesday. Over these three

sessions, Nifty dropped by 2.3 per cent.

"FII selling intensified on Tuesday as they offloaded

equities worth Rs 6,400 crore, inducing cautiousness in Indian markets. Investors will also watch out for interest rate

decisions of Japan and England as well as US Q3 GDP data to be released tomorrow. We expect markets to remain sideways with the Fed commentary determining the near-term direction," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. The BSE smallcap index declined 0.76 per cent, and the midcap gauge dipped 0.61 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, utilities tanked 2.06 per cent, power (1.78 per cent), capital goods (1.56 per cent), metal (1.44 per cent), industrials (1.30 per cent) and financial services (1.20 per cent). BSE Focused IT, healthcare and IT were the gainers.

The rupee dropped 3 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.94 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday. "Investors shunned stocks led by banking ahead of the out-

come of the US rate decision with a focus on the Fed chairman's commentary on inflation and growth outlook in the backdrop of the worsening global economic situation. "The rupee continuing its downward trajectory and hitting fresh lows also dampened the sentiment, as extended fall could further worsen trade deficit and hit inflation going ahead," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,409.86 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled higher, while Tokyo ended lower.

European markets were trading in the positive territory in mid-session deals. Wall Street ended lower on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.48 per cent to

USD 73.67 a barrel. "15 companies are set to launch their IPOs by December 20, 2024, with many more in the pipeline. This surge in IPO activity is drawing substantial liquidity from the market, adding pressure to major indices.

"FIIs, who are major participants in the Indian equity markets, often wind down their trading activities towards the end of the year due to the Christmas Holiday in Europe and North America. This reduced participation can lead to lower demand for Indian equities, adding pressure to the Nifty," Vinit Bolinjar - Head of Research at Ventura Securities, said.

Falling for the second day in a row, the BSE benchmark tanked 1,064.12 points or 1.30 per cent to settle at 80,684.45 on Tuesday. The Nifty tumbled 332.25 points or 1.35 per cent to 24,336.

Bihar to host 2nd edition of investor meet on Dec 19-20

PTI ■ PATNA

After an impressive maiden show, Bihar will on December 19-20 host the second edition of Bihar Business Connect - the global investor summit that looks at boosting industrial and entrepreneurial growth in the state.

The prestigious event, curated by the state's Department of Industries, seeks to showcase Bihar as a vibrant investment destination.

"The inaugural edition in 2023 witnessed participation from over 600 entrepreneurs from India and abroad. Bihar Business Connect 2023 was a landmark initiative. During the two-day summit held last year, a total of 278 investment proposals amounting to Rs 50,530 crore were signed as MoUs, out of which 244 projects worth Rs 38,000 crore have already been implemented on the ground," an official statement said.

This investment has significantly accelerated industrial development in the state and created numerous employment opportunities. "Considering the success of last year's Bihar Business Connect, the Department of Industries, Government of Bihar, is once again organising this event," it said. "Bihar, once known for its agricultural heritage, is now emerging as a hub for industrial transformation, entrepreneurship, and infrastructure



development."

The event will feature Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, senior ministers of the state government, prominent industrialists, policymakers, and regional experts.

This two-day conference aims to establish Bihar as a premier destination for industries and investors while showcasing the state's economic and industrial growth potential.

The Bihar government has introduced several reforms and policy initiatives to encourage investment across various sectors. The Bihar Industrial Investment Promotion Policy 2016 offers tax exemptions, subsidies, and incentives to promote

industrial growth.

Besides, there are sector-specific policies that target investments in high-potential industries like textiles, leather, logistics, biofuels, IT, and renewable energy.

Under the Startup Bihar Policy, a fund of Rs 500 crore dedicated to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship has been set up. The state's Export Promotion Policy looks to boost global trade through facilities like Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and export packhouses.

With a Single-Window Clearance System and an investor-friendly administration, Bihar prioritises ease of doing business to attract

domestic and international investors, the statement said. Key focus areas of Bihar Business Connect 2024 include manufacturing sector, infrastructure and connectivity, and exports.

Bihar's manufacturing sector is undergoing rapid development, with a focus on textile cluster and bag manufacturing, military footwear exports, ethanol plants and food processing units. The state has implemented several initiatives to empower MSMEs and startups.

Under the Mukhyamantri Udyami Yojana, financial assistance of up to Rs 10 lakh for entrepreneurs from marginalized groups, including women,

scheduled castes/tribes, and persons with disabilities is provided. Over 21 incubation hubs are fostering innovation and providing a platform for startups. Also, affordable plug-and-play workspaces in Patna and Purnia are supporting emerging enterprises. Bihar has witnessed unprecedented growth in infrastructure development. The state ranks third in road density in India, facilitating smoother trade and transport. Its energy capacity has expanded from 700 MW to 7,000 MW. IT parks and upcoming data centers are propelling digital growth across the state.

Projects like the Multi-Modal Logistics Park (MMLP) in Patna provide integrated supply chain solutions.

"Bihar is positioning itself as a hub for global trade with focused infrastructure and policies," it said.

Bihar's Industry & Tourism Minister Nitish Mishra will inaugurate the two-day event. The session will include the signing of initial MoUs and 4-5 sector-specific sessions, with a special focus on MSMEs and startups.

A CEO roundtable is planned on the second day.

"Significant MoUs will be signed in the presence of Nitish Kumar," the statement said adding during plenary sessions, key insights will be shared regarding Bihar's industrial potential and policy framework.

Tata Power-DDL awarded prestigious 'Certificate of Merit in DISCOM sector'



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL), a leading power utility supplying electricity to a populace of around 9 million in North Delhi, has been awarded with the prestigious 'Certificate of Merit in the DISCOM sector' at the 34th National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA) 2024. The award ceremony was organised by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Union Ministry of Power (MoP) on the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. The 'Certificate of Merit' was

received by Kiran Gupta, Chief - Customer Experience, Commercial, Govt. Affairs, EAC & Consumer Litigation, Shashank Sharma, HoD - G&I, E&S, NBS & Street Light Projects and Kapil Kumar, HoD - PSC, BD & Storage on behalf of Tata Power-DDL. The award was presented in the esteemed presence of Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shripad Naik. The event was attended by many dignitaries from the government and private industries. Tata Power-DDL has been a pioneer in energy conservation, actively participating and advocating in demand-side management programs. The company's flagship initiatives, including Urja Arpan and

behavioural demand response programs, aim to optimize energy usage while empowering consumers to reduce their carbon footprint. Commenting on the accolade, Gajanan S. Kale, Chief Executive Officer, Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited said, "At Tata Power-DDL, energy efficiency and sustainability are at the core of our operations. We are honored to receive the 'Certificate of Merit' at the prestigious 'National Energy Conservation Awards 2024'. This recognition motivates us to continue driving impactful energy conservation initiatives and inspires us to lead by example in building a greener, more sustainable future for all."

Gold falls Rs 200 to Rs 79,100 per 10 gm; silver rises Rs 500

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices fell Rs 200 to Rs 79,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a firm trend in international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity settled at Rs 79,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Snapping a three-day losing run, silver climbed Rs 500 to Rs 92,000 per kg on Wednesday. It closed at Rs 91,500 per kg on Tuesday.

In the last three sessions, the white metal plunged Rs 5,500 per kg.

The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 200 to Rs 78,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 78,900 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Gold remains on the defensive as the market braces for the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's (Fed) meeting, which can provide forward guidance for bullion prices, experts said.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery went up Rs 74, or 0.1 per cent, to trade at Rs 76,945 per 10 grams.

"Gold continues to trade within a range as market participants await the Fed's policy announcement tonight, with increased focus on the 2025 outlook and concerns surrounding the job market," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

In MCX, gold is trading near Rs 76,950. The policy



statement is expected to set the tone for the next leg of movement in gold prices, Trivedi added.

However, silver contracts for March delivery slipped Rs 45, or 0.05 per cent, to Rs 90,830 per kg on the exchange.

Comex gold futures in the Asian trading session rose 0.08 per cent to USD 2,664.10 per ounce.

Gold prices declined on Wednesday as the US dollar's strength and better-than-expected US retail sales data weighed down on bullion, Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

The solid consumer spending, along with the US economic resiliency and warmer inflation data in recent months, implies that the Fed may stop its rate-cutting cycle at the January meeting, which acts as negative for precious metals, Gandhi said. Meanwhile, silver traded flat

at USD 30.92 per ounce in the global markets.

"Gold and silver slipped under pressure from a strengthening US dollar, climbing Treasury yields, mixed US economic data and ceasefire updates," Manav Modi, Analyst, Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. Traders will focus on macro-economic data such as the US housing, GDP and inflation, which could provide more insights on the trajectory of the gold and silver prices, Modi said.

According to traders, investors will be looking for clues about the outcome of the FOMC rate decision and focus on the Fed Chair Jerome Powell's commentary at the post-meeting news conference and the updated economic estimates. This, in turn, will influence the dollar and provide some impetus to the gold price, they said.

We have to wait and watch to see how it pans out: Official on Trump's tariff threat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Imposing reciprocal duties violates global trade rules but one has to follow a "wait and watch" approach to US President-elect Donald Trump's remarks on imposing reciprocal tariffs, a senior official said on Wednesday.

US President-elect Donald Trump has said that India charges a lot of tariffs, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products.

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"It will be very difficult to decipher from one or two sentences which Mr Trump makes but if I understood from what he was saying, his main intent is that reciprocity will matter in future. So if you are putting a tax on Harley-Davidson (bikes) we will also put a tax on your motorbike exports. So from that point of view, this will be in clear violation of the WTO (World Trade Organization) norms but there are instances when Mr Trump has used measures like Section 232 of the Tariff Act which allows the US to take unilateral measures against countries on national security grounds.

"So one will have to wait and watch and see," Director General of Foreign Trade (DGT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said here at CII's export competitiveness event. He said that there are many areas where India has tariff peaks but the country does not necessarily export those to the



US.

For example, India has high customs duties on a number of agri goods but they are not necessarily exported to America.

"So if the US uses reciprocity and imposes taxes on that, it will not harm us in a major way but there could be a few items where this reciprocal principle thing might impact us," he said.

Further, he added, "So one has to wait and watch, how it is panning out and the fine print of this will be available only after they undergo a process like they have a process where they have a process where the USTR (US Trade Representative) examines, investigates and recommends an action. Before guessing the impact, one will have to wait and watch as to which are the kind of products that they are looking at."

In 2019, Trump repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on

American products. He has criticised India's "big tariffs" on American paper products and the iconic Harley-Davidson bikes.

The US was the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at USD 77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at USD 42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

In FY2024, India's top exports to the US included medicines (USD 8 billion), Garments and Made-ups (USD 7.5 billion), Cut and Polished Diamonds (USD 5.6 billion), Smartphones (USD 5.6 billion), Solar Cells (USD 1.9 billion), Shrimps (USD 1.7 billion), Gold Jewellery (USD 3.3 billion), Auto Parts (USD 2.1 billion), Steel (USD 475 million), and Articles of Steel (USD 2.8 billion).

Commenting on the Trump remarks, think tank GTRI said while Indian tariffs comply with WTO rules, the proposed Trump tariffs would violate them.

Reliance Nippon Life starts negotiation with IndusInd Bank on bancassurance tie up

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Nippon Life Insurance, a subsidiary of debt-ridden Reliance Capital (RCAP), has initiated talks with IndusInd Bank for bancassurance partnership as the IIHL and RCAP deal has reached the final lap.

Mauritius-based IndusInd International Holdings Ltd (IIHL), the parent entity of IndusInd Bank, won the bid to acquire RCAP and entities under it.

"IIHL and Japan-based Nippon Life have struck a good understanding and they are absolutely clear about promoting the insurance business. This augurs very well for the business and policyholders as IIHL has a very strong capital base and a solid global aspiration in BFSI space," Reliance Nippon Life Insurance CEO Ashish Vohra told PTI.

Hinduja Group company IIHL is expecting to complete the acquisition of RCAP by next month nearly a year after the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved its rescue plan.

"Bancassurance was a missing link in our structure and we have started exploring the possibility with IndusInd Bank and we are already in dialogue to strike a win-win deal for all stakeholders," he said.

At the same time, he said, the company has started talks with other financial institutions as the regulation allows more than one such tie-up. IndusInd Bank serves about 41 million customers through 3,040 branches/banking out-



lets and 3,011 ATMs across India.

"Most of the approvals and procedures related to the resolution process of Reliance Capital are complete. Couple of the procedures at the end of the administrator and CoC are to be completed. We hope that all these will be over in the next 4-6 weeks and RCAP should come into the fold of Hinduja Group by the end of January," IIHL Chairman Ashok P Hinduja had said earlier this month.

As soon as delisting of shares is over, money will be handed over to RCAP debtors, he said, adding that delisting usually takes 4-6 weeks.

Sharing the road map for business expansion, Hinduja had said the focus will be on value creation, bancassurance and digitalisation to improve customer and policyholder experience. He emphasised that the bancassurance model creates value for all stakeholders - banks as well as the insurance companies.

"We aim to establish relationships on terms that are beneficial for all parties involved," he had said.

Vinicius Júnior and Aitana Bonmati win FIFA best player of the year awards

AP ■ DOHA

Real Madrid star Vinicius Júnior finally got his hands on a big global player award on Tuesday. Vinicius was named the men's player of the year at the FIFA's "The Best" awards, where Barcelona playmaker Aitana Bonmati continued to clean up in the prizes for women's soccer. The 24-year-old Vinicius was so disappointed to lose out to Manchester City midfielder Rodri for the Ballon d'Or in October that he and his Madrid team snubbed the ceremony in Paris in protest. This time Rodri ended up second to Vinicius by five points. The Brazil forward was at the FIFA ceremony to collect his award having travelled to Doha on Monday with Madrid for the Intercontinental Cup final against Pachuca. "I don't even know where to begin," Vinicius said in Portuguese. "It was so far away that it seemed impossible to get

here. I was a kid who only played football barefoot on the streets of São Gonçalo, close to poverty and crime. "Getting here is something very important to me. I'm doing it for many children who think that everything is impossible and who think they can't get here." Vinicius echoed those sentiments in an Instagram post, where he took a thinly-disguised dig at presumably the Ballon d'Or voters — journalists from the top 100 countries in the FIFA rankings. "Today I am writing to that boy who saw so many idols lift this trophy... Your time has come," he wrote. "Or rather, my time has come. The time to say... Yes, I am the best player in the world and I fought hard for it. "They tried and still try to invalidate me, to diminish me. But they are not prepared. No one is going to tell me who I should fight for, how I should behave." Vinicius has been subjected to racist abuse in Spain and at one point earlier this year said he was "losing my desire to play" but



added "I'll keep fighting." Bonmati won the award for best women's player of the year



making it back-to-back prizes at FIFA's version of the older and more prestigious Ballon d'Or prize. The 26-year-old Spain midfielder has won the Ballon d'Or for two

straight years, and won the Spanish league, Spanish cup and Champions League with Barcelona in 2024. "I am grateful to receive this award. As I always say, this is a team effort," Bonmati said. "It was a great year, very difficult to repeat. I am grateful to the people who help me to be better every day, from the club, to my teammates, who always help me to be better." FIFA said the award winners were decided by an "equally weighted voting system" by fans, the current captains and coaches of all national teams, and media representatives. There was an 11-player shortlist for both awards, with the contenders selected based on their performances from Aug. 21, 2023, to Aug. 10, 2024. Vinicius had the best season of his career, scoring 24 goals in 39 appearances for Madrid and helping the Spanish team to a record-extending 15th European Cup — and his second Champions League trophy.

He also netted in the final, becoming the youngest player to score in two Champions League finals. Madrid teammate Jude Bellingham was third, ahead of Dani Carvajal and Lamine Yamal, with Lionel Messi — who had won the award the previous two years — sixth. Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was named best men's coach, and United States coach Emma Hayes took the women's prize. Hayes steered the USWNT to Olympic gold in Paris in August. Their shotstopper, Alyssa Naeher, was given the women's goalkeeper award. Aston Villa and Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez won the men's prize for the second straight year. Alejandro Garnacho won the FIFA Puskas Award for the best goal, for his sensational overhead strike for Manchester United against Everton in November 2023. Marta won the award that is named after her — the inaugural FIFA Marta Award — for her goal for Brazil against Jamaica in June.



Six teams pick 48 players in draft for World Pickleball League

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A total of 48 players were picked by six franchises in the player draft for the inaugural edition of the World Pickleball League which will be held here next month. While the players draft consisted of 75 players from 20 countries, the tournament will feature men and women players from 14 countries including India, Japan, Spain, South Korea, Australia and the United Kingdom. The WBPL, which works closely with All Indian Pickleball Association (AIPA), is co-founded by former Indian tennis players Gaurav Natekar and Arati Ponnappa Natekar and will be held from January 24 to February 2. The six franchises in the tournament will represent Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Delhi. The owners were guided by the league during the player draft here on Wednesday. "To ensure that the draft process was smooth, fair and transparent, we curated a special in-house software that consisted of all the necessary information about the players," Natekar said. "We wanted to pick some of the best players across the globe and have a combination of players who are experienced as well as new, young talent. We also wanted to give our Indian players a chance to shine so we had mandated each team that one player should be from India in each team," Natekar told PTI. A total of eight players will be in each team including four men and as many women including a mandatory Indian

player. "The league format will comprise of a round-robin stage, where each team plays against the other resulting in 15 ties. Each tie featuring five games including men's singles, women's singles, doubles in each category and mixed doubles," the league said. "Each team will play a total of 5 ties, at the group stage, the top four teams going forward to semi-finals and finals. Giving fans the opportunity to witness a total of 90 matches during the entire duration of the league," it added. Squads: Delhi: Alexa Schull, Isha Lakhani, Eduardo Irizarry, Willy Chung, Lauren Mercado, Leander Lazaro, Kenta Miyoshi, Aiko Yoshitomi. Chennai: Maria Sobek, Molly Knaggs, Vanshik Kapadia, Brooke Revuelta, Louis Laville, Molly O'Donoghue, Mateusz Matysik, Rocio Cardo. Mumbai: Brandon Lane, Glauka Carvahal Lane, Mayur Patil, Sabrina Dominguez, Mihae Kwon, Kim Eung Gwon, Bartosz Karbownik, Katie Morris. Bengaluru: Jack Foster, Katerina Stewart, Vrushali Thakare, Trang Hyunh McClain, Marcelo Jardim, Alejandra Bobaria, Felix Grunert, Mauro Garcia. Chennai: Maria Klokotzy, Etienne Blaszkewycz, Sonu Vishwakarma, Tanner Tomassi, Thaddea Lock, Edward Perez, Tyra Calderwood, Sarah Jane Lim. Hyderabad: Max Freeman, Ava Cavataio, Kuldeep Mahajan, Ross Whittaker, Madalina Grigoriu, Karolina Owczarek, Ben Cawston, Ludovica Siaky.

India to face Pakistan in opening match of inaugural Kho Kho World Cup on Jan 13

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hosts India will face arch rivals Pakistan in the opening match of the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup on January 13, the organisers announced on Wednesday. As many as 24 countries have confirmed their participation in the week-long event (January 13-19), which will be organised at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in the national capital and at the Noida Indoor Stadium. "The league matches will start on January 13. There will be an opening ceremony on that day and after that the most exciting match of the season, the match between India and Pakistan men's teams will be played," Kho Kho World Cup CEO Vikram Dev Dogra said during a media interaction. "Thereafter, on 14th, 15th and 16th January, the remaining league matches will carry on, following which the



quarterfinals will be held on January 17 and semifinals on January 18 and final on January 19." The tournament will see 21 men's and 20 women's teams competing for the top prizes. Dogra said the national camp for 60 men and 60 women is currently underway at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, and the Indian teams for the event will be selected from among these players. Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) president and

chairman of the tournament's organising committee, Sudhanshu Mittal announced that Bollywood megastar Salman Khan will be the brand ambassador of the World Cup. "I am announcing with pride that the brand ambassador of the event will be Salman Khan," Mittal said. "I am proud to be associated with the first-ever Kho Kho World Cup 2025. This is not just a tournament — it's a tribute to India's soil, spirit, and strength. All of us,

including me, have played Kho Kho at one point in our lives," Khan said in a message. "It is a sport with non-stop action and relentless spirit that has already captured the global attention. Let's come together and celebrate the soul of Kho Kho on the global stage," he added. USA, England, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil are among the teams that have confirmed their participation in the tournament. The event will take place in a league-cum-knockout format, for both men and women. Among Asian countries, Indonesia will send only their women's team while all other nations will send both their men and women's squads. Mittal had said that 615 players and 125 support staff will take part in the event. Each team will comprise 15 players, one coach, one manager and international technical officials.



India look to make all-round amends against West Indies

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

India will look to make amends in all areas and counter the West Indies' power game when the two teams face off in the decider of the women's T20I series on Thursday, with regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's participation still shrouded in uncertainty. A comprehensive 49-run win in the series opener helped India extend their dominance in the format to nine consecutive victories but West Indies crushed the hosts by nine wickets to level the terms in the second game. The manner in which West Indies cruised to win with 26 balls and nine wickets to spare, hitting a total of 27 fours and two sixes, the visitors left India scrambling for answers. None of the Indian bowlers could pose any threat as heavy dew made their job only tougher. On their part, the West Indies used the conditions to their benefit. They send the balls to the ropes more times rather than attempting to hit sixes which also worked in their favour. The conditions aren't expected to change much in a day's time but India will be required to change a lot in terms of their collective batting and bowling, aside from concerns over the availability of Kaur. Kaur didn't take part in India's fielding innings in the first match last Sunday and missed the second on Tuesday owing to a "niggle in her knee". Her unavailability for the series decider will certainly

rob India off an in-form batter, for Kaur has struck two fifties in her last three T20I outings. Stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana's second fifty of the series gave India a platform to push on for a competitive total but the rest of the batters could not carry their form from the first game in which they had put a collective show. A visible improvement in the West Indies' tactics to bowl tighter lines and not give width made the batters' job difficult but beyond Mandhana and Richa Ghosh (32), no one else could find their way through a phase where the ball was also losing pace off the surface. In Kaur's absence, the seniors in Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma will have to shoulder extra responsibility in the middle order which featured debutant Raghvi Bisht at the number 4 slot in the second game. India will also have to watch out for the all-round threat posed by West Indies veteran Deandra Dottin, who has made a strong impression on this series. The pair of Hayley Matthews and Qiana Joseph provide West Indies a lot of firepower at the top, which again will be a challenge for India to manage. "It would mean a lot to the group if we were able to win this series. But we know in order to do that, we've got to come back and play just as good as we played today or even better. We know it's not going to be easy work," Matthews said after the second game.

India waiting on Harmanpreet's fitness update: Smriti Mandhana

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Harmanpreet Kaur's participation in India Women's T20I series decider here on Thursday is under doubt after the regular captain was sidelined from the second match having suffered a niggle in her knee during the first game. Smriti Mandhana, who stood in for Kaur as the West Indies levelled the series 1-1 on Tuesday, said the team is awaiting update on Kaur's availability for the third match. "Harman's fitness, (the) BCCI medical team is observing on day-to-day basis. They'll be at a better place to answer that question. I think we'll have to wait for the update from their side," Mandhana told media after India's crushing nine-wicket loss here on Tuesday. Kaur, who turned up for practice here last Saturday with her knee strapped, scored 13 not out in India's big total of 195/4 but she did not take the field in the series-opener here. "Harmanpreet Kaur sustained a niggle in her knee while batting during the first T20I against West Indies. Hence, she remains unavailable for selection for the second T20I. The BCCI Medical Team is monitoring her progress," the team issued a statement ahead of the second T20I



here. Mandhana, meanwhile, brushed aside any concerns regarding her after she copped a blow to her hand towards the end of the second match. "I think (the) finger is fine now. Just that initial impact, where you think that 'oh, it can be wrong,' but it's all good now," Mandhana said. "T20 cricket is a game where it's probably very boundary oriented. Anytime you are scoring 80 plus, you're probably going to have a lot of boundaries. It's quite motivating coming down here after the first game especially, and being able to level the series one all," she added.

player. The executions were not at the mark," she said after her counterpart Matthews hit a 47-ball 85. "As a bowling unit, our execution can be better. The only way we can get them out is to put pressure by dot balls. We couldn't do that, even in the start or maybe even after six overs. We couldn't create a lot of dot balls and the pressure was never there." "As a bowling unit we did give a lot of width," Mandhana added. West Indies skipper Matthews hailed West Indies' nine-wicket win as a "massive feat". "I think that's our first win against India, as far as I remember probably since (the) 2016 World Cup here, so that's a massive feat for us. However, we feel like it's just the beginning. These are the kind of performances we want to be consistent with," she said. Matthews, who cracked 17 fours in her knock in a brutal display of power-hitting, emphasised on hitting boundaries for a long innings. "T20 cricket is a game where it's probably very boundary oriented. Anytime you are scoring 80 plus, you're probably going to have a lot of boundaries. It's quite motivating coming down here after the first game especially, and being able to level the series one all," she added.

Will await with interest India's bid for 2029 World Championships: WA chief Coe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Athletics President Sebastian Coe says his organisation will "await with interest" India's expected bid for the 2029 World Championships but indicated that there will be tough competition from other countries to get the hosting right of the showpiece. The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is set to formally express its interest to host the 2029 World Championships when the process is launched in the next few months, in line with the country's plan to stage a series of high-profile events to mount a serious bid for the 2036 Olympics. "The 2029 World Championships, look, we will await with interest (India's

expected bid). I have to tell you, we've got a lot of interest in those Championships already, and the process will open shortly," Coe replied to a PTI question during a virtual conference with the global media. It was in December last year when the AFI first revealed its intention to bid for the 2029 World Championships. The bidding process is expected to start in January-February 2025 along with the publication of a time-line. World Athletics is expected to announce the host city in 2026. Distance running powerhouse Kenya has also declared its interest to host the 2029 World Championships while Britain, which staged the showpiece

in 2017 when the legendary Usain Bolt ran his last international race in London, has also done the same, though not formally. The bidding process for the 2027 World Championships to be held in Beijing, China, began in January 2023 and the announcement of the host city was made in March 2024. The 2025 World Championships will be held in Tokyo. Earlier, the AFI officially submitted its expression of interest to host the World U20 Championships in 2028 when Coe made a two-day visit to India last month. He met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, besides AFI officials.



"I had a very good discussion with Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) and actually was comforted by the recognition that sport, particularly athletics, is probably the most or one of the most accessible sports," Coe said about his discussion with PM Modi. "He (PM Modi) sees (it) as a very key element in the

growth and development of healthy communities, particularly among young people, both mentally and physically. And that was in large part the discussion. "I have to say that I spend a lot of time talking to senior politicians and political leaders. I've rarely found such a commitment to that concept. I was very pleased to hear that commitment." Coe, who is one of the frontrunners to become International Olympic Committee president in the March 2025 elections, said Indian athletics is moving ahead in the right direction, with javelin superstar Neeraj Chopra's achievements being the key to its growth. "(AFI) chief Adille Sumariwalla is a very

ambitious federation president. We will continue to have good dialogue with India, both at governmental level and certainly at federation level. "And yes, Indian athletics is moving in the right direction. And it's not unhelpful that Neeraj (Chopra) is there on the scene, just reminding people that there is occasionally an alternative to cricket." A few days back, the AFI announced that India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event -- a bronze level meet -- on August 10 in Bhubaneswar, and Coe said he is delighted with the development. Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field

competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics and it forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the prestigious Diamond League. "While I was in Mumbai just recently, I received a letter of intent for the the Under 20 World Championships in 2028. "I know Bhubaneswar well. It's a city that staged successful Asian Championships (in 2017). And it's a city that has a commitment to sport and legacy. So, that's a good thing," said Coe, who had attended the Asian Championships in 2017. The host city for the 2028 World U20 Championships will be announced by September next year.

Third Test between India and Australia ends in a draw

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India escaped with a crucial draw in the weather-hit third Test against Australia after intermittent rain wiped out majority of play on day five, leaving the five-match series tantalisingly locked at 1-1. Resuming the day at 252 for nine, India batted for 24 balls and were all out for 260 in their first innings. With limited time left in the day to force a result after majority of the morning session was rained out, the Australian batters came out all guns blazing and stuttered to 89 for seven in 18 overs before making a brave declaration, giving India at least 54 overs to chase down 275. Bad light and rain forced an early tea break soon after with India at 8 for no loss in 2.1 overs. The rain got heavier as the time passed and no play was possible thereafter. The absorbing series is nicely poised going into the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. India would have fancied chasing 275 on day five but weather

helped them immensely in the game controlled by Australia. Jasprit Bumrah (3/18) was brilliant as usual in the second innings with Mohammed Siraj (2/36) and Akash Deep (2/28) offering good support. Australia's approach in the second essay was brave and questionable at the same time. Nathan McSweeney (4) and Marnus Labuschagne (1) went after balls outside the off-stump and perished while Usman Khawaja (8) and Mitchell Marsh (2) fell to good deliveries. Wickets falling in a heap did not impact Australia's approach as they kept going for the big hits. Skipper Cummins chipped in with two sixes and as many fours before the declaration. In the morning session, lightning and subsequent rain allowed only 24 balls to be bowled. The warning of severe weather was flashed on the digital scoreboard at the Gabba shortly after India were bowled out for 260 in their first innings, handing Australia a lead of 185 runs. Akash Deep (31) was the last man



out, stumped off a Travis Head delivery, bringing an end to a 47-run stand with Jasprit Bumrah (10 not out). The duo had done well to avoid the follow-on on day four. Players were asked to remain in the dressing room and fans were requested to take shelter away from the fence after the visitors were all out. The forecast was largely clear for Brisbane from Thursday onwards but the entire game has been adversely impacted by bad weather with rain forcing multiple stoppages for four out of five days. Only day two of the game was not impacted by weather as Australia coasted to 405 for seven on the back of memorable hundreds from Head and Steve Smith. Going into the fourth Test beginning December 26, India have major concerns in both batting and bowling department which they must address. Barring K L Rahul, who has been India's standout batter on the tour, the star-studded line up has not found a way to negotiate the threats posed by the Australian

pace attack. Skipper Rohit Sharma has been woefully short of runs and after the hundred in Perth, superstar Virat Kohli has struggled with ball outside the off-stump. Majority of the batters have been guilty of playing away from their bodies in challenging conditions. They will need to curb their white-ball instincts to make an impact at MCG. On the bowling front too, it has been effectively a one man show with Jasprit Bumrah doing the heavy lifting in all the games. Mohammed Siraj bowled in the Brisbane Test with a niggler, leaving a question mark over his fitness ahead of the Melbourne game. Akash Deep, who played ahead of Harshit Rana, bowled well in the game but did not have a lot of luck, especially against Smith. He is expected to retain his place the eleven. India have picked three different spinners in the first three Test. It remains to be seen what strategy they adopt for the Boxing Day Test.



Will go to Melbourne with confidence: Rohit

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma hailed the resilience of the lower-order batters after his team managed to salvage a crucial draw in the rain-hit third Test against Australia here on Wednesday, saying the side it has given the side renewed confidence for the remaining series. With the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy now tied 1-1, Rohit believes the team's morale will be high during the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. "I mean, we will take that. Obviously to have interruptions like that wasn't great, but going to Melbourne at 1-1 pretty much gives us that confidence to go out there and pull things towards us," Rohit said at the post-match presentation. "The situation we were in just after lunch (on Day 4), needed someone to stand up and take us through, we knew with the weather, we knew it wasn't going to be a full game." Opener KL Rahul once again shone, top-scoring with 84 before Ravindra Jadeja (77) put up a lower-order resistance. Then the last duo of Akash Deep (31) and Jasprit Bumrah (10 not out) put on a gritty 47-run partnership to help India avoid follow-on

before they were all out for 260 in reply to Australia's big first innings score of 445. "Credit to (Ravindra) Jadeja, the way he played and (KL) Rahul, the way he played was magnificent at the top of the order, the fight that Akash Deep and Bumrah (gave) was great to watch, we have seen them work so hard at the nets (on their batting)." Despite the challenges posed by intermittent rain and lightning on the final day, India's bowlers held their own in the second innings. Bumrah was particularly brilliant, taking 3/18, while Akash Deep and Mohammed Siraj chipped in with two wickets each. Australia's bold approach in the second innings saw them declare at 89/7, setting India a target of 275 in 54 overs, but bad light and rain ensured no further play was possible after the early stages of the chase. "Coming to the bowling, Bumrah was outstanding, Akash Deep is a feisty cricketer, always wants to be involved in the game, very new to international cricket, he has worked hard at the nets, still new to international cricket, but he has put in the hard yards..." "There are people in the group to put their hand across and help him going forward. As he

showed with the bat, these are the sort of characters we needed in the team," Rohit added. Cummins rues not leading 2-1 Australia captain Pat Cummins lamented the impact of rain on the game's outcome. "Would be better to be 2-1, lot of rain, nothing we can do about it. We set a huge total and felt like we were right ahead of the game throughout," said Cummins. Australia also suffered a heartbreak with pacer Josh Hazlewood ruled out of the entire series with a calf strain. "Poor Josh, one of those things, few rain breaks probably helped, Starc and I were able to push through. "Day 5 here can be up and down, there wasn't much cricket played on it, felt challenging when the ball was new and hard." Cummins also highlighted the positives that his team could take from the match. "(Steve) Smith and Head's innings' were fantastic, Alex Carey too... (Nathan) Lyon looked really good, Starc got wickets, just about ticked off every box." On the Boxing Day Test, Cummins said: "That will be amazing, one of those things here in Australia that you wake up and can't wait for."

Head confident he'll be 'fine' for Boxing Day Test in Melbourne

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia's man in form, Travis Head, played down concerns over his fitness after appearing to struggle with a potential groin issue during the rain-marred drawn third Test against India at the Gabba here on Wednesday. Head said he expects to be "fine" for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. The five-match series is tied 1-1 going into the Boxing Day Test after the drawn affair. "Very pleased with the way I am batting at the moment. Just a little sore, but I should be fine (before the next game)," Head, who was adjudged the player of the match, said after the game. The 30-year-old, who has been in red-hot form with 409 runs at an average of 81.80 this series, noticeably struggled to run between the wickets during his brief innings of 17



on day five. At times, he was seen clutching his groin, raising concerns among the commentators. Former pacer Brett Lee called the visuals "worrying signs", noting Head's limited movement, while Indian great Ravi Shastri also expressed concern, describing the

potential injury as a "body blow" for Australia, given Head's big role in the batting lineup. Head did not take the field during India's second innings, fuelling further speculation. "Travis, he'll be fine. It's a bit of a tight quad. He'll be fine for Melbourne," asserted his captain Pat Cummins.

The left-hander further reflected on his approach this series, attributing his success to adapting well to challenging conditions and staying composed at the crease. "Challenging wicket. I had to work through the gears. I had different plans, pleased I could get through those. Good partnership with (Steve) Smith," he said on their centuries, contributing to their 241-run massive stand. "I just try to sum up the conditions well. What I've done well this series is assess the conditions. Pleased with the tempo I've batted with. Pretty relaxed communication. "Felt like he was back in his rhythm, and he gives me full freedom and confidence knowing he's going to be there for a long while. I feel like I am playing the situation in front of me," he added.

Pacer Ihsanullah returns to action after injury fiasco

PTI ■ KARACHI

Promising young Pakistan pacer Ihsanullah has returned to competitive cricket in the ongoing Champions Cup T20 tournament in Rawalpindi after being sidelined since late 2022 following a botched diagnosis of his injury. The Pakistan Cricket Board had appointed an independent medical panel to oversee his rehabilitation, following prolonged issues with his treatment and recovery. Ihsanullah emerged as a bright prospect during the 2022 Pakistan Super League to be fast-tracked into Pakistan's white-ball squads for T20 and ODI matches. However, his progress was halted by an elbow injury, which led to significant scrutiny of the PCB's medical management. The independent medical panel discovered that the injury had been misdiagnosed, and appropriate treatment was not initially recommended. Ihsanullah had also not adhered to his rehab properly. This mismanagement eventually prompted the resignation of the PCB's head of medical panel, Dr Sohaib Saleem. During his treatment, Ihsanullah even underwent an elbow surgery but he was later sent to England to see a specialist by the independent medical panel who ruled out another surgery but recommended a new rehab programme for the player. At one stage even the PCB officials appeared to lose patience with the young bowler for not taking his recovery seriously and then he even blamed the PCB for his prolonged forced absence from cricket. Meanwhile, Pakistan's seasoned allrounder, Shadab Khan is also facing fitness issues while captaining a team, in the Champions Cup which forced him to miss a few games of the event and he has not even bowled frequently.

Mitchell Santner replaces Williamson as New Zealand white-ball skipper

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner was on Wednesday appointed the New Zealand white-ball captain, officially taking over the role from Kane Williamson who stepped down following the T20 World Cup in June. Santner, who has represented New Zealand in 243 internationals, will take on the permanent leadership mantle of both the ODI and T20 sides. Santner has previously led the team in 24 T20s and four ODIs. The 32-year-old will begin his full-time captaincy tenure in the upcoming T20 and ODI series against Sri Lanka in late December and early January. The Sri Lanka marks the beginning of a heavy run of white ball cricket for the side, including an ODI Tri Series in Pakistan in February, followed by the ICC Champions Trophy and a home T20 and ODI series against Pakistan to conclude the home summer.



"It's obviously a huge honour and a privilege to be asked," said Santner in a NZC statement. "When you're a young kid the dream was always to play for New Zealand but to have the opportunity to officially lead my country in two formats is special. "It's a new challenge and I'm excited to

get stuck into the important period of white ball cricket that we have ahead of us." Santner, who most recently led the side in last month's T20 and ODI series in Sri Lanka, is one of just four players to have represented New Zealand over 100 times in both ODI and T20I cricket and is widely regarded as one of the top white ball bowlers in world cricket. He first led the side in a T20 against West Indies at Bay Oval in November 2020 and became New Zealand's 24th ODI captain when he led the side in the only ODI against Scotland in Edinburgh in 2022. New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said Santner was a great fit for the role. "Mitch is a fantastic team man and leads by example in all facets of the game," said Stead. "He's an incredibly calm and collected personality and he has a huge amount of respect in the changing room, which will serve him well."

Australian captain Cummins denies momentum in India's favour after draw

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia captain Pat Cummins is not bothered if India walked away with momentum from the drawn third Test but is pleased that they did not let the visitors exploit better batting conditions in the first innings. Australia, who largely controlled the third Test, declared their second innings at 89/7 to set India a 275-run target but rain prevented an exciting climax. "(I) can't say I've ever been scared of momentum — don't really care about that. I think we can take a lot from this week," he told media after the end of the contest. "A couple of great partnerships, to be sent in on

a (fresh) wicket and score 450 (445) and then managing to bowl India out for 250 (260) when the wicket, the conditions were probably a little bit better. We can take a lot from that," he said. Ashwin is one of the all time greats. While the contest expectedly ended in a draw with the series tied 1-1, India's spin great Ashwin announced his immediate retirement from international cricket. Cummins said Ashwin's decision midway through the series was surprising. "Yeah, (the timing was) a bit of a surprise. He's obviously been a fantastic player all around the world really. There aren't too many finger spinners that have that kind

of longevity. He'll go down as one of the all-time greats." "(He was) always a fantastic competitor, (we) had a lot of battles against him over the years here in Australia as well over in India. Just a massive respect from our change room to the career that he's had," he said. The home skipper said the Brisbane Test was one of the most frustrating games due to the number of times players were forced off the field. "It's right up there. I can't remember (in the past) even coming close (to) the amount of times we were on and off throughout the five days," he said. "Especially here in Brisbane, I feel like it normally just pelts down for a couple hours and



then you're back on and it's clear... yeah, frustrating. (It) felt like we were ahead of the game for pretty much all of it, but not to be," he added. Hazlewood to miss remainder of series, Head will be fine

Cummins lamented that pacer Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the series due to injury but said Travis Head would be fine from a "tight quad" trouble. "Josh won't be part of the series, which is a real shame. Travis, he'll be fine. It's a bit of a tight quad. He'll be fine for Melbourne," Cummins said. "It's really tough. It's kind of in the story of the last few summers. The extra layer to that is probably one of the most disciplined, professional sports people you'd ever meet," Cummins said while talking further on Hazlewood. "The way he trains and prepares and goes about... when he's at home, he's in the gym every second day, every

day doing whatever it needs to take to try and minimise injuries." "That's an extra kind of blow knowing how much he has put into his body over the last few years to try and play as many Test matches as he can." He continued, "We value him. Unfortunately, he'll miss this series. I don't know when exactly he'll be right to go again. Even in the little snippets you've seen this series, how much we rate him, how much of an impact he can have." Cummins said it has been a tough series for top-order batters while backing Australia rookie Nathan McSweeney ahead of the team's selection for the remaining two Tests.

"The trend in world cricket, pretty much all around the world, is (that) the top three is really hard place to bat at the moment. Particularly here in Australia, the wickets are tough," he said. "I've been really impressed with the way he's (McSweeney) gone about it even today. Someone's starting out his career still being selfless enough to go out there and try and play shots rather than just trying to preserve and get a score." "I'm really impressed with him. Again, (he) hasn't probably scored the runs that he would (have) liked, but he has played some important knocks that have set up a win in Adelaide and a really good result here," he added.

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